A Case for a Contrastive Interpretation of the Expression of Time in English and Arabic

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Abstract
Time and the expression of time are integral features of all cultures and languages. When we learn our first language, we learn not just the language to talk about time but also how to express our perceptions of time. These perceptions are often at the subconscious level. The current paper contrasts the expression of time in both English and Arabic not just from the grammatical perspective but also from the semantic. Learners bring this intuitive understanding of the expression of time through tense and aspect from the first language (L1) and it is argued that this affects all subsequent language learning. An analysis, not just of the grammatical differences but also the meaning and functional contrasts, can help understand why our learners make the errors they do and can also inform material developers so that learner texts can take these differences and challenges into consideration.

Keywords: tense, aspect, time, temporality, contrast
Introduction

Time is an integral part of all human experience and as such is a universal concept. The encoding of time through language, however, is linguistically and culturally specific (Guiora, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Comrie, 1985; von Stutterheim & Klein, 1987; Al Mutawa & Kailani, 1989; Donnellan, 1991; Hinkel, 1992; Haded, 1996). We learn to encode temporal notions when we learn our first language(s). Linguistic input from the environment interacts with learners' cognitive capacities shaping the initial interpretation and encoding of temporal notions in the first language (L1). No prior linguistic associations exist between temporal expression and morphological and syntactic structures.

English and Arabic have grammatical systems for the encoding of temporal concepts (Hinkel, 1992; Haded, 1996), providing a familiar framework facilitating to some extent acquisition of the English Tense and Aspect (TA) system (Hinkel, 1992). The assumption, however, that Arabic speakers learning English as an L2 understand the notion of the grammatical expression of temporal concepts is at a very general level. Languages, though grammaticizing the expression of time, do so in different ways and may verbalize different temporal facets of a situation. The morphological encoding of past habitual situations in English, for example, focuses on past deictic location while the verb phrase in the Arabic past habitual indicates imperfectivity in the main verb and past time location in the helping verb. One language may depend on syntactic features other than verb form to communicate certain facets of temporality. The challenge for learners is, consequently, grammatical and semantic and what is needed as Svalberg (1995) points out is “a grammar awareness which systematically links meanings with their grammatical encodings, and which includes not just grammar rules but also the meaningfulness of these rules.” (p. 66)

English Tense System

Both TA systems are closely associated with time in language teaching involving as they do the grammaticalization of subjective, psychological time (Givon, 1982; Brown & Miller, 1986; Lewis, 1986; Nehls, 1992; and Schramm, 1996). Klein (1994) refers to tense as the “entire phenomenon” of the grammaticalization of time, a phenomenon generally articulated through the verb. Comrie (1985) defines tense as “the grammaticalized expression of location in time” (p. 9) locating “the time of a situation relative to the situation of the utterance” (p. 2). Deixis is central to tense (Comrie, 1976; Bertinetto, 1994; Schramm, 1996). Freed (1979), while viewing tense as a way of making “specific reference” to an event “in particular with respect to the time of the utterance”, also comments on tense as a way of indicating the “ordering of events”, (p. 10) suggesting two fundamental temporal functions. The first involves an event considered in terms of speaker location and the second in relation to another event. In both cases, locations involve ‘before’, ‘after’ and ‘simultaneous with’ either speaker time or narrative time.

Svalberg (1995) suggests that the fact that “there is more than one reference point in the grammar’ is ‘what is peculiar about tense in English.” (p. 69) She refers to these points as “speaker time” and “story time.” In each case, the “axis of orientation” (Bull, 1971) differs. Speaker location is the vantage point indicating a relationship of ‘at’, ‘before’ and ‘after’ the time of speaking, illustrated in Table 1 (Svalberg, 1995, p.70).

Table 1. Reference Points for primary tense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>have gone/ went</th>
<th>go</th>
<th>will go</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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The reference (R) and event (E) points coincide, precede, or follow (S) speaker location.

\[
\begin{align*}
  R/E & \iff S \\
  R/E/S & \iff S \\
  R/E & \iff S
\end{align*}
\]

The narrator designates a temporal location to the story, choosing to tell the story from a selected vantage point, generally from the perspective of another event. All other narrated events maintain a relationship of 'before', 'at' and 'after' to the reference point (Svalberg, 1995, p.70).

**Table 2. Narrative time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>had gone</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>would go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus is still on the relationship between two points in time, albeit separate from the time of utterance. The reference point (R) and the event point (E) in examples 1 - 3 below occur before speech time (S) while in 4 / 5, both could be simultaneous with or after speaker time. The verb forms articulate the relationship between R and E.

1. He **had eaten** breakfast when the bus **came**.

   E \iff R \iff S

The sequence of events can be communicated equally effectively through the use of sequence indicators 'before', 'after'.

