

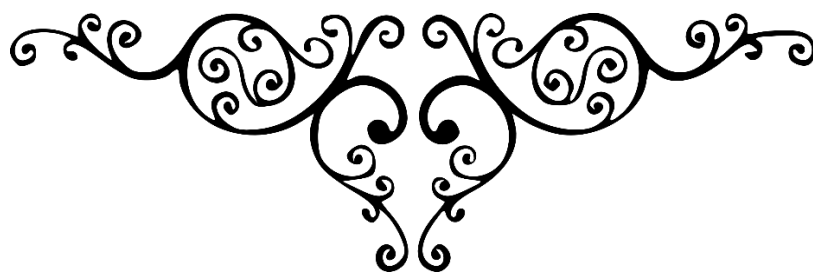
# **An investigation of the past tense in some Quranic texts with reference to English**

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## **Abstract**

The past tense may be defined as the tense which is concerned with an event or a state that happens at any point before the moment of speaking (Aziz, 1989:45). it is hypothesized that the past tense is used in both Arabic and English, yet it is realized differently. The past tense seems to be much more important in Arabic than to be in English .This use of the past tense may have an important role to show the absolute difference between Arabic and English .In Arabic , the past tense is expressed by one or two forms , while in English , it will have more than two forms when Compared in Arabic and English as well as the different ways to be understood when used in both Arabic and English .Some verses from the Glorious Quran are chosen at random with their interpretation to test the validity of the mentioned hypotheses .The basic findings arrived at are as follows : (1) it is possible to convey the past tense in the Glorious Quran through semantic and grammatical points of view . (2) Twelve verses from different suras of the Glorious Quran are specified to be our data. (3) The past tense in the Glorious Quran can be understood easily unlike the English ones which undergo many difficulties to be conceived well.

**Keywords: absolute – dimation – translatiomn – interpretation – rendering - semantics – reference .**

## دراسة زمن الماضي البسيط في بعض النصوص القرآنية في اللغتين العربية والإنكليزية

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### المخلص:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية لبيان اهمية زمن الفعل الماضي في العربية والانكليزية وخصوصا في النصوص القرآنية لانه يتعلق بالمعنى. من اهم فرضيات الدراسة ان هذا الزمن يكون موجود في اللغتين المذكورتين لكن طريقة الفهم والادراك تكون مختلفة. اختارت الدراسة (١٢) نص من القران بطريقة عشوائية اضافة الى تفسيراتها. ومن اهم ماتوصلت اليه الدراسة: بالامكان توضيح زمن الماضي بالاعتماد على المعنى الدلالي والنحوي . يأخذ هذا الزمن حالات متعددة للفهم والادراك في الانكليزية اضافة الى المشاكل المعقدة التي يواجهها القراء. اما في العربية فتكون الصعوبات اقل مما نجده في الانكليزية وخصوصا في فهم المعنى .

الكلمات المفتاحية: قطعي، بعد، ترجمة، تفسير، تحويل المعنى، علم الدلالة، دلالة.



## Introduction

In Arabic there are two forms used to express tense: past (=), both كَتَبَ and Present = imperfective اَل-يَكْتُبُ are also used to indicate aspect perfective and Saeid (1968: 142). Qurik (1973:40) argues that the form of the verb can be expressed by " tense ". Time is always deeply concerned with three dimensions: past, present and future. tense may take different forms and each form refers to certain moment of time. Hartmann and Stork (1972: 235) remark that forming of verb can be expressed through tense.

Time is the means which indicates the relationship of the action in both sentences and utterances (ibid: 236 ) The study gives examples of some verses taken from the Glorious Quran and to discuss them depending on different views of different writers .This can enable students to distinguish and be aware of the nature of the past tense and how the true meaning of the verses can show the semantic and grammatical differences between Arabic and English concerning this study .

