

## ***Tools of Tense in English and Arabic Languages: An Analysis*** **Dr. Syed Sahid Ahammad<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *This article presents a comparative analysis of the tense between Arabic and English languages. The objective of this presentation is to make a foreign language easier for the native speakers. The article has been ended by discussing the tense in Arabic compared to English Language.*

**Keywords:** *Verb, Tense, Arabic, English, Language, morpheme, similarities, differences*

### **1. Introduction**

*Tense* (in Arabic and English) is the correspondence between the form of verb and the concept of time that covers the form, roots and the distribution of morphemes. The *tense* refers to the absolute location of an event or action in time, either the present, past or future. This article describes a comparative analysis of the *tenses* between English and Arabic languages.

#### **2. 1. The *tense* in English**

*The tense*, according to Wren and Martin, is the form of a verb which shows the time and the state of an action or event.<sup>2</sup>

For example,

- ‘*I sing*’ is in the present *tense*
- ‘*I shall sing*’ is in the future *tense* and
- ‘*I sang*’ is in the past *tense*.<sup>3</sup>

In this case, C. E. Eckersley defines the *tense* as “*tense* indicates the time of a verb.”<sup>4</sup>

Some says:

*Tense* is the time at which an action takes place<sup>5</sup>

#### **2. 2. The *tense* in Arabic**

We know that, فعل (verb) is a kind of كلمة (parts of speech) that tells about an action or situation happened. For example, ذَهَبَ – He went, فَتَحَ – He opened, كَتَبَ – He wrote, etc. For example:

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<sup>2</sup> Wren & Martin, *High School English Grammar and Composition* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company, 6<sup>th</sup> edn. 2005 ), p – 34

<sup>3</sup> S . Greenbum , *An Introduction to English Grammar*, (London : Longman Group Ltd. 2002), p.57

<sup>4</sup> C. E. Eckersley, *A Comprehensive English Grammar for Foreign Students*, (London : Longman Group Ltd. 2002), p. 74

<sup>5</sup> Md. Rafiz Uddin, *Master-Key English Grammar* (Pabna: Punam Publication, 2014 ), p.64

- دَخَلَ راشد في الغرفة - Rashid entered the room. Here, the word دَخَلَ is a فعل (verb) and Rashed is الفاعل .

“It is known to everyone that, time is essential to perform the action. This time would be either present, past or future.

For examples:

- ذَهَبَ راشد إلى المدرسة أمس - Rashid went to Madrasha yesterday
- يَذْهَبُ اليوم إلى داكا - Today he is going to Dhaka
- ثم يَذْهَبُ إلى المدرسة غدا - Then he will go to Madrasha tomorrow

From the above sentences, the words أمس (Yesterday), اليوم (Today) and غدا (Tomorrow) indicate to the which time is called زمان الفعل or *tense* .

J. Wightwick and M. Gatter state that, Arabic is relatively straightforward when it comes to *tenses*. Some languages have many tenses and very specific about the time of an action and whether or not the action has been completed. Arabic grammar is clear about time and aspect; there are three basic tenses: i) the past (الماضي) ii) the present (الحال) and future (المستقبل). Both of present and future is called فعل المضارع.<sup>6</sup>

According to Dr. Munir Al-Ba'al Bakki,

صيغة الفعل:

"الدالة علي زمانه"<sup>7</sup>

(Paradigm {structure} of the verb indicating its time)

According to Ali Al-Zarem and Mostafa Amin,

"الزمن في النحو هو وقت الفعل"

*The tense* ( زمن الفعل ), according to Ilm Nahw, is a grammatical category that helps to locate a situation of the time of verb.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, in Arabic language, there are four things (i.e -person, جنس - gender, ضمير - pronoun and عدد - number) hidden in some verbs. As a result, learning of this language as it is abbreviated easy than other languages.

For Example:

تَكْتُبُ – You/she (a single male/female) are writing or will write.

يَكْتُبُ – He (a male) is writing or will write.

أَكْتُبُ – I (a single male/female) am writing or will write.

نَكْتُبُ – We (two or more male/female) are writing or shall write.

In English, there are four genders are masculine, feminine, common and neuter; but in Arabic, there are only two genders are masculine and feminine.