2. He **ate** breakfast **before** the bus **came**.

   E \iff R \iff S

Non-finite verb forms in dependent temporal clauses exemplify secondary tense, where the time of the event depends on the finite verb in the main clause. In each of the following examples, though the relationship between the two events remains the same, the tense location differs ranging from past to present to future.

**Table 3. Reference Points for secondary tenses**

3. Having **finished** work, Ahmed **went** home.

   E \iff R \iff S

3a. When he **had finished** work, Ahmed **went** home.

4. Having **finished** work, Ahmed **goes** home.

   E \iff R/S (contemporaneous)

4a. When he **has finished/finishes** work, Ahmed **goes** home.

5. Having **finished** work, Ahmed **will go** home.

5a. When he **has finished/finishes** work, Ahmed **will go** home.

S \iff E \iff R

In examples 1 – 5, the essential temporal requirement is that the event in the non-finite clause should occur before the second event 'of going home'. This can be done through either of the two methods above (Murphy, 1999; Azar, 1992). The three temporal points, of speech (S), event (E) and reference (R) define the relationships inherent in tense (Reichenbach, 1947; Aqvist, 1978; Dahl, 1983; Comrie, 1985; and Hatav, 1993). Reference (R) may be where the speaker is (in which case (S) and (R) coincide), or where s/he chooses to place the story with (E) viewed in sequential relation to that reference point, before, after or at.
English Aspect System

Non-sequential relationships exploring the interaction between reference and event time fall into the category of aspect. Aspect is not deictic and functions as Maslov (1988) explains “irrespective of the moment of speech or ...of the time of another action mentioned or implied.” (p. 63) Aspect defines the nature of the situation, “in terms of such things as inception, repetition, completion, duration and punctuality” (Freed, 1979, p.10). In Comrie's (1985) view, aspect is “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”, (p. 3) involving as Smith (1995) suggests “preliminary stages, internal stages and resultant stages.” (p. 7) The question of the relationship of the event to other identified temporal points is fundamental to aspect involving a description of the relationship between the two temporal points, reference and event.

Table 4. Reference points for aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Three aspects are encoded morphologically in English (Klein, 1994; Klein, 1995) and are said to make up the English grammatical aspect system. Simple aspect describes situations presented in their entirety without any focus on the internal temporal architecture of that event. The following examples contain fundamental temporal differences. However, in both cases the single events of 'goes' and 'went' are viewed in their entirety and at one level if the relationship between the events and reference points 'every day' and 'yesterday' is considered it can be represented in Figure 3.6 below. However, aspectual features at the syntactic level in example 6 include the notion of habituality; thereby changing the overall aspectual perspective, making it imperfective while 7 is perfective.

Table 5. Reference points in simple aspect

6. Ahmed goes to school every day.
7. Ahmed went to school yesterday.

Table 6. Reference points in progressive aspect

| E | R |

In both 8 and 9, the reference points 'now' and 'when the phone rang' are contained in the event time.

Progressive aspect focuses on phases of an event that may be located in different time frames as illustrated in the following examples.
8. Ahmed is talking to his friends right now.
9. Ahmed was talking with his friends when the phone rang.

Perfect aspect describes an event viewed as either having occurred or at least having begun before the reference time (which is also S time). If already completed, the speaker considers it as having some current relevance. This can mean that the event is still true as in 11 below or that in the speaker's perception the event, though completed, has some current relevance or on-going effect.
10. Ahmed has visited Syria four times.
11. Ahmed has lived/ been living in Sharjah for three years.
The event time precedes but also includes the reference point, from a subjective perspective in sentence 10 or objectively in sentence 11.

**Table 7. Reference points in perfect aspect**

Event precedes but also includes reference time (fact or speaker interpretation)

$$E \leftarrow R$$

Linguistically, aspect as a grammatical 'idea' or category has been less investigated than tense. One possible explanation could be its comparative subjectivity, as Hasegawa (1998) suggests, since aspectual concepts are far more dependent on speaker interpretation than tense. Tense is more tangible, presenting time as a “past-present-future continuum” and more readily accessible to analysis as it is independent of the “speaker's mental state.” It is also contended that aspect when marked on the verb form is a more integral part of the verb than tense as in 'I am going' where aspect is marked on the main verb '-ing' and tense on the helping verb. Siewerska (1991) explains “aspect markers occur closest to the verb nucleus followed by tense with modal operators constituting the outermost layers.” (p. 115) There are syntactic limitations on precisely what aspects of a situation can be communicated. Bache (1985, p. 66 - 67) quoting Forsyth (1970, p.353) points out that:

