Tense and Aspect
In Arabic and English
A Contrastive Study

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Section One

INTRODUCTION

To know the English Language ,one must know the grammer of it . There are many ways of thinking about grammer .Many senses in which the term is used .One Way is that grammer is something that produces thae sentences of a Language .Then we may ask what we mean by something .An English grammer would be a set of rules for making English sentences, thus something might mean the rules or we can have another meaning for something , we can simply mean a speaker of English Aitchison (1999:181) quotes Roger's Bacon view about the importance of grammer far as the essential properties of grammer are concerned .Nunan (1999:96) affirms that for most people who speak a language ,the essence of that language lies in grammer.The object of grammer is to teach people to express their thoughts correctly, either in speech or writing .

Gleason (1969:11) points out that a generation or two ago, the place of grammer in the curriculum differed from school to school,and even from classroom to classroom. In most school, it was he who thinks that in the teaching of a foreign? Language grammer, it should be taught in such really strong and it remained so.In some schools," grammer" was the dominat element in the English curriculum receiving more attention that either literature or composition. Coombe et, al (2001:93).

The purpose of learning English grammer is to enable the college students to know that "through grammer the learne can make words acquire the competence and performance in using the foreign language as Rutherford (1987:1) steesses this fact in real communication ". Each grammatical class has its own feature, linguistic complexities and

difficulties so the quantity and quality of leaner's mistakes differ from one category to another. Among those complexities is the interpretation and familiarization of the English tense and aspect. throughout my college experience in teaching grammer at the university level. I feel that the problem has embodied empirically and after long period of teaching .I seems that the students are incapable of using those terms properly . they are unable to distinguish between them.Dawood (1948:20) diagnosed this weakness in the recognition and the production of English tense and aspect and concluded that this due to the differences in English and Arabic and this idea is confirmed by the notion

of the contrastive analysis theory idicates that similar items in two languages are the most difficult among the total different or very similar items (Brown, 1987:30) . These imilar items in English and Arabic have caused big and perilous problems for Iraq –Arabic learners of English when handling them in their real use of the language .The fact is alwayas found in syntax.

The forms of the present and the present continuous tenes are the same .For example;

(يقرأ الولد في الحديقة)

(j∂qr∂u   ∂lw∂l∂du fil al hadiq∂)

   Could possibly mean either

1-The boy reads in the garden .(it indicates present simple) or

2-The boy reading in the garden .(it indicates present progressive)

       Teachers and educators in Iraq definitely notice such errors practically either when learner write composition or when they sit for conversations tests. They produce ungrammatical sentences in English as in :

 The boy reads in the garden.Or

 The boy is reading in the garden now.

Begg (1997:2) stresses this phenomenon by arguing ;"jumping from present tense to present progressive or to past tense or to future with in one and the same piece of a discourse is precisely what many non- native speakers of English when they speak and write in English. Some difficulties may be attributed to the interference of the students mother tongue which is perfectly stressed by Lado (1957:7). The students suffer a lot in grasping and applying the rules with little emphasis on the practical side make them feel with this problem. Gleason (1969;11) points out that a

generation or two ago the place of grammar in curriculum differed from school to school and even from classroom to classroom .It was he who thinks that in the teaching of a foreign language grammar , it should be taught in such really strong and it remained so .I some schools " grammar" was the dominant element in the English curriculum receiving more attention than either literature or composition . Coombe (2001;93) emphasizes that studying grammar should create in the learner a motivation To learn and deduce and generalize .rules which make up the have language .Educators believe that grammatical awareness takes contribut to the development of a sound basis in language leaning .

Ur (984),Lado (1964) ,and Fries(945),all agree on the vital role of grammar in language leaning. The researcher believes that the students or the learners have to learn the grammer rules to complete understanding .If the speaker is abide by the rules of grammar.he will produce ungrammatical utterances and incorrect conception of the language. This idea is confirmed by Rutherford (1987:1) who states that "in the recognition and the production level of grammar.the learner can make words effective and finally become efficient in his own communication ".

Each grammatical class has its own feature, linguistic complexities difficulties, so the quality and the quality of learner's mistakes differ from one category to another. Among those complexities is the interpretation and familiarization of the English Tense and Aspect Befor going deeplay in the problem area, we have to introduction about Tense and Aspect in Arabic and English to let the reader have additional knowledge to be familiar with those terms that always cause difficulties.

