Translating Tenses in Arabic-English and English-Arabic Contexts

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By

Hassan Abdel-Shafik Hassan Gadalla

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بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَحْمَنِ الرَحِيمِ
وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ
وَاخْتِلافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ
إِنَ فِى ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِلْعَالِمِينَ
صَدَقَ اللهُ الْعَظِيمُ
(القرآن الكريم - سورة الروم - الآية 22)

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: Verily in that are signs for those who know.

(The Holy Quran 30: 22)

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FOREWORD

The verb is the heart of a clause. One major aspect of the verb is its tense – a word that derives from a Latin root meaning time. Locating a process in its temporal context through tense and aspect is one means of anchoring the whole clause and of constructing meaningful messages and achieving effective communication.

Because languages have different ways of indicating time, though the basic concepts are universal, problems are bound to arise in translation as well as in interlingual communication. Very little attention to tense and aspect is paid by Arabic language and grammar courses. Most of the time they are taken for granted. This is partly why Arab learners of English often find difficulty matching the detailed tense chart in English with corresponding tenses in Arabic.

The difficulty is aggravated by the polyglossic nature of Arabic. Each level of the language has its ways of indicating time. For example, the standard particle /lan/ indicates the future by default – a negative future, whereas /sa-/ and /sawfa/ are used to indicate the future in the affirmative and the colloquial particle /bi-/ indicates progressiveness and continuity. Tense sequences can be indicated by other particles such as /fa-/ and /θumma/.

This book by Professor Hassan Gadalla is much in demand. It certainly fills in a serious gap in the study of translation between English and Arabic. Written by a serious scholar whose major is English linguistics, with a very strong background in Arabic grammar and morphology, the book addresses the major issues in translating tense and aspect between English and Arabic. It will be of great help for Arab learners of English as well as translators between the two languages.

With examples from various genres and varieties of Arabic and plenty of tables, the book will on the one hand help learners of English and translators overcome many practical problems especially in translating narrative texts, where tenses and tense sequencing are quite significant and purposeful, and will, on the other hand, provide very important insights into the relation between structure and meaning in both languages. The book will be a valuable guide that can be used as a course-book for grammar and translation classes.

A native speaker of Arabic whose academic major happens to be English writing about Arabic is a long standing debate in Arab, including Egyptian, academia. Except for very few, those whose major is Arabic are not quite knowledgeable about English, and those whose major is English are habitually excluded from discussions of Arabic. Professor Gadalla belongs to a group of dedicated scholars in departments of English in Egypt and other Arab countries who have proven beyond doubt that those whose native language is Arabic and who have a near-native command of English should be taken seriously and should be consulted when making decisions and debating issues relating to the Arabic language. This concern I share with the author and this contribution to the case I most sincerely thank him for.

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PREFACE

It is my great pleasure to introduce this important monograph devoted to the translation of Arabic tenses into English, and English tenses into Arabic, which originated as post-doctoral articles in linguistics and translation published in the renowned journals BABEL, META and the Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Assiut University, as Gadalla (2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b and 2010).

Most researches, until now, have considered only certain aspects of Standard Arabic and English tenses and there is a great emphasis on Arabic syntax in modern linguistic studies at the expense of translation. The present book, in embracing both Arabic and English tenses, will attempt to elucidate the basic natural relationship between syntax and translation, and to explain the differences between tenses in terms of syntactic and semantic comparison. Hence, this book aims to provide a comparative account of the translation aspects of SA tenses and to focus on the similarities and differences of the two languages in relation to their tense structures.

The present monograph contains a systematic contrastive analysis of the verb tenses of both languages using an easily interpreted rule-based formalism. Depending on a corpus of 1,605 examples, this book is remarkably exhaustive in its treatment of the categories and forms of both Standard Arabic and English tenses. Therefore, it should serve as a useful reference for translators and linguistics researchers. With 260 example sentences and their translations as well as 34 exercises, the book would be very beneficial to school teachers, university lecturers and students of Arabic/English and English/Arabic translation.