### 3. Past Tense in Arabic :

Al-Mubarak ( 1963 : 78 ) illustrates that the main idea of tense is to be are also ( فَعَلَ , يَفْعَلُ ) the past and the present tense ( i.e the two forms ) refers to the past tense , ( فَعَلَ ) considered to be the same idea, the first ( while the latter is expressed by the present tense (ibid : 83 )

Al-Fatali ( 1973 : 38 ) says that it is possible to see three dimenions which are common to all languages represnted in past , present and future. The notion of tense in Arabic can be indicated in the past and present. But there is a big difference in the system and form in both Arabic and English besides the complexity of the Arabic verb system.

Matloob (1973 : 171 ) confirms that the verb in Arabic may have the clue of action and time .The forms of the present and past can be absolutely clarified by tense with its forms .This can indicate the derivations of the two verbs

Ezzat ( 1975 : 144 ) mentions that present , past and future are the main time divisions , yet there are forms of tense : simple , continuous , perfect tense .

Izzat ( 2001 :60 ) states that tense and aspect systems both allow speakers to relate situations to time . Arab grammarians could draw distinction between present and past tense depending on the action which can be divided into a completed action called past tense , while unfinished action can refer to present tense (ibid : 61 ) .

### 3. Absolute Tense in Arabic :

Al-Mubarak ( 1959 : 5 ) points out that it is hard to consider in both Arabic and English that " present " and " past" are used to refer to the same meaning exactly and this does not happen in all time ( i.e . there is no relevancy between verbs in both Arabic and English ) in all time because of the difference in system and form .Consider the following verses :

﴿ يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ﴾ ( الاحزاب : ٧١ )

He makes your works be success and forgive your sins ( Al-Hilali and Khan,1996 : 1138 )

﴿ إِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِأَهْلِهِ إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا ﴾ ( النمل :٧ )

( Behold ! Moses said to his family " : I perceive a fire " )

( Al-Hilali & Khan,1996 : 979 )



﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴾ ( الاحزاب : ٦٤ )

( Verily God has Cursed the unbelievers )

( Al-Hilali & Khan,1996 : 1126 )

Mukaram ( 1968 : 16 ) seems in agreement with Saeed's ( 1997 : 114 ) opinion by stating that there is no suitable scale to make a similar idea about the notion of the tense in both Arabic and English because of the differences in the form and system that is conceived clearly through the texts above . it is possible to one case concerning the past tense in Arabic , yet there are different cases that seen in English .This can be an essential point to differentiate between the two languages .it is important to see that absolute tense and the past tense can have the same concept .

Aziz ( 1989 : 47 ) argues that absolute tenses may have the notion of present and past . Consider the following examples :

- 1.We write the letter .
- 2-He writes the letter .
- 3-They went home .
- 4-We ran slowly .

The verbs in (1) and (2) are said to be in the present tense because they refer to actions which include the present moment .The verbs in (3) and (4) are to be in past because the actions have happened not in the present moment of speaking ( ibid : 48 ) .

#### **4. Past Tense In English :**

Comrei ( 1985 : 41 ) regards past tense as location in time prior to the present moment ( i.e it refers to the action that happened in past and not taking place during the moment of speaking .

Declerk ( 1991 : 302) seems to be in disagreement with Comerie's ( 1985 : 42 ) view by pointing out that the notion of the past tense is not to refer just to the past , but sometimes it is expressed by present perfect tense (i.e the form of has / have + p.p ) .past tense has explained that

the speaker should be able to interpret the hearer's assumption that he has a specific time in mind ( ibid : 303 )

Quirk et al . ( 1985 : 186 ) maintain that past tense is used to refer to repeated actions ( habits ) or facts in the past as in the following examples :

1. He wrote a poem yesterday .
2. They drove quickly .

Eastwood ( 2000 : 87 ) states that past tense is also used for describing certain states , look at the following examples :

1. Iraqis had a great civilization .
2. He was there from two o'clock to about one ( then he left ) .

Swan ( 1996 : 422 ) suggests that past tense also can be seen with present perfect aspect as in the following example :



I have wondered why they didn't pass the exam .