Tense and Aspect in English and Arabic

Tense is agrammatical device used by a language to denote time by means of contrast in verb forms. Thus in English the contrast between the form "go(es)" and "went " points to time , it expresses tense. The first from basically refers to the present simple and the second to the past simple .In Arabic ,the from يذهب [j∂ðh∂bu]and ذهب [ð∂h∂b∂] denote time and is therefore tense. The first from is connected with the present time whereas the second is with the past time.(Aziz,1989:p.39) .

In determining how a verb from refers to time we must know the point of reference which indicates what is means by past, present and future .

Division of Time
Past————————— present—————————future

In this figure which is quoted from (Quirk et,al 1985,p.75). The point of reference is the moment of speaking wich determines the present as the moment identical with the point of reference, the past as the time which precedes the point of reference, and the future as the time which follows the point of reference .Tenses using the moment of speaking as the point of reference are termed "absolute"; those using the moments as point of reference are termed "relative". English tenses are basically " absolute". They take the moment of speaking as their reference.

Arabic tenses are usually relative, they may take other moments in the sentences as their point of reference.(السامرائي 1991:8)

Tense in English

If we look at the five forms of the English verb: go ,gose, went, going and gone, we find that only the contrast between "go", "gose","went" expresses time (Leech,1975,p.83). The contrast between "go",and "gose" denotes person, but no time .

Igo , She gose

Both forms refer to the present .The form "went",on the other hand, refers to the past. The other two forms (-ing) and (-edz), (the present and past participle)" going " and" gone" are non –finite . They do not normally refer to time but to aspect. On the basis of the two verb forms (go)(es):went, we have two tenses in English:the present tense(go, gose)and the past tense(went)

The present Tense

The present tense has its point of reference the present moment of speaking .It is an absolute tense: but it refers to present time in general. This tense expresses repeated actions, habits, customs and even mere ability in the present. It may refer to future time. e.g Ali leaves for paris next month.

The past Tense

It refers to the moment befor the time of speaking: it is an absolute tense. The time is the definite past, expressed or implied, There are three less basic uses of the past tense which refers to the present. They are found in :

> a- indirect speech
> b- polite attitude
> c- unreal situation

Tense in Arabic

In Arabic there are two verb forms (the perfect الماضي ا (al-m∂dhi)and the imperfect المضـارع [∂lmudhri∂]) which express, among other things, time reference. The perfect كتـب [k∂t∂b∂]and the imperfect يكتـب [j∂ktubu]. Express present \past contrast when they are used as absolute tenses, i.e. taking the moment of speaking as their reference point. It should be noted however that the same two forms may be used for relative tenses, in which case the point of referenceis not the present moment of speaking but other points in the sentence. Here are two examples which illustrate absolute relative tense of the imperfect يـذهب (gose) [j∂ðha∂bu](Farghal and Shunnaq.1999,63-66)

يذهب اخي الـى هنـاك كل يوم My brother gose there every day [j∂ðhabu ∂ki ela hun∂k kul∂j∂w∂m]

(Absolute: point of reference the moment of speaking(now)

علمـت انذاك ان اخـي يذهـب الـى هنـاك كل يـوم – Then I knew that my brother went there every day.

[∂limtu ∂n∂ða:k ∂nd ∂khi j∂ðh∂bu ela huna:k kul∂ j∂wn]

(Relative: point of reference past علمت :the past refers to the past)

The present Tense

The verb form called the imperfect (المضـارع) basically refers to present time. If the point of reference is the moment of speaking

a- As in English , the present tense my refer to the general present, namely a repeated action, afact or an ability in the present .

I go to the market once a week . اذهـب الـى السـوق مـرة كـل اسبوع [∂ðhabu ela ∂lsuq m∂r∂ kul isbua]

Ali rarely comes to the Meeting , قلما يحضر على الاجتماعات[q∂l∂m∂ j∂hdh∂r ∂li ∂lijtima: ∂t].

b- Unlike the English present tenses, the Arabic present tense may often refer to the present moment .

He is writing along poem. انه يكتب قصيدة طويلة[en∂hu j∂ktubu q∂seeda t∂weal∂].

Layla is working in the kitchen. ليلى تعمل في المطبخ [Leila t∂m∂l fil m∂tbakh].

The past Tense

The perfect from(الماضي) basically refers to action,states, situations ,befor the present (absolute tense) . This tense has the following uses:

a- All types of acts completed befor the present moment: long acts , which indicate definite past time .