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Assiut, April 2017

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My research has also benefited greatly from my weekly meetings with Prof. Rolf Noyer for two years at the Department of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania. I am proud to have been his student and proud of his words in the first letter to me: “We will have much to learn from each other”. Indeed, it was he who taught me exactly what it is like to be a linguistics researcher. Finally, I thank all the members of my family, particularly my late parents, my wife (Sabra) and my children (Gehad, Hamza, Sarah, Hager, Maryam and Amena) for their moral support at every stage of this work.

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Active Participle
Autumn	*Autumn Quail* (Allen 1985)
PP	Passive Participle
SL	Source Language
TL	Target Language
Wedding	*Wedding Song* (Kenny 1984)
...-...	morpheme boundary
/.../	phonemic transcription
/Ø/	zero morpheme
[...]	morphological pattern, element or form
F-3-L	First, Second and Third consonants of the
root,	i.e. = C_1, C_2 and C_3, respectively
أفراح	*Afrah Al-Qubbah* (Mahfouz 1981)
السمان	*Al-Simman wa l-Kharif* (Mahfouz 1962)
بعلبكي	Baalbaki (1988)
إسكندر	Iskandar (1999)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1.1. Varieties of Arabic

Arabic is the most widespread member of the Semitic group of languages[1]. Two main varieties of this language can be distinguished in the Arab world nowadays: Standard Arabic (SA), also called “Modern Standard Arabic” (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic. The first variety is the offspring of Classical Arabic, also labeled “Quranic Arabic” (e.g. by Thackston 1984), which is now used in religious settings and the recitation of the Holy Quran. Thus, Standard Arabic is considered “the direct descendant of the classical language, with modifications and simplifications more suited to communication in a world quite different from that of the Arab Golden Age in medieval times” (Travis 1979, 6). It has also been defined by Gaber (1986: 1) as “the written form taught at schools”. He goes on to say that in its spoken form it is “the ‘formal’ speech of the educated people in public speeches, radio comments, news broadcasts on radio and television.” The written form of SA is relatively uniform throughout the Arab world. The spoken form, on the other hand, is more or less different from one Arab country to another since it is affected by the local dialects. It is the first variety, Standard Arabic, that is mostly used in this work. Only in two chapters is its classical predecessor, Quranic Arabic, employed.

1.2. Translation as a Text-Oriented Process

One of the definitions of translation is that it is “the replacement of a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language” (Hartmann & Stork 1972, in Bell 1991, 20). Therefore, translation must be a text-oriented process. While English has sixteen tense forms, Arabic has only two aspectual forms. Therefore, each Arabic form can be rendered by several English tenses, which causes a problem for the translator. However, a good Arabic-English translator who fully understands the Arabic context in which a verb form occurs will have no difficulty in choosing the suitable tense for that form.

Since translation is a text-oriented approach, the text must receive the utmost attention from the translator. “One of the very few issues on which there is substantial, if not universal, agreement among translators and translation theorists is the centrality of the text and its manipulation through the process of translation” (Bell 1991: 199). Understanding all aspects of the original text is a requirement for proper translation. Therefore, Wilss (1982: 112) asserts that the text-oriented nature of translation necessarily “requires the syntactic, semantic, stylistic and textpragmatic comprehension of the original text by the translator.”

The importance of meaning in translation has been asserted by many linguists and translation researchers. For instance, Tymoczko (1978, 29) speaks about the belief that

> translation is essentially a semantic affair. ... a translation of a sentence in one language is, by definition, a sentence in a second language which means the same as the original. Under this conception a translator begins with sentences which have meaning in the semantic structure of one language and attempts to construct equivalent sentences using the semantic devices of the second language. Hence, semantic theory, built upon syntax and phonology, is sufficient to provide an adequate theory of translation.