Declerk ( 1991 : 29 ) states that the past tense can occur with past perfect aspect .The following example is illustrative :

1. One day he noticed that a big tree had been destroyed by a storm .

Cahlker & Weiner ( 1998 : 286 ) confirm that the past tense may refer to present or future .Here both the past and the present tenses are used.

They can be expressed as follows :

1. Did ( do ) you to add something about the problem .

2. He wondered if I could lend him some money .

#### 4.1 Absolute Tense In English :

Mittins ( 1962 : 28 ) says that absolute tense and tenses are used in a similar way ,taking the present moment of speaking into consideration . Thus , actions which are concerned with the present tense and take place at time and they can include the present moment , absolutely differ from actions which happen only at the present time .The past and the present tense can be explained throughout the following examples :

1. They paint a picture .

2. He paints a picture .

3. They came early .

4. We ate quickly .

The verbs in (1) and (2) can be realized as the present tense because the indicated actions which take place at a time can include the present moment. The verbs in (3) and (4) can refer to the past because their time do not include the present moment of speaking, but fall before it (ibid: 30)

Aziz (1989 :51 ) asserts that the notion of both past and absolute tense can be used as the same case and there is no difference , if you use either the past tense or absolute tense ( i.e They both refer to the past in Arabic ) yet they refer at the same time to present perfect tense in English as in the following verse :

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا﴾ (نوح : ١٥)

See ye not How God has created the seven Heavens one above another

(A-Hilali & Khan, 1996 : 1615 )

### **5. The Way of Realizing the Past Tense :**

Al-Salih (1972, :21 ) maintains that the Glorious Quran is sent down and revealed upon the prophet Muhammed perfectly . The Glorious Quran has had a secular call ( i.e .the Glorious Quran is not sent only for the Arab people ) .Thus , there must be two ways of understanding of the verses of the Glorious Quran Translation and interpretation (ibid : 23)

Interpretation and Translation must be taken into account when reading and understanding the verses of the Glorious Quran especially in the studies that are being done so as to see the difference between Arabic and English ( Haroon , 1972 : 78 )



## **5.1 Interpretation :**

It is regarded as the best way to explain something that is really ambiguous .Interpretation is used widely in the divine books rather than other fields .it is dealing with things that are not clear for others to understand ( Al-Thahabe 1977 : 5 )

Interpretation can include the following concepts: a.There is an interpretation and none but Allah (alone ) knows its meaning (Al-Khule , 1985:15) .

b.it is important to mention the grammatical and linguistic interpretation which can be realized throughout the words of the Arab people ( Al- Saade, 1986 : 81)

c.There is another interpretation known just by the linguists who are having more knowledge than others (Al-Shalabe , 2004 : 27 )

## **5.2 Translation :**

Mates (1952 :113 ) asserts that translation and interpretation are used synonymously , but translation may be more proper than interpretation when used in two different languages .

Nilsen &Nilsen (1975:22 ) point out that translation is a good method to express two sentences in two different languages in order to find out the true meaning ( ibid :114 )

It is better for the reader to use interpretation when he tries to deal with the Quranic texts , while translation can enable the writer to deal with two different languages .

### **5.3 Text Analysis :**

It is important to concentrate on the lexical and structural meaning whereas the first is related closely to the semantic aspect and the latter concerns the grammatical level ( Al- Munjid : 12 ) . Thus , it is significant to talk about the two types of meaning in some detail with

reference to twelve different Quranic verses Which are taken into consideration

#### **5.3.1 Lexical meaning :**

Ibrahim ( 1958 : 62 ) mentions that the lexical meaning can be expressed by the meaning of the word in the lexicon . most of the ambiguity cases are due to the misunderstanding of the lexical meaning .

Al-Munjid (1972 :23) argues that looking for the lexical meaning of the word is the first step for the semantic level of a word . The English descriptive way for explaining the meaning of word cannot be consistent to the way in Arabic . Shalabe (1972: 171) remarks that the basic way to findout the true meaning of a word is to see lexicon first without anyother aspect .

#### **5.3.2 Structural meaning:**

Trager ( 1949 : 102 )stresses that all the relations between the components of a sentence as well as the words that form the sentence can be absolutely expressed for the structural meaning .