- although aspect does basically express the speaker's subjective attitude to a given action in the real world, the choice of aspect in a context …is to a considerable extent dictated by the objective considerations of meaning, syntax and expressional emphasis…

Aspectual expression is, as Smith (1995) explains, "usually signalled morphologically; each morpheme is associated in the lexicon with a schema that gives the properties of the viewpoint." (p. 5) The linguistic and conventional constraints on the speaker in aspectual choices vary from one language to another and may not always reside in the verb or verb phrase alone (Freed, 1979; Maslov, 1985; El Hassan, 1987). According to Sapir (1921) “aspect is expressed in English by all kinds of idiomatic turns rather than by a consistently worked out set of grammatical forms”, (p. 108) and is arguably a much more complex concept semantically and syntactically than tense. It can be communicated through the inherent lexical semantics of the verb, the verb and its argument; the subject and object of verbs, adverbial time phrases and singular and plural nouns (Verkuyl, 1972; Hoepelman, 1978; Freed, 1979; Smith, 1983; Schramm, 1996) as well as verb morphology.

The fact that aspect occurs in a variety of ways outside the verb phrase cannot be ignored as such aspectual features may impact on morphological structure. Verkuyl (1993) uses the term _aspectuality_ to “to capture the whole area covered by the two notions” (p. 11) of grammatical and lexical aspect. In his examples illustrated in 12 and 13,

12. Judith ate a sandwich yesterday.
13. Judith ate sandwiches all day yesterday.

the accomplishment situation (illustrated in verb + predicate) 'ate a sandwich' in 12 is telic with telicity indicated in the finite number of sandwiches 'a sandwich'. In 13, the activity verb 'eat' is atelic as no endpoint is indicated in the object 'sandwiches'. The difference at this level is that of lexical aspect between an activity 'eat' and an accomplishment 'eat a sandwich' and in Arabic the morphological forms of perfective (12) and imperfective (13) illustrate this aspectual difference of completed and non-completed (Bybee & Dahl, 1989). In English, however, morphological choice is affected by the boundedness indicated in 'yesterday' with verbs...
in both utterances referring to actions completed prior to the time of speaking. Morphological choice in the Arabic translation of 13 indicates a certain element of speaker choice, as both imperfective verb form to indicate the non-completed nature of the situation or perfective to illustrate the prior occurrence of the situation are possible.

**Arabic Tense Aspect System**

The definitions of tense and aspect presented in the preceding descriptions fit the temporal functions of English verb morphology but may not categorize all Arabic temporal meanings. Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) explain:

The main problem encountered by Arab students in dealing with the English verb-system emanates from the fact that each verb-form in English (simple or expanded) expresses many different meanings, and the two systems in the two languages sometimes express the same meanings through the same forms, but at other times the area of overlap ends and each system goes its own way. (p. 157)

The two-way morphological division in Arabic is argued (Qafisheh, 1975; Haded, 1996; Versteegh, 2001) to have clear semantic functions. Suffixal forms 'al maaDii' 'perfective', (Chejne, 1969; Fleisch, 1974; Comrie, 1975; Kaye, 1987; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Holes, 1995) denote completed situations while prefixal forms 'al muDaar9' 'imperfective', (Holes, 1995) describe non-completed. Some linguists (McCarus, 1976; Wright, 1981; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983) have argued that neither form denotes time deictically in the way that English does. In Mitchell & El Hassan's (1994) view Arabic verb forms, are only “tenuously concerned” (p. 8) with tense differences, the primary function of which, they argue, is essentially aspectual, showing the distinctions between situations that have been realized or carried out and those that have still to be realized. They point out “the two-tense system of the Arabic verb embodies basically a realized/unrealized distinction rather than very clear temporal differences.”(p. 8)

Traditionally, Arabic has been categorized as an aspect and not a tense language (Tritton, 1943; Haywood & Nahmad, 1965). Haded (1996) argue that categorizing Arabic as a tense or aspect language is “inconsistent and unjustifiable.” (p. 47) Brustad (2000) suggests that “the perfect (perfective) and imperfect (imperfective) represent relative past and relative non-past respectively” (p. 204) in Classical Arabic and she adds that this is true also for the various Arabic dialects. Shlonsky (1997, p.96) & Fassi Fehri (2000) conclude that Arabic verb forms have deictic potential because in the absence of all other functions “sentences with a bare …… verb have a tense component”, as illustrated in the following examples, where Arabic morphological verb forms of perfective, imperfective and future auxiliary 'sawfa' with imperfective provide deictic reference in a manner similar to that identified for English in Figure 1.

14. _yadhab_  
    _aa'laa aal madrasah kul yawm_

    He _goes_ 3 masc _imperf_ to the school every day.
    He goes to school every day.