<sup>6</sup> J. Wightwick and M. Gatter, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* ( Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7<sup>th</sup> edn. 2008), p. 14

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Munir Al-Ba'al Bakki, *Al Mawrid* ( Beirut: Darul 'Ilm lil Malayeen, 37<sup>th</sup> edn. 1997) , p. 958

<sup>8</sup> Ali Al-Zarim and Mostofa Amin , *An-Nahu Al-Wadih* (Cairo: Daar Ibn Khaldun, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. V-1,1996), p . 31

### 3. 1. Types of the *tense* in English

According to P.H Matthews “Time is a concept in which the speaker, reader and listener think. Humans live in three dimensions of time, namely, the past, the present and the future”.<sup>9</sup> Basically there are three principle *tenses* in English language.

From the above discussion, it can be said that there are three principal (main) types of the *tense*:

a) Past *tense* b) Present *tense* and c) Future *tense*.

Again, each of the principal types of *tense* has four aspects (forms):

i. Indefinite (Simple) forms ii. Continuous forms iii. Perfect forms and iv. Perfect Continuous forms.

### 3. 2. Types of the *tense* in Arabic

“The Arab Grammarians have given an important idea of time, in connection with the verbal forms, by their division of the *tense* into the past (الماضي), the present (الحال) and the future (المستقبل), the first of which they assign to the perfect and the other two to the imperfect.”<sup>10</sup>

The following examples would be the clear concept of the *tense* (زمن الفعل):

- دَرَسَ خالد في الصف الثامن في العام الماضي – Khaled studied in class eight in the last year
- و يَدْرُسُ في العام الحالي في الصف التاسع – And this year he is studying in class nine
- ثم يَدْرُسُ في الصف العاشر في العام المقبل – Then he will study in class ten in the next year.

Analyzing the above examples, we can say that there are two types of verbs used to denote three *tenses*. E.g. دَرَسَ – He studied (Past Tense), يَدْرُسُ – He is studying or he'll study (Present or Future Tense). So there are two types of *tense* form in Arabic language. Namely:

- a) الفعل الماضي (the Past Tense).
- b) فعل المضارع ( the Present Tense or the Future Tense).

#### 4.1. The Past *Tense* in English

This *tense* is used to express an event that happened in the past. It has four forms.

##### (i) The Past Indefinite form

“A Verb that refers to a past time action or situation is said to be in the past *tense*. The simple past *tense* talks about an action or a situation which is very often ended in the past.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> P.H. Matthews, *Morphology and Introduction to the Theory of word structure* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p.49

<sup>10</sup> W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* ( Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. 2011), p.51

<sup>11</sup> Prof. Md. Ak Nowaz, *Special Communicative Functional English Grammar* (Dhaka: Alpona Publication, 2012 ), p. 40

For example:

- She **passed** her examination because she had studied very hard.

### (ii) The Past Continuous form

This *tense's form* is used to describe ongoing actions in the past. These actions often take place within a specific time frame.

For example:

- Fatima was **telling** a story. Here the action “**was telling**” took place in the past and continued for some time in the past.

### (iii) The Past Perfect form

The past perfect *tense* is used to refer to actions that took place and were completed in the past. The past perfect is often used to emphasize that one action, event or condition ended before another past action, event, or condition began.

For example:

- The elephant **had eaten** all the hay so we fed it with oats for a week

In this sentence, both actions took place in the past, but the eating of the hay (“had eaten”) preceded the eating of the oats (“fed”).<sup>12</sup> The first action should be used in past perfect and the latter in simple past.

### (iv) The Past Perfect Continuous form

The past perfect continuous is used to indicate that a continuing action in the past began before another past action began or interrupted the first action. Each of the highlighted compound verbs in the following sentences is in the past perfect continuous *tense*.

For example:

- We had **been talking** about repainting the front room for three years and last night we finally bought the paint.

In this example, the ongoing action of “talking” precedes another past action (“bought”).

## 4.2. The Past Tense in Arabic

The following examples are the indications for the details description of **الفعل الماضي** (the past tense):

- **ذَهَبَ** ماجد إلى المدرسة - Majid went to school
- **دَخَلَتْ** فاطمة البيت - Fatima entered the house
- **خَلَقْنَا** - Allah created us
- **جَلَسَ** الأستاذ على الكرسي - The teacher sat on the chair

The above sentences refer to the past. So these **فعل** (verbs) are classified as **ماضي** (past).