Huda lived in paris last year . عاشت هدى في باريس السنة الماضية
[ashat huda fi bareas ∂ls∂n∂ ∂L m∂dhiyah].

The train arrived a short time ago. وصل القطار قبل قليل
[w∂s∂l∂ ∂L qit∂r q∂bl∂ q∂leal]

b- past actions in the indefinite past .They may be with present by means of their effect or result. Such action are usually expressed in English by the perfect aspect and the present tense قد [q∂d] Is occasionally used with the perfect form, but its use is restricted to affirmative statements .

The plane has arrived . وصلت الطائرة [w∂s∂l∂t eltaira ∂la:n∂]

I have lost my book. فقدت كتابي [f∂q∂tu kita:bi] .

I have not done this. مافعلت هذا [ma f∂∂ltu haða]

Comparison of Tenses in English and Arabic

a- In absolute tenses, the present tense in English and Arabic refer to general present time, which includes the present moment .This may express facts,habits,customs, repeated, but not necessarily actions happening at the present moment .

b- The Arabic present tense often refers to an action taking place at the moment of speaking (now). In English, this use of the present tense is confined to a limited number of verb notably verbs of sensation,The English equivalent is expressed by the progressive aspect.

Layla is preparing the tea. تعد ليلى الشاي الآن [t∂idu Leila ∂l shi ∂la:n].

Ali is working in the garden now.علي يعمل في الحديقة الآن [∂Li y∂∂m∂lu fil h∂diqa ∂la:n].

c-Both in English and Arabic, the present tense may refer to future time, usually with the help of an adverbial of futurity.
My brother leaves for Cairo tomorrow. يغادر اخي الى القاهرة غدا [jugha:dir ∂kh: ela elq∂h:rd qh∂dan]

d-Definite English past tense refers to a definite past which excludes the present moment. The Arabic past tense may refer to definite past .
I saw this man last year. رأيت هذا الرجل في العام الماضي [r∂eitu ha∂d ∂lr∂jul fil a:m elma:dhi]

e- The Arabic past tense in contrast with the English past tense may also refer to an indefinite past time normally connected with the present in one way or another .
I have seen this man twice:his face is familiar to me. رايت هذا الرجل مرتين
[r∂eitu ha∂∂ ∂lr∂∂gul m∂r∂tein,w∂∂ghahu m∂luf endi] :وجهه مألوف عندي

The English equivalent is normaly expressed by means of the present tense and the perfect aspect.
I have not finished the story yet.لم انته من القصة بعد [L∂m ∂nt∂hi min ∂lqus∂ b∂du]

f- Often Arabic uses the past tense, where English uses the present tense . This is found in the proverbs, maxims, and what is in print. It is also true of certain verbs of emotion.
Shakespeare says. قال شكسبير [qa:l∂ sh∂kespear]
I love this girl. لقد احببت هذه الفتاة [l∂q∂d ∂hbabtu ha:ðihi ∂lfata:t]

g-probably the most important difference between the English and the Arabic tenses is that the English tenses are absolute: the relative tenses are expressed by means of different forms. The non-finite forms. The Arabic tenses uses the same forms in absolute and relative constructions.
The following examples of transformation from direct to indirect speech illustrate this point .
He said "Ali likes jazz music."(direct speech).
He said that Ali liked jazz music."(indirect speech).

In the indirect speech " likes" becomes" liked" because the action is now in the past, and the tense is absolute; it uses two different forms . In Arabic the is not necessary because the same form may be used in absolute tenses (direct speech here) and relative tenses (as in the direct

speech below). In both the direct and the indirect speech in the above examples, the imperfect يحب [   ] is used first absolutely, then relative.

Aspect

As Crystal (2000;36) puts it as it "acategort used in the grammatical description of verb (along with tense and mood , referring primarily to the way the grammar markes the duration or type of temporal activity denoted by the verb)". It differs from tense in that it dose not place an event befor, simultancous with or after apoint of reference as tense dose; it is not a deictic (poining) category .It only expresses the manner of action or event whether it is along. Short, continuous, incomplete, ete. Aspect denotes how the speaker views an event , or an action . The same event may be viewed by aspeaker as a non- durative, short event as in :

I went to the door and opened it,

Or a long durative one as in :

As I was opening the door ,I heard some music

English Aspects

English has two aspects expressed in its grammer by means of combination of verb forms : the progressive and the perfective .The progressive aspect is expressed by means of the verb Be+ing form. Further , this aspect is combined with the two tenses, the past and the present ,resulting in the following combination :

(a)　　　present Tense, progressive Aspect: I am writing ,
　　　　　you are writing, he is writing…etc.