15. _dhahaba_  
    _aa'laa aal madrasah aa'ms._

    He _went_ 3 masc _perf_ to the school yesterday.
    He went to school yesterday.

16. _sawfa_  
    _yadhah_  
    _aa'laa aal madrasah bukra._

    _future auxiliary_ he _goes_ 3 masc _imperf_ to the school tomorrow.
    He will _go_ to school tomorrow.
Cuvalay-Haak (1997) argues that Arabic verb forms are polysemous, a view that she says “runs counter to traditionalist orientalist approaches” concluding that “a simple verb form can thus be associated with two or more operators.” (p. 127) One clear tense function of Arabic perfective forms is to establish deictic location at some point in the past (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989). Once this is done, the writer/narrator is free to encode all unbounded or habitual utterances in the imperfective form with or without ‘kaan’.

Consider the following narrative on Ibn BaTuuTah (Brustad (2000, p.12).

17. Kharaj Ibn BaTuuTah min beladtuhi Tunjah
He went out 3 sing. masc. perf. BaTuuTah from country his Tunjah
qaaSdaa setting off 3 sing. masc. active participle the Haaj, he lives 3 sing. masc. imperf.
akaaHaj, ya9iish
during journey his among the people, he travels 3 sing. masc. imperf.
kaHJaal riHltu biin aal naas, yariHil
with the tribes and he gets up 3 sing. masc. imperf. in the wind and
yuzaur aahil aal 9lm.
he visits 3 sing masc imperf family the world.
The use of the initial perfective verb establishes past time and the imperfective in subsequent verbs indicates habituality and repetition.

A primary reason for the argument of tenuous concern of form with tense is the apparent multifunctionality of both Arabic forms when compared with the English translation. The Arabic imperfective form encodes both finite and non-finite English verb forms. Fassi Fehri (2000) explains that, in tense languages, non-finite verb forms such as participles and infinitives are used to complement the finite form of the verb in the main clause, whereas in Arabic this relationship is generally encoded in the imperfective form. Consider the following utterances where Arabic imperfective translates both English participle form and infinitive.

18. jaat umuha tabkii.
She came 3 fem. perf. mother her she cries 3 fem. imperf.
She came to her mother crying.

19. yadhab aal'aaal mgha9ii li'aann yashrab
He goes 3 masc imperf to the coffee shop so as he drinks 3 masc imperf.
qahwah.
coffee.
He goes to the coffee shop to drink coffee.

20. Bdaa'
yagraa'.
He began 3 masc perf he reads 3 masc imperf.
He began reading

21. yakml yagraa' wa
He finishes 3 masc perf he reads 3 masc imperf and
yadhab aal'aaal biit.
he goes 3 masc. imperf. to the house.
He finishes reading and he goes home.
The main verb provides temporal location (18/ 20 in past time and 19/21 present) while the second verb in each case establishes the events of ‘crying’, ‘drinking’ and ‘reading’ as non-completed, functioning as non-finite and infinitive verbs in English. In Arabic, the second verb in the verb phrase is in the imperfective form (O’Leary, 1923; Smith, 1983; Brustad, 2000).
Secondary tense, as defined in the English TA system, describes temporal sequential relationships between R and E. In Arabic, the term describes a relationship of logical sequence independent of the temporal location of the narrative. The Arabic perfective form is used in conditional and time clauses to illustrate the logical temporal relationship existing between two events. Realization of one event depends on the prior completion of another. Whether the main event refers to the past, present or future is irrelevant as Bybee & Dahl (1989), Smart (1992) and Ingham (1995) point out. Ingham explains, “The preference is for the Time or Condition clause to precede the main clause and to contain a verb in the perfective.” (p. 137)

The question of deictic anteriority to the time of utterance is not an issue as “the Time or Condition clause is unmarked for time reference” and actual time reference “must be worked out from the meaning and the context”. (Smart, 1992, p.217) In conditional clauses, the verb in the apodosis establishes the time of the event while the verb in the protasis is generally encoded as perfective. Although the circumstances referred to by the verb in the protasis may be unrealized at the time of the utterance, the condition must be met before the main event can occur. The perfective establishes a relationship of dependency between the two propositions.

22. Aadhaa w Saltu bdrii, aazurukii.

   Conditional particle 1 arrived 1 sing perf early, I (will) visit 1 sing imperf you.

If I arrive early, I will visit you.

The conditional particle 'aadhaa' reflects modality, and combined with the perfective verb in the protasis suggests certainty that the condition will be met. If the particle 'law' or the imperfective verb form (non-completion) is used in the protasis, there is no such expectation.

In a similar manner, the function of the perfective in subordinate time clauses is to indicate the logical relationship that exists between the situation in the main clause and that in the subordinate time clause irrespective of tense as Comrie's (1976, p.73) example illustrates.