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<sup>12</sup> N. C. Stageberg *Introduction to English Grammar*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. 2016 ), p.21

Therefore, “the verb which refers to the completion of a task in the past is called **الفعل الماضي**.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Dr. Syed Ali,

**الفعل الماضي** (the past tense) shows the event in the past, and its action is completed.<sup>14</sup>

Aiman Abdul Gani states,

” هو الفعل الذي يدل على حدث حصل في الزمن الماضي “<sup>15</sup>

“It is the verb that indicates an event happened in the past time”

According to Dr. Zawarez Marti Abdul Maseh,

”<sup>16</sup> هو الفعل الذي يدل على حدث وقع وانقطع قبل زمن التكلم

“The past *tense* is the verb that indicates an event happened and ended before the time of speech.”

According to Ibn Hisham al-Ansari,

”كل فعل حدث في الزمن الماضي وانتهى “<sup>17</sup>

“The past *tense*) that every action happened in the past and ended”

For example:

- ذَهَبَتْ اُخْتٌ سَعِيدٍ - Sayeed’s sister went.
- الْاَوْلَادُ شَاهَدُوا - The children witnessed.
- سَمِعْتُ نَصِيحَةَ اُسْتَاذِي - I heard to the advice of my teacher.
- فَتَحَ التَّلْمِيذُ كِتَابَهُ - The student opened his book.

According to J. Andrew, “(ماضي), the past *tense* verb e.g. (كَتَبَ -wrote). This category is (مبني) in its entirety. i.e. No governing agent will ever enter upon a past-tense conjugation and alter its ending.”<sup>18</sup> The Arab grammarians have divided **الفعل الماضي** into four categories:

- (a) **الماضى المطلق** “Simple Past”, e.g. ذَهَبَ -He went .
- (b) **الماضى القريب** “The Near Past” is formed by the addition of **قد** to **الفعل** e.g. ذَهَبَ - He has gone.
- (c) **الماضى البعيد** “The Past Perfect *Tense*” is formed by the addition of **كان** to

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Muhammad Fazlur Rahman, *Arabic Grammar* (Dhaka: Riad Publications, 4<sup>th</sup> edn.2014), p. 23

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Syed Ali, *Arabic for Beginners* (Chennai: Royapetteh, 1997), p. 32

<sup>15</sup> Aiman Abdul Gani, *An-Nahu Al-Kafi*, (Qairo: Daru Ibn khaldun, V-1, 2002), p. 17

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Zawarez Marti Abdul Maseh, *Mu’zamu Qawa’idul ‘Arabiyyatul Alamiyyah* (Beirut: Maktabatu Nasherun, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1995) p.162

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, *Sharhi Shuzuriz Zahab* (Beirut: Darul Marifah, 1999) , p. 99

<sup>18</sup> Andrew J. *Morphology without word-internal constituents: a review of Stephen R.* (Amsterdam, Yearbook of Morphology, Edited by Geetrt Booij,1974) , p.123

- الفعل الماضي , e.g. كَانَ ذَهَبَ -He had gone.
- (d) الماضي الاستمراري “The past continuous tense” is formed by the addition of كَانَ to المضارع , e.g. كَانَ يَذْهَبُ - He was going.
- (e) الماضي الاحتمالي “The past possibility” is formed by the addition of لَعَلَّمَا to الفعل الماضي , e.g. لَعَلَّمَا ذَهَبَ - he may go.
- (f) الماضي التمني “The past expectation verb” is formed by the addition of (لَيِّنَّمَا) to الفعل الماضي , e.g. لَيِّنَّمَا قَرَأَ -If was he read!

In Arabic, the meaning of 12 tenses of English is expressed by using different words (i.e. فعل المضارع and الفعل الماضي المطلق) before the (ي-ت-ا-ن) {قد, كان, سوف, لعلمًا, ليتما,}. It also said that. فعل الماضي (past tense) expressed its time and events by 14 paradigms; but the tense in English, expressed its time, action and events by 4 tense's forms. The basic form of Arabic verb is taken from the past tense, whereas the basic form of English verb is taken from the infinitive.

### 5.1. Present Tense in English

This tense is used to express an event that happens in the present. The present the tense has four forms:

#### (i) The Present Indefinite form

Present Indefinite Tense or Present indefinite is ‘A Verb that refers to the present time and is said to be in the simple present tense.’<sup>19</sup> Farther, W. Stannard Allan states, “Present Indefinite Tense is used to talk about a habitual action and general truth; not necessarily now”<sup>20</sup>

For example:

- She **goes** to school every day (habitual)
- The earth **goes** round the sun (rightness of statement)
- Nurses **look after** patients in the hospitals (repeated event)

#### (ii) The Present Continuous form

The **present continuous** (also called **present progressive**) is a verb tense which is used to show that an ongoing action is happening now.