(b)　　　 past Tense, progressive Aspect: I was writing,you
　　　　　Were writing he was writing..tc

The perfective aspects is expressed by the verb have +the past participle Here too the perfective aspects is combined with the two tenses to yleld these constructions:

(c)　　　 present Tense, perfective Aspect:I have written ,
　　　　　 you have written, he has written…etc.

(d)　　　 past Tense, perfective Aspect:I had written , you
　　　　　had written , he had writtien… etc.

The two aspects may be combined yielding perfective progressive aspect in the present or past.

(e)　　　 I have been writing, you have been writing, he

had been writing… etc.
(f)   I had been writing, you have been writing, he
                    had been writing… etc.
There is also a contrast between these combinations the absence of the two
aspects (often termed Simple aspect); e.g.
        I am writing(progressive): I write (Simple) .
    The progressive Aspect
     The progressive aspect in English basically a durative event .
     The Three are growing fast in this place .
     The houses were becoming old.
     This aspect is therefore not normally used with stative verbs such as
         know be, seem contain, etc.
     He is being seeming adoctor .
     I am seeing you now .
     The box was containing gold .
     The main uses of the progressive aspect are the following.
     (a)It is used for an event happening at the moment of
       speaking. The present tense is combined with this aspect.
     He is resting now.
  This use may be contrasted with the simple present tens, which dose
     not express an actual event but a repeated action or ahabit.
     He rests every two hours .
     (b) The progressive aspect may refer to a temporary temporary
         action . The simple aspect usually refer to a more permanent
              event. The tenses is present or past, depending on the time of
        the event .
     He lived in a fashionable hotel . (temporary, during his visit only)
         He lived in a fashionable house. (his permanent place of living).
            It may express an incomplete event, in The present or past
(with present   or past respectively).
        She is was crossing the street. (incomplete action, the end of it is
not envisaged).
        The simple aspect, on the other hand, may express a completed
action She crossed the street.(completed action in the past CF.
        She crossed the street as this point express her habit).

c- Since the progressive aspect expresses durative event, it often provides a frame for another short event, expressed by a simple aspect.

The perfect aspect present tense may implay the subject exists, the past simple, on the other hand, indieates that the subject dose not exist

Mr Hill has written an epic poem .(Mr Hill is still alive).

Milton wrote along epic poem .(Milton is dead).

The perfect aspect past tense relates a past event to a point in the past. It indicates that an even is completed befor a point in the past. The point of reference here is not the moment of speaking but a moment in the past: the is relative tense combined with aspect .

When they arrived everybody had left .

He was living in an old house which had bought the year befor .

In these examples the second action expressed by the perfect aspect is completed befor a point in the past denoted by the verb in the simple aspect in the past. It serves as a bridge between two point in the past.

He had been reaching a novel when the guests arrived .

We had been waiting for six hours when the guest opened and a big black car come in .

The perfect aspect, past tense is used in the indirect speech as a backsheft of the perfect aspect present tense and simple aspect past tense.

She said that She seen him(befor) indirect (two days befor) .

She said, I have seen him befor .

She said, I saw him to days ago .

For more detailson direct and indirect speech, see chapter 18.

Finally,the perfect aspect , , past tense is used to indicate a rejected condition (unlikely, unreal) in the past .

If they had come to the meeting I would have seen them.(They did not come)

(For more details o conditional sentences, see chapter 14.

As states befor, the imperfect aspect is used to convey the idea that an event or an action is not completed yet. It may therefore denote a durative (progressive) event.

يعمل على في البستان الآن (Ali is working in the orchard now) .

In the sense that something is taking place now, probably the pattern where the subject precedes the verb is more common, as in (32).

علي يعمل في البستان

This aspect may also express a habit,a custom or a repeateed action (see,3.7).

(Ali works in the orchard every day)يعمل علي في البستان كل يوم .

Only the contex will show whether the durative or the habitual sense is meant . Unlike English , in Arabic this distinction is not drawn by means of aspect .

When combined with a relative tense taking its reference from a point in the past ,this aspect may express a durative or a habitual action in the past.

(I met him in the café he was reading a التقيت به في المقهى وهو يقرأ جريدة newspaper) (durative) .

(He said that he traveled to the country once قال انه يسافر الى الريف مرة كل شهر a month).