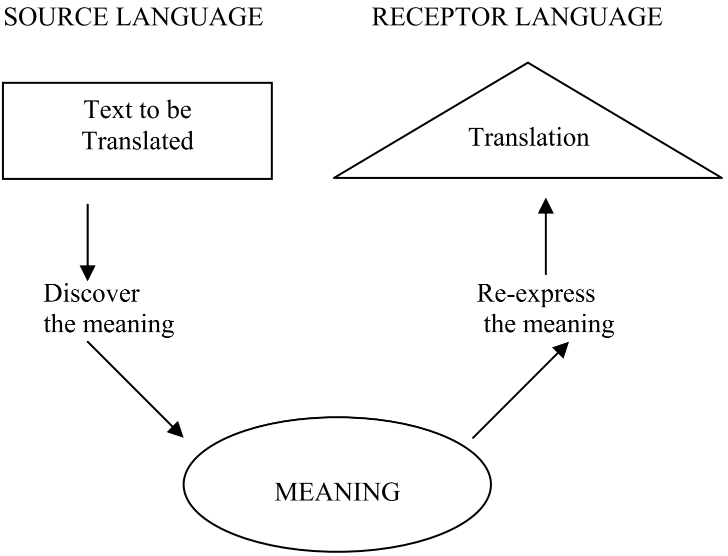
Meaning is so important to translation that it represents the common core of many of the definitions of translation itself. For example, Nida (1969, 210) defines translation as “the reproduction in a receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style.” Also, Rabin (1958: 118) defines translation as “a process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended and presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language.”

Correctly conveying the meaning of a source text into a target language is even considered a serious responsibility of translators by Campbell and Miller (2000): “Translators have a serious responsibility to accurately reproduce the meaning of the original text without personal bias, ensuring that no information is omitted or altered.” Meaning has also been stressed in teaching foreign languages through translation. “Students should be encouraged to think first of meaning when translating. After that they should decide what wording would be the most suitable" (Touba 1990: 175).

In his book, *Meaning-Based Translation*, Larson (1984, 3) shows that

> translation consists of transferring the **meaning** of the source language into the receptor language. This is done by going from the **form** of the first language to the **form** of a second language by way of semantic structure. It is **meaning** which is being transferred and must be held constant. Only the **form** changes.

Larson (1984, 4) diagrams the translation process as follows:



In this diagram, Larson indicates that in order to translate a text, one has to analyze the lexical and grammatical structure, the communication situation and the cultural context of that text to fully understand its meaning, then reconstruct this same meaning using lexical and grammatical forms which are suitable in the target language and its cultural context.

Therefore, Arabic-English and English-Arabic translation of tense structures should rely on the specific meanings of each tense. In the following sections, these meanings will be explained and the forms used to render them in the target language will be demonstrated.

1.3. Purpose & Procedures of the Research

Until recently, a few researchers (e.g. Ahmed 2015, Malkawi 2012, Obeidat 2014, Ouided 2009 and Zhiri 2014) have considered only certain aspects of Standard Arabic and English tenses and there is a great emphasis on Arabic syntax in modern linguistic studies at the expense of translation. The present book, in embracing both Arabic and English tenses, will attempt to elucidate the basic natural relationship between syntax and translation, and to explain the differences between tenses in terms of syntactic and semantic comparison. Hence, this book aims to provide a comparative account of the translation aspects of SA tenses and to focus on the similarities and differences of the two languages in relation to their tense structures.

Therefore, the objective is to fill in a gap in translation studies, which has not been adequately covered in previous works. Hopefully, there will be also some pedagogical applications. This book is of great importance for language teaching, since it serves as a guide for teachers of Arabic/English translation. It can be used by course-designers for a new approach to Arabic tenses based on modern linguistics. It can also be helpful to teachers of foreign languages, particularly English, to determine the degree of difficulty, due to Arabic interference, encountered by Arab students when they are introduced to the basic tenses of the foreign language(s). The book may also be beneficial for non-native speakers when they start to learn Arabic, for it provides them with an understanding of the tense features of the language.

Moreover, this book offers material for contrastive and comparative studies on Arabic. It is also significant for studies on language problems related to translation and computer programs on the Arabic language. Needless to say that this book will be useful to linguists working on universal grammar who do not confine themselves to one language but try to find common properties of all languages in the world.