According to Tahir al Bayati,

- (a) To form this tense, ‘am, is or are’ are used followed by the present progressive.

<sup>19</sup> Wren & Martin, *High School English Grammar and Composition*, p. 34

<sup>20</sup> W. Stannard Allan, *Living English Structure* (London: Longman. 1995), p. 34

- (b) The present continuous is used to describe an action that is taking place now and not yet complete.<sup>21</sup>

For example:

- Please don't make so much noise *I'm studying*.
- *I'm reading* an interesting book at the moment.

### **(iii) The Present Perfect Tense's form**

The present perfect *tense* is used to describe an action that began in the past and continues into the present or has just been completed at the moment of utterance.

Each of the tense highlighted compound verbs in the following sentences is in the present perfect *tense*. For example:

- They **have not delivered** the documents we need.

This sentence suggests that the documents were not delivered in the past and that they are still undelivered.

### **(iv) The Present Perfect Continuous form**

The Present Perfect Continuous tense is used to describe an action, event, or condition that has begun in the past and continues into the present. The present perfect continuous, however, is used to stress the on-going nature of that action, condition, or event.

For example:

- *They have been publishing* this comic book for ten years. *We have been seeing* geese flying south all afternoon.

## **5.2. Future Tense in English**

This *tense* is used to express an event that happens in the future. The future *tense* has four forms:

### **(i) The Future Indefinite form**

The future indefinite *tense* is used when an action is promised / thought to occur in the future.

For Example:

- We *shall move* to another city.

### **(ii) The Future Continuous form**

The future continuous *tense*, sometimes also referred to as the future progressive *tense*, is a *tense* that indicates that something will occur in the future and continue for an expected length of time.

For Example:

- Habib *will be running* a marathon this Saturday.

### **(iii) The Future Perfect form**

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<sup>21</sup> Taher Al- Bayati, *Arabic Language* (Beirut: Al-Ahliyyah, 2008), p.110

The future perfect is composed of two elements are the simple future of the verb "to have" (will have) + the past participle of the main verb.. For Example:

- I *will have finished* this book

### (iii) The Future Perfect Continuous form

The Future Perfect Continuous is a *tense*'s form that describes actions that will continue up until a point in the future. The formula for Future Perfect Continuous *Tense* is as follows:

- We *will have been going* to work for 2 weeks.

### 5.3. Present and Future Tense in Arabic

We have already said that in Arabic grammar, the present *tense* and future *tense* are expressed together by فعل المضارع . Therefore, فعل المضارع (Verb of Present and Future) is a verb that shows the meaning in relation to the present or future time and expresses an action still incomplete and could mean either (i) Present and Present continuous *tenses* or (ii) Future Imperfect *tense*, which is made from the three radical letters of the الفعل الماضي and with the addition of one or more of these letters: ن , ي , ت , ا. These are known as “the signs of فعل المضارع” . .

For example:

- تَكْتُبُ -You are writing or will write
- يَكْتُبُ - He is writing or will write
- أَكْتُبُ - I am writing or will write
- نَكْتُبُ -We are writing or will write.

The Arab grammarians have given many definitions of *tense* are:

فعل المضارع هو ما دل علي معني في نفسه بزمان يحتمل الحال والمستقبل<sup>22</sup>

“ فعل المضارع is an act that indicative of the meaning of itself in a time taking place at present and future”

For Example: Allah (SWT) Says,

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ وَيَبْسُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

“Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned.” (2:245)

On the above mentioned, in the following words: يُقْرِضُ , فَيُضَاعِفُهُ , يَقْبِضُ , وَيَبْسُطُ are the verb of الفعل المضارع .

It is very important to remember that, the present and future *tense* (فعل المضارع) denotes only unfinished action, but it may be made to indicate the future by putting the independent word سوف before it, or by prefixing its contraction س to indicate ‘near future’ and سوف is used for ‘distant future’. But in English, there are no special letters for the near future and the distant future. The vowel of 2<sup>nd</sup> radical of the present and future *tense* would in respect of some verbs, be the same as that of the past perfect. But in some

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Ramil Badi Yaqub, *An-Nahu Was Sarf Wal Arab* (Chittagong: Al-Maktabatul Fununiyyah, ), p. 500

verb, the vowel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> radical of the imperfect, المضارع is different from that of the second radical of the past perfect الماضي.<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Comparison of Tenses

English	Arabic	Examples
<b>1. Past Tense</b>	<b>الفعل الماضي</b>	<b>ذهب خالد إلى المدرسة</b> Khalid went to the school.
i. Past Indefinite	الماضي المطلق [Simple Past/Common الفعل الماضي]	قد طردت اللص I was kicked out the thief
ii. Past Continuous	الماضي الإستمراري “Continuous” is formed by the addition of كان to المضارع [فعل المضارع كان to]	كان يذهب إلى المدرسة He was going to Madrasha
iii. Past Perfect	الماضي البعيد [“The Past Perfect Tense” is formed by the addition of كان to فعل الماضي]	كنت ذهبت إلى البيت قبل أن اذهب إلى داكا I had gone home before I went to Dhaka
iv. Past Perfect Continuous	الماضي الإستمراري [but need minimum two verbs at a time]	كانوا يقرءون قبل أن تجيء They had been reading before you came
<b>2. Present Tense</b>	<b>المضارع (الزمن الحال أو الحاضر)</b>	<b>يقترّب الشهر من نهايته</b> The month is approaching its end.
i. Present Indefinite	فعل المضارع [Simple paradigm of المضارع]	هو يقرأ القرآن كل يوم He reads the Quran everyday
ii. Present Continuous	فعل المضارع [To be added some adverbs or اسم الفاعل]	نحن ذاهبون للقاء الأصدقاء I am writing a letter to my friend
iii. Present Perfect	ماضي قريب [The Near Past is formed by the addition of قد to الماضي.]	قد رأيت أسدا I have seen a lion
iv. Present Perfect Continuous	فعل المضارع [There will be add منذ before time]	يلعبون الكرة القدم منذ ساعتين They have been playing football for two hours
<b>3. Future Tense</b>	<b>المضارع (الزمن المستقبل)</b>	<b>سيذهب حامد</b> Hamid will go

<sup>23</sup> Assayyid Ahmad Al-Hashimi, *Al-Qawid al-Asasiyyatullugah al 'Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Darul Kutubul 'Alamiyyah, 1994) p .100

i. Future Indefinite	[Future Indefinite tense is derived from the present tense simply by adding the prefix (سـ - near future) or the particle ( سوف - The distant future ) before the paradigm of الفعل المضارع	سلبس الأولاد الملابس الجديدة The children are wearing the new clothes سوف أغسل ملابسني في عطلة نهاية الأسبوع I will wash my clothes in the weekend.
ii. Future Continuous	[There will be two or more paradigms of الفعل المضارع together.	سأكون قراءة هذه الورقة I shall be reading this paper
iii. Future Perfect	[Future Perfect tense is by adding the prefix (سـ - near future) before the paradigm of فعل المضارع	سيبدأ اللعب قبل أن تذهب The Play will have started before you go
iv Future Perfect Continuous	[There will be put فعل حتي before [ الضارع ]	سنكون ننتظر ثمانية عشر ساعة حتي يعود فهم We shall have been waiting eighteen hours until Fahim returns.

## 7. Findings

In the above statement, this paper may be summarized to consolidate the essence of this writing. They are:

English	Arabic
<i>Tense</i> indicates to the time of a verb. The word ' <i>tense</i> ' comes from the Latin tempus or time.	<i>Tenses</i> of the Verb (Past, Present and Future) زمن الفعل (الماضي؛ المضارع والمستقبل)
<i>English</i> has many <i>tenses</i> and very specific about the time of an action and whether or not the action has been completed.	Arabic is relatively straightforward when it comes to <i>tenses</i>
English verb is taken from the infinitive.	The basic form of Arabic verb is taken from the past <i>tense</i>
Verb has three forms: past, present and past participle.	The present verb always beings with one of the following letters : ن ، ي ، ت ، ا
The above four things have to be expressed differently.	ضمير (gender) جنس (person) شخص (pronoun) and عدد ( number) عدد (Tense). الفعل زمن (Tense).
There are four genders Masculine, Feminine, Common and Neuter	There are three genders: Masculine, Feminine and Common.

All tenses have covered by 12 (3x4) <i>tense</i> 's forms.	Tenses (past, present and future) express its meaning by 14 paradigms.
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## 8. Conclusion

There lies no denying the fact that in both English and Arabic '*Tenses*' holds a place of tremendous importance as a part of speech. Hence, when reading the Holy Qur'an, the reader cannot just translate the sentences as simply as English text, but one must have various spheres of knowledge to perform the real translation.