23. "aajiiki "aadhaa Hamar aalbasr."

   "I (will) come 1 sing imperf when it ripened 3 masc perf the dates."

   "I shall come to you when the unripe dates ripen."

The imperfective verb ‘aaji’ has future reference while the perfective verb ‘Hamar’ establishes that the first action ‘shall come’ cannot happen until the second has been realized. It is context and not verb form that clarifies time reference in Arabic (Abdul Fattah & El Hassan, 1994; Ingham, 1995). Perfective and imperfective can refer to the past and non-past (Bybee & Dahl,1989).

Aspect in Arabic

It can be argued that, from the perspective of tense, English and Arabic have morphological forms indicating the sequential temporal relationship of events to the speaker. The situation in a contrastive aspectual sense is more complex. The traditional division of grammatical aspect into perfective (completed), and imperfective (non-completed) situations, (Klein, 1994) provides as Comrie (1976) explains a “genuine aspectual opposition” in Arabic, habitual – continuous' 'durative – habitual'…. 'do in fact join together to form a single unified concept, as is suggested by the large number of languages that have a single category to express imperfectivity as a whole, irrespective of such subdivisions as habituality and continuousness. (p. 24)

English, however as Andrews (1992) points out, has “no general form that corresponds to all imperfective situations”, (p. 286) which difference could be argued to contribute greatly to learner difficulty in differentiating between the alternatives. Kharma & Hajjaj (1989) suggest
“the categorical grammatical meanings expressed by the continuous and perfect forms in English cannot be easily associated with clear-cut expanded forms in Arabic.” (p. 157) Imperfectivity can be divided (Comrie 1976) into a “number of distinct categories” (p. 24) including the habitual and continuous, the latter being subdivided into non-progressive and progressive. One feature common to all imperfective situations is duration indicating as Comrie (1976) explains “that the given situation lasts for a certain period of time, or at least is conceived as lasting for a certain period of time.” (p. 41) In English, morphological forms (present simple and progressive forms) differentiate between some imperfective situations, while in Arabic other sentential features often perform this function. Imperfective describes a variety of situation types including timeless facts, statives, habituals and progressives, each with its own distinct temporal features though all encoded in the one single form in Arabic.

Mitchell & El-Hassan’s (1994) definition of Arabic timeless situations applicable to English also explains that such situations

*are characterized by a particular type of duration which differs from that (of) progressive, habitual and even stative aspect. This type of duration is unlimited, omni-temporal, appropriate to so-called general truths and scientific properties .... The validity of such expressions extends over present, past and future time.* (p. 102)

The imperfective verb in Arabic to encode these timeless features does not require adverbial phrases of temporal limitation and as such these utterances are syntactically less complex than other imperfective types.

Stative situations share some of the temporal features of timeless facts. The verbs 'to be' and 'to have' are probably the most frequently used stative verbs in English and describe situations that exist unchanged over an unspecified period of time. In Arabic, a verb 'to be' though available, is not employed in non-completed stative situations. Such utterances are verbless though the verb 'to be' equivalent to 'equals' is understood (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). Brustad (2000) explains, “the absence of a tensed form indicates that the time reference is understood to be the moment of speech.” (p. 23) A stative utterance completed in the past requires the appropriate part of the past form of the verb 'to be' 'kaan' to locate the situation prior to the moment of the utterance. This form is often referred to as the only truly deictic verb form in Arabic, because its only function is to locate the event in past time. In many cases it occurs alongside the imperfective to locate habitual and progressive situations in the past. The verb ‘kaan’ can combine with other stative verbs in the imperfective to indicate a state that was true for a period of indefinite time in the past.

24. *kaan yHibbuhaa.*

*was 3 masc perf* he loves *3 masc imperf* her.

He used to love her.

The second most common stative verb in learner lexicons is ‘to have’ for the expression of possession. In Arabic, though verb forms exist, possession is generally (Haywood & Nahmad, 1965) expressed through a prepositional phrase consisting of a preposition '9ind' translated as 'to' or 'with' preceded or followed by a noun i.e. the possessor, or the preposition with an attached suffixal pronoun indicating the possessor. The word itself does not have a temporal component and if occurring alone is assumed to depict present possession.

25. *Hamda 9indhaa siiaarah jadidah.*

Hamda *to/ with her 3 fem prep. car new.*

Hamda has a new car.
If the temporal reference is intended to illustrate a situation of possession in the past, the verb ‘kaan’ ‘to be’ functions as a temporal marker.

A second preposition 'lii' followed by a pronoun representing the person who has the object or quality can also be used.

ap to me 1 sing. prep. pain strong.
I have a strong pain.