Tager &Smith ( 1951: 54 ) mention that structural meaning and the comprehensive study of any word within sentence and its function are so closely related to the descriptive way to analyse the sentence so as to reach the true meaning . Lyons (1968:435 ) illustrates that the distinction between the subject



of a sentence , oppositions of definitions , tense and the difference between statement , questions and requests are regarded to be as structural meaning .

### 5.3.3 Translation of the Glorious Quran Texts

Darweesh ( 1996 :1 ) confirms that the Glorious Quran is having a unique

**text for the following reasons :**

a.It may differ from all other literary texts .

b.all the linguists in the world even those who are not native speaker of Arabic have unanimously agreed that the Quranic style is also unique and shows a high level of rhetoric .

Thus , Translation of the Glorious Quran requires deep understanding , penetrating mind , intuition , high skill and deep insight of its texts .

#### Text (1) :

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ ثُمَّ تَابُوا ﴾ ( الاعراف : ١٥٣ )

The TL Text :

1-But those who committed evil deed and repented .

(Al-Hilali and Khan , 1996 : 222 )

#### 2.Text (2) :

﴿ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَأَغْلِبَنَّ ﴾ ( المجادلة : ٢١ )

2-Allah has decreed : " verily , it is I and my messenger who shall be the victorious "

(Al-Hilali &Khan , 1996 : 748 )

#### 3-Text (3) :

﴿ أَوْ لَمْ تُنَبِّئُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا مَاءً ﴾ ( النساء : ٤٣ )

3-Or you been in contact with women ( by sexual relations ) and you find no water .

(Al-Hilali &Khan , 1996 : 155 )

Text (4) :

﴿ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ﴾ (الفاحة : ٧ )

The way of those on whom you have bestowed your Grace .

(Al-Hilali, 1996 : 1 )

Text (5) :

﴿ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ﴾ (النساء : ٦٩ )

Then they will be in the company of those on whom Allah has bestowed . His  
Grace .

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 120 )

Text (6) :

﴿ بِئْسَمَا اشْتَرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ ﴾ (البقرة : ٩٠ )

How bad is that for which they have sold their ownelves .

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 18 )

Text (7):

﴿ (يونس : ٥٩) قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ مِنْ رِزْقٍ ﴾

" Tell me, what provison Allah has sent down to you !

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 278 )

Text (8) :

﴿ مَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ بَحِيرَةٍ ﴾ (المائدة : ١٠٣ )

( Allah has not instituted things like things like Bahirah )

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 165 )

Text 9:

﴿ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ﴾ (لقمان : ١٠ )

He has created the heavens without any pillars you see )

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 550 )

Text (10) :

﴿ قَالَ النَّارُ مَثْوَاكُمْ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ﴾ (الانعام : ١٢٨ )

He will say : " the fire be your dwelling –place , you will dwell there in foreve "

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 192 )

Text (11) :



﴿ أَخْرَجْنَا لَهُمْ دَابَّةً مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ تُكَلِّمُهُمْ ﴾ (النمل : ٨٢ )

We shall bringout from the earth a beast for them , to speak to them .

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 514 )

Text (12 ) :

﴿ وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَا فِي كُلِّ قَرْيَةٍ أَكْبَرًا مُّجْرِمِيهَا ﴾ (الانعام : ١٢٣ )

And thus we have set up in every town great ones of its wicked people .

(Al-Hilali & Khan , 1996 : 191 )

Anees (1966: 154 ) proposes that the past tense in Arabic doesnot refer to any aspect just concerns the actions and situations that happened in past . ( أَنْزَلَ , قَالَ )

( جَعَلَ , كَتَبَ , عَمِلَ ) There are so many verbs in Arabic like

and these verbs are not accepted only to be verbs in past or refer to the past time . The past tense in Arabic can be expressed by future and

present perfect ( ibid : 155 )

Ezzat ( 1973 : 145 ) says that all tenses in English can be formed as follows:

- 1.The present simple tense ex : He writes the letter .
- 2.The past simple tense ex : He wrote the letter .
- 3.The future simple tense ex : He will write the letter .
- 4.The present continuous tense ex : He is writing the letter .
- 5.The past continuous tense ex : He was writing the letter .
- 6.The future continuous tense ex : He will be writing the letter .
- 7.The present perfect tense ex : He has written the letter .
- 8.The past perfect tense ex : He had written the letter .