To render the past more explicitly, the verb كان is used with the imperfect aspect .

(His wife was working in a large store كانت زوجته تعمل في مخزن كبير).

The perfect Aspect

The perfect aspect is expressed by the perfect form, which also expresses the absolute and the relative past tenses. These meaning will be explored here.

The perfect aspect with the absolute past tense may express a completed action with present relevance (e.g. present result)

(The plane has now arrived) وصلت الطائرة الآن

(I have finished writing the poem) انتهيت من كتابة القصيدة

To render this sense more explicit, the particle قد is often used with the perfect form,usually with the additional meaning of 'already' or'just' .

(I have already explained this) قد شرحت هذا .

(She had just left the (place) لقد غادرت المكان .

The particle قد however restricted to positive statements .

(He has not come) ما قد جاء .

Combined with a relative tense taking its reference point from the past, this aspect expresses an event completed befor a point to the past, and is usually rendered into English by the perfect aspect, past tense.

وصل بعد ان بدات الحفلة (He arrived after the party had started).

جلست حيث جلست امها من قبلها (She sat where her mother had sat).

Subject to the restrictions mentioned in the previous paragraph, the particle, قد is sometimes used with the perfect to express this sense .

زرتـه فـي قريتـه وقد اشـترى سيارة جديدة (I visited him in his village;he had bought a new car).

It is to be noted that the second verb "قد اشترى" is interpreted relatively, taking its reference point from the first verb .

There is however another possibility, the second verb may be interpreted absolutely taking its reference from the moment of speaking, the sentence may then be rendered into English as .

I visit him in his village; he has bought anew car .

The verb "كان" is also used with the perfect to express this sense more explicitly .This construction may be used with "قد" or without it. The restrictions on "قد" seem to be connected with the verb after it, not befor it.

عش في بيت قديم كان (قد) اشتراه من عمه

(He lived in an old house which he had bought from his uncle).

أعجب الامير بما رآه لانه لم يكن قد زار تلك البلاد من قبل

(The prince was impressed by what he saw ;he had not been to that country befor)

أعجب الامير بما رآه لانه كان قد مارأى تلك البلاد من قبل

The perfect to aspect may combine with a relative tense taking its reference from apoint in the future.In this case it would be interpreted as expressing an event which will be completed befor the point in the future . The particle قد subject to the same or the im perfect, يكون may be used .

ساغادر هذا المكان واكون (قد) انتهيت من عملي

(I will leave this place when I have finished my work)

تكون الشركة قد اوفت بشروط جميع العقود بحلول عام 1990

The company will have fulfilled the conditions of all the contracts by the end of 1990 .

Comparison of Aspect in English and Arabic

(a) The aspects in English are formed by combination of verbal elements . future, separate formes are used for the tenses whose aspects are considered simple. Thus in English we have :

Igo (simple aspect – mainly tense).

I went (simple aspect – mainly tense).

I have gone (perfect aspect+ tense (present)

I had gone ((perfect aspect+ tense (past)

I am going (progressive aspect+ tense(present)

I was going (progressive aspect+ tense(past)

I have been going (perfect progressive aspect+ tense(present)

I had been going (perfect progressive aspect+ tense(past)

Arabic on the other had used one form each of the two tenses and aspects.

Thus the eight combinationa above correspond to two simple forms in Arabic:" اذهب " and " يذهب".

-   absolute tenses present .I go
-   R elative tense, I will go, I went every day etc.
-   Aspect, imperfect, combined with absolute and relative
-   Tenses: I am going, I shall be going, I was going…
-   absolute tense, past: I went.
-   Relative tense, I will have gone, I had gone .
-   Aspect, perfect(combined with the bsolute and the relative.
-   Tenses: I have gone , I will have gone, I had gone…etc.

(b)   There are one restrictions on the used of the aspect in Arabic. Two forms are used with all kinds of verbs including those having a stative sense :

English progressive aspect,on the other hand, is not used with stative verbs: is containing, is knowing. It is confined to dynamic verbs: I am reading ;she is playing .

(c)   The progressive aspect in English and the imperfect aspect in Arabic are used for durative action, incomplete events, temporary actions and what is happing (continuous) at a certain moment.

(d) The perfect aspect in English and the Arabic are used For completed actions in relation to the present moment,

a moment in the past or a moment in the future : e.g.
I have come:جنت ; ha asid he had come : قال انه جاء
He will have finished:sd; سيكون قد انتهى

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