There are of course verbs 'to own' 'ymlik' indicating possession and declined as regular verbs.

In general, stative verbs in Arabic and English do not occur in the progressive aspect, as seen in the lack of compatibility of English stative verbs with the –ing form. In Arabic, the restrictions are syntactic rather than morphological. Stative verbs in common with other verb types are compatible with ‘maa zaal/ lissa’ equivalent to English ‘still’ as illustrated in the following example (Holes 1984, p.119).

27. huwa maa zaal
he still proclitic b duration he loves 3 masc imperf her 3 fem obj
pronoun.
He still loves her. (proclitic 'b' in progressivity)

They do not, however, combine with the particle ‘qaa9id’ which encodes progressivity. A combination of a stative verb and qaa9id as in

28. huwa qaa9id
The mark of progressivity proclitic b duration he love 3 masc imperf her 3 obj fem.
is as unacceptable in Arabic as its English translation is.

28a  He *is loving her.

Inceptive phases of stative situations requiring a two verb combination in English can be communicated in Arabic through a single morphological form often referred to as the active participle (Holes, 1995; Mitchell & El Hassan, 1994; Brustad, 2000).

29. faahim
part. indicating inception into a state understood
He has begun to understand.

The function of this form when used with stative verbs is to note entry into the state. Holes (1995) explains this form as describing “the state in which the subject of the verb from which it is derived finds itself as a result of the action or event which the verb describes.” (p. 122) He also explains there is no deictic time marking in the form, any sense of temporality associated with it being interpreted through the context of situation. In English when one enters a state, entry is recorded simply through the simple present form 'I understand'; 'I know' 'I see' whereas in Arabic, a speaker has three possible affirmative choices in answering a question such as 'do you understand?' S/he can use the participle as indicated above to show inception into the state as in ‘9aarif’, ‘faahim’ communicating the notion that 'I have entered the state of knowing or understanding'. This should not be interpreted as Noor (1996) suggests as 'I am knowing ' or 'I am understanding'. A second possible choice is the imperfective form ‘aa9rif’ 1 sing. imperf; ‘afham’ 1 sing. imperf. or the perfective form in 'aarifu’ 1 sing. perf. = 'I knew' or 'fahimtu’ 1 sing. perf. ‘I understood’.

All habitual and iterative situations in Arabic are viewed as imperfective (Beeston 1970) with an adverbial phrase of habituality accompanying the imperfective verb to clarify verb function.

30. *Tashrib
Samiira qahwah kul yawn.
She drinks **3 fem imperf** Samira coffee every day.

Samiira drinks coffee every day.

The nature of the verb, whether durative or punctual, does not affect the imperfectivity of habituals and iteratives. Past habitual events are encoded for tense and aspect. The appropriate part of the Arabic verb 'kaan' 'to be' establishes past deictic time while the imperfective form of the main verb indicates the non-realized nature of the whole series.

31. **Kaanat** Samira *tashrib* qahwah kul yawm
    She was Samira she drinks **3 fem. imperf.** coffee every day

   *al sanah al maaDii.*
    the year the last.

Samiira drank coffee every day last year.

Durative situations in the past with no overt boundary and repeated punctual events are encoded as imperfective. Consider the verb 'cough' in the following utterance.

32. **Kaan** *yas9l* Tawaal al liil.
    He was **3 masc perf** he *coughs 3 masc imperf* all the night.

He coughed all night.

'Kaan' locates the event in the past while the imperfective verb form establishes the ongoing nature of the coughing with no clear end stated.

The meanings associated with the English expanded verb forms (progressive and Present Perfect) are articulated in Arabic in a variety of ways. The active participle (Holes, 1995; Cuvalay-Haak, 1997; Brustad, 2000), along with a multiplicity of particles, auxiliaries, adverbial phrases and other sentential elements and the two morphological forms contribute to the communication of TA features in Arabic (O'Leary, 1924; Brustad, 2000). In Arabic, both habitual and progressive situations are categorized as aspectually imperfective (Comrie, 1976) but the nature of the imperfectivity differs. In the former, each situation is complete, and forms part of a non-completed series (Meziani, 1979; Holes, 1990). Situations labelled as progressive are single incomplete events, viewed from an internal perspective and containing no reference to a boundary. Progressive perspectives on events are grammatically encoded in English, whereas in Arabic (with exceptions) they are not differentiated from other imperfective situations, as Abufara (2000) points out “there is no Arabic match for the English distinction in this aspect.” (p. 9) Both habituals and progressives are encoded as imperfective (McGuirk, 1986; Ali, 1988), and depend on the adverb or adverbial phrase for disambiguation (Abufara, 2000).

33. yshraab qahwah kul yawm / thalaathah maarat fii al yawm.
    He drinks **3 masc imperf** coffee every day/three times in the day.

34. yshraab qahwah aalaan.
    He drinks **3 masc imperf** coffee now.

   He is drinking coffee now.

It is possible to differentiate between progressive and non-progressive situations as some Arabic dialects do. Qafisheh (1975; 1997) points out that the proclitic b- prefixed with the imperfective form of the verb is often used in Gulf dialects to indicate action in progress. (p. 5)

35. b+vatkallam **proclitic b** he talks **3 sing. imperf**
    He is talking.

In other dialects (Egyptian and Sudanese), however, proclitic 'b' indicates habituality Mitchell & El Hassan (1994).
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36. b+ yruH llii aal madrasah mashie kul yawm.
   proclitic b he goes 3 masc imperf to the school walking every day.
   He walks to school every day.

   Many Arabic dialects indicate progressivity through the employment of the active participle 'gaa9id' of the translocative verb 'g9id'. This translates literally as 'sitting', functioning like the French 'en train' ' in the process (cannot combine with statives and habituals) and declined for number and person. Mitchell and El Hassan cite "colligability with aspectual elements 'gaa9id'" (p. 91) as necessary to show that a verb can be progressive, a point made by Holes (1976) who says that the progressive aspect of non-stative verbs in Gulf Arabic and many other dialects is expressed by the imperfective form of the verb, often preceded by the particle 'gaa9id', belonging to a translocative group of verbs.

37. Ahmed gaa9id yaqraa' aalaan.
   Ahmed sitting 3 masc active participle he reads 3 masc imperf now.
   Ahmed is reading now.

   The use of the active participle with translocative verbs can differentiate between progressive and habitual situations (Bohas et al 1990) in Arabic. Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic (1983) suggest that the active participle on such verb types functions like a dynamic adjective and makes a sentence “equational rather than verbal.” (p. 615) Translocative verbs, intransitive and inherently atelic verbs of motion, are the only verbs in the non-past form that have the facility to indicate a difference between aspectually simple and progressive situations.

38. Adnan dhaahib aal sawq aalaan.
   Adnan going 3 masc active part. the market now.
   Adnan is going to the market now.

   The same sentence can be translated using the imperfective form where the adverbial phrase 'now' or 'at the moment' clarifies temporality.

38a. Adnan ydhahib aal sawq aalaan.
   Adnan goes 3 masc imperf the market now.
   Adnan is going to the market now.

   The participle form, though generally translated with the English present progressive agrees in number and gender with the subject. It is more functionally adjectival than verbal, describing a state or condition that the subject is in, as pointed out by Qafisheh (1997) in the following example. (p. 1)

39. " al shaarja mizdahrah bi aal 9mal al Sinaa9iia."
   "The Shaarja 3 fem active part. flourishing with the work the industrial."
   Sharjah is flourishing with branches of industry.

   Clearly, it is possible to encode the temporality of progressivity; it is, however, more syntactic than morphological.

   The Arabic active participle or imperfective can be used in what Holes (1990) calls “verb strings” (p. 146) to show different phases of a situation (Hunston & Francis, 1998). In English, choice of the infinitive or –ing form depends on the inherent semantics of the main verb and/or the aspectual focus of the situation corresponding to the Arabic system, where the inherent semantics of the main verb also affects the choice of imperfective or active participle. The former communicates an aspectually simple situation while the active participle indicates a situation in progress (Qafisheh, 1975). The temporal location of the utterance is encoded in the finite verb and tense does not affect the choice of form of the second which remains in the imperfective or participle.
I finished eating the breakfast.  

The specific aspectual focus of the imperfective form is seen in the function it plays in utterances with the helping verb 'kaada' (almost) used in Arabic to show that something remains unfinished. The semantics of 'kaada' indicate lack of completion (Gully 1995), necessitating its combination with the imperfective verb form. 'Kaada' can be declined like regular verbs and its form either perfective or imperfective indicates time. This contrasts with the structure in English where the main verb form indicates time and 'almost' lack of completion as seen in the following examples.

40. 

40. kamiltu aakal aal faaTur.  
I finished 1 sing perf. eating 1 sing. active part. the breakfast.  
I finished eating breakfast.

40. yakad yluun al Suura.  
He almost 3 masc imperf he paints 3 masc imperf the picture.  
He has almost painted the picture.

41. 

41. kaad yfaqad al muftah.  
He almost 3 masc perf he loses 3 masc imperf the key.  
He almost lost the key.