This book is based on the comparative study of Arabic and English tenses. It will not be confined to any particular school of thought, or to any particular model proposed by a given school. Thus, the framework adopted in the book is chiefly a descriptive one, taking tense structures as the basis of description.

Two techniques are employed to analyze and evaluate the translations and to compare the source texts with the target texts. The first is the parallel texts technique stated in Hartmann (1980) and the other is the parallel reading technique adopted by Lindquist (1989). The first technique was first used in the contrastive analysis of languages, then later adapted to compare "translationally equivalent texts" (Hartmann 1980, 37). Lindquist (1989, 23) says about the second method: "the most natural way of analysing or evaluating a translation is to read the SL text in parallel with the TL text, noting anything that is remarkable, and then to list deficiencies (or felicities) of all kinds." The parallel reading method suggested by Lindquist shows the relationships between two written languages. It is useful for assessing the quality of a particular translation and discovering translation difficulties between two languages (Lindquist 1989, 23).

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first is an introductory chapter that sets the scene for the whole work. It presents the variety of Arabic that will be studied and explains why translation should be a text-oriented process. Then, it displays the purpose and procedures to be followed in the research. At the end, it offers a list of the phonemic symbols used to represent the vowels and consonants of Standard Arabic.

Chapter Two deals with the differences between tense and aspect in Arabic and English, respectively. The importance of tense/aspect distinctions in translation will be dealt with at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Three proposes a model for translating Standard Arabic perfect verbs into English based on their contextual references. It analyzes the various translations of Arabic perfect verbs in the translations of two novels by Naguib Mahfouz. It starts with the translation of the bare perfect form, and then handles the translation of the structure "/*qad*/ + perfect." After that, it discusses the translation of "/*kaana*/ + /*qad*/ + perfect." At the end, it deals with the translation of "/*(sa-)ya-kuun*/ + /*qad*/ + perfect."

The fourth chapter attempts to show the contextual clues that can assist a translator to select the proper English equivalents of Arabic imperfect verbs. It analyzes the different translations of Arabic imperfect verbs in the English translations of two novels written by Mahfouz. It starts with the translation of the bare imperfect form. Then, the translations of the structures "/*sa-*/ + imperfect" and "subjunctive particle + imperfect" are discussed. After that, the translations of "/*lam*/ + imperfect" and "/*kaana*/

+ imperfect” are handled. In addition, the translations of some other imperfect constructions are studied.

Chapter Five deals with the translation of Arabic active participles into English. It begins with a survey of the syntactic classes of the Arabic active participle. After that, it deals with the translation of Arabic active participles into English nominals, adjectivals, verbals and adverbials, respectively.

Translating Arabic passive participles into English is handled in Chapter Six. It starts with an overview of the syntactic classes of the Arabic passive participle. After that, it analyses the translation of Arabic passive participles into English adjectivals, nominals, verbals and adverbials, respectively.

The seventh chapter tackles the translation of English simple and progressive tenses into Arabic. It sets off with the translation of simple tenses, namely present, past and future, respectively. Then, it moves to the translation of progressive tenses: present, past and future, respectively. Furthermore, it handles the translation of English non-progressive verbs into Arabic.

The last chapter attempts to provide an approach to the translation of English perfect and perfect progressive tenses into Standard Arabic based on a comparative study of two translations of Pearl Buck’s novel ‘*The Good Earth*’, namely those of Baalbaki (1988) and Iskandar (1999). Moreover, it deals with the translation of English conditional tenses into Arabic. It starts with translating the English present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect into Arabic. Then, the translation of English perfect progressive tenses, i.e. present, past and future, will be analyzed. At the end of the chapter, the translation of conditional or future-in-the-past tenses will be handled.