9.The future perfect tense ex : He will have written the letter .

10.The present perfect continuous tense ex : He has been written the letter.

11.The past perfect continuous tense ex : He had been writing the letter .

12.The future perfect continuos tense ex : He will have been writing the letter .

it is possible to consider carefully the translation and the underlined verses , and you will see the tenses ( 2 ,3 and 7 ) above and how to refer precisely .

As-Sammarae ( 1980:25 ) asserts that the past tense in Arabic may express only one case is that it refers thoroughly to things , events and situations that happened in past , but it can take different forms in English , especially in the verses of the Glorious Quran . it can refer to

past , future and present perfect tense (ibid : 28 )

Al-Dhamin ( 1975 : 284 ) illustrates that the underlined verbs in the texts number ( 1 , 2 , and 10 ) are absolutely past verbs in Arabic and no one

can say something else to contradict this idea .These verbs are called

In Arabic .( افعال ماضية )

Anees ( 1966 : 154 ) seems in agreement with As-Sammarae's ( 1980 : 25 ) view by remarking that the notion of the past tense in Arabic can be yet it can refer to three of ( كُتِبَ , قُرِئَ ) like ( الفعل الماضي ) expressed by

tenses ( i.e past tense , present perfect tense and future ) .e.g.have written the poem.,.He read the lesson,He will go soon.



## 6.Past Tense in the Glorious Quran and Text Analysis :

Al-Raihani ( 1998 : 19 ) mentions that text analysis may be done clearly based on figure or diagram .This may be possible if the writer refers to the

Title	Past Tense			Way of Realizing	Types of meaning
Arabic	ماضي عَمِلَ past	ماضي جَعَلَ	ماضي قَالَ	Interpretation	Lexical
English	Past tense He ran fast	Present perfect tense She has painted a picture	Simple future tense They will go home	Translation	Structural

components of the diagram or figure thoroughly ( i.e the researcher documents the information completely ) .

This diagram is to show the past tense in Arabic and English as illustrated by Aness( 1966 : 154 ) and As-Sammarae ( 1980 : 25) .

## 7. Comparison of past tense in Arabic and English :

a . In Arabic , there is one way to understand and realize the past tense is that it is a verb which refers to the action which happened in past and it is .There is no way else to understand and that's clear ( فعلٌ ماضٍ ) called (

for the native speaker and who are interested in Arabic .In English , there are different ways to conceive the past tense and it is not an easy task for every one to realize the past tense in English .

b. There are so many difficulties facing the learners to understand

something about the past tense in English .

Titles and nominations can add something difficult for learners to realize this form .The another problem is to see that the verbs are radically different between both Arabic and English because of the differences

between their system and form .

, but the past tense itself ( الفعل الماضي ) c. In Arabic , the past tense means (

in English may have three ways to realize it well . It can indicate the

past , present perfect tense and future simple tense .It is important to mention that past in Arabic is more complex than English .

## **8. Conclusion and Suggestions :**

Grammarians and Semantistis seem in disagreement about the notion of the past tense concerning the grammatical and semantic aspect . The past tense is present in both languages but with a varying degree .it is used in Arabic repeatedly , while in English it is less used . It can be seen in both Arabic and English with different realizations .There is no one –to –one correspondence about the past tense in Arabic and their English renderings . This research is beneficial for students of translation , teachers and those who are interested in translation which is important element in semantics .This study can leave the door open for further studies for the following reasons : (1) A linguistic study of the past tense in English and their realizations in Arabic may be studied , (2) some problems of translation concern the past tense from Arabic into English can be reasearched and (3) the other topics belong to the past tense in both Arabic and English may be contrastively studied.



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