A situation is classed as aspectually perfective if it is presented as “a single unanalysable whole” (Bache, 1982; p. 60; Thompson Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). The event is presented “from the outside as a complete whole.” Siewerska (1991) explains, “reference time must coincide with the time of the whole event including its completion.” (p. 117) An event viewed perfectly is not necessarily punctual and may involve a period of time. In Arabic, the function of the perfective is to differentiate between the clearly completed and other situation types.

A situation is perfective (Beeston 1970) if an end is implied or explicitly stated. In the absence of any explicit evidence, all situations whether stative, habitual or progressive are viewed and encoded as imperfective. Boundedness can take a number of forms. Deictic reference to an event that occurred prior to the moment of speaking is bounded by tense features. Boundedness articulated through adverbial phrases indicating limits as in 'in three hours' are aspectual. Unlike English, Arabic perfective forms generally occur only when boundedness is overtly stated with explicit reference to the realized condition. Smith (1983) observes that “aspectual meanings focus on certain properties of idealized situations. In English, I have argued, aspect focuses on the endpoint properties of situations; but considerable variation exists among languages.” (p. 494) 

Compare verb forms and temporal notions in the following utterances.

42. He walked along the beach every day last year.  
43. He walked on the beach from six to eight o'clock yesterday.

The temporality involved in both sentences is quite different. The situation in 42 continued for an indefinite period of time while that in 43 clearly spanned a period of two hours. In both utterances in English, focus is on the tense adverbial 'last year' and 'yesterday' and consequently both are encoded in the past simple verb. Now consider the same utterances in Arabic.

44. 

44. Kaan yamshti 9laa aal shaatii kul yawm  
He was 3 masc perf he walk 3 masc imperf on the beach every day  
al sanah al maaDii.  
the year the last.

45. 

45. Mashii 9laa aal shaatii min sitah alaa thamaaniyah aamis.  
He walked 3 masc perf on the beach from six to eight yesterday.
He **walked** on the beach from six to eight yesterday.

There is a difference in aspectual perspective here. The first habitual event in 44 does not have an overt marker of boundedness while the second does in the time frame 'eight o'clock'. The verb combination in 44 describes both tense in 'kaan' and the aspectual nature of the habitual in the imperfective verb 'yamshii'. A time frame is involved in 45 but includes a clearly stated right boundary 'eight o'clock'. Therefore the Arabic perfective form is used.

Example in 12, 13 (based on Verkuyl, 1993) illustrated a situation where a verb and finite number predicate defined a telic situation. The indefinite plural 'sandwiches' describes a non-bounded situation while ‘three’ in example 47 contains inherent limits in the situation. The English verb form 'ate' in all examples focuses on the location of the situation in past time.

46. **Aakalat Judith sandwiitsh.**
   She ate 3 fem perf Judith a sandwich.
   Judith ate a sandwich.

47. **Aakalat Judith thalaathah sandwiishat.**
   She ate 3 fem perf Judith three sandwiches.
   Judith ate three sandwiches.

48. **Kaanat Judith taakal sandwiishat kul al yawn.**
   She was 3 fem perf Judith she eats 3 fem imperf sandwiches all the day.
   Judith ate sandwiches all day.

In example 46 and 47, the finite nature of the situation is communicated through the definite numbers 'one' and 'three'. The morphological choice of perfective 'aakalat' 'she ate' (3 fem perf.) indicates the completed nature of the 'eating' situation. In example 48, no definite limit is set to the number of sandwiches eaten suggesting that the event could have gone on indefinitely. The verb 'kaanat' 'she was' (3 fem perf of verb 'to be') locates the event prior to the time of utterance while the imperfective verb 'eat' indicates the non-bounded-ness of the situation. The morphological form focuses on the aspectual nature of the event.

**Conclusion**

Each language has a limited number of verb forms available to encode several temporal notions resulting in forms that perform a variety of functions (Cuvalay-Haak, 1997). One verb form in English and/or Arabic can encode a variety of temporal as well as modal meanings. This may affect learner judgement. In addition, the presence of a number of temporal foci in an utterance may result in confusion for the learner as to which one should be morphologically encoded. Andersen (1988): 60) points out that:

some but not all verbal inflections are multifunctional in that they encode not only aspect but also tense and subject-verb agreement - the relative attention paid to any one of these categories by the learner changes over time as the learner acquires greater sophistication in the language. (p. 60)

When considering the effect of L1, one has firstly to consider how the learner views and interprets the temporality of an utterance. It is possible that the learner makes a direct interpretation of the function to form association from L1 to L2 that works in some situations. This can be seen in single realized bounded events in the past, encoded in perfective in Arabic and past simple form in English. On the other hand, the availability of a number of English forms to encode Arabic imperfective is confusing for the learner. Therefore, when considering
how to enhance the learning experience of learners, attention must be given to syntax and semantics, to form and meaning.

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