1.4. Vowels of Standard Arabic

	Short			Long		
	Front	Central	Back	Front	Central	Back
High	*i*		*u*	*ii*		*uu*
Mid						
Low		*a*			*aa*	

1.5. Consonants of Standard Arabic

Manner	Voicing	Place									
		Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Dento-Alveolar		Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
					Non-Emphatic	Emphatic					
Stop	Voiceless				*t*	*T*		*k*	*q*		*?*
	Voiced	*b*			*d*	*D*					
Fricative	Voiceless		*f*	*θ*	*s*	*S*	*š*	*x*		*ħ*	*h*
	Voiced			*ð*	*z*	*Z*		*ǥ*		*3*	
Affricate	Voiced						*j*				
Flap	Voiced				*r*						
Lateral	Voiced				*l*						
Nasal	Voiced	*m*			*n*						
Glide	Voiced	*w*					*y*				

CHAPTER TWO

TENSE/ASPECT DISTINCTIONS IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH

2.0. Introduction

This chapter aims to show the major differences between English and Arabic in relation to tense/aspect. It also explains the importance of understanding tense/aspect differences by translators into both languages.

Tense is a language-specific category by which we make linguistic reference to the extra-linguistic realities of time- relations. Thus, for example, according to Quirk et al. (1972, 84), “English has two tenses: PRESENT TENSE and PAST TENSE. As the names imply, the present tense normally refers to present time and past tense to past time.” Aspect, on the other hand, “refers to the manner in which the verb action is regarded or experienced. The choice of aspect is a comment on or a particular view of the action. English has two sets of aspectual contrasts: PERFECTIVE/ NON-PERFECTIVE and PROGRESSIVE/ NON-PROGRESSIVE” (Quirk et al. 1972, 90). Tense and aspect categories can be combined in English to produce as much as sixteen different structures. There are four tense forms: present, past, future and future-in-the-past or conditional. Each tense has four aspectual references: simple, progressive, perfect and perfect progressive.

In Arabic, the fundamental differences between verbs are based on aspect rather than tense. As indicated by Wright (1967: I/51), there are two aspectual forms of the Arabic verb: “The temporal forms of the Arabic verb are but *two* in number, the one expressing a *finished* act, one that is done and completed in relation to other acts (the *Perfect*); the other an *unfinished* act, one that is just commencing or in progress (the *Imperfect*).” Certain verbs such as /*kaana*/ ‘to be’ and certain particles like /*qad*/ ‘already’ combine with these two forms of the verb to convey various meanings. Thus, one of the major problems that face translators from English into Arabic is to identify the Arabic verb form and the verbs or particles that can combine with it in order to convey a particular English tense.

Whereas the Arabic verb has two aspectual forms, the English verb has sixteen tenses. It follows that each Arabic form must substitute for several English tenses, which creates a problem for the Arabic-English translator. Nevertheless, the competent Arabic-English translator, who is acquainted with the semantic properties of the English tenses, may have no difficulty in selecting the appropriate English tenses. From this, we conclude that the Arabic text must contain clues that guide the translator in choosing the suitable English tense. This chapter seeks to identify and describe some of these clues for the purpose of throwing some light on the very complex problem of translating Arabic tenses into English and English tenses into Arabic.

2.1. Tense/Aspect Distinctions in Arabic

As stated above, there are two aspectual forms of the Arabic verb: perfect(ive) and imperfect(ive). The **perfect** is employed for a completed or finished action (frequently in the past, i.e. before the moment of speaking), as in:

(1) a. غزا العلم الفضاء
b. Science conquered space.

On the other hand, the **imperfect** describes an action that is not yet completed or finished (often in the present or future). The specified time of the imperfect may be indicated by the use of time-words such as */?al?aana/* ‘now’ and */g̱adan/* ‘tomorrow’. Consider the Arabic examples in (2-3a) and their English translations in (2-3b):

(2) a. الآن ينطلق الصاروخ
b. Now, the rocket is departing.

(3) a. غداً نسافر إلى القاهرة
b. Tomorrow, we will travel to Cairo.

To distinguish between the meanings of the two Arabic forms, Beeston (1968, 50) states that: