

Present Perfect Tense in Arabic and English: A comparative Analysis

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Received: 12.11.2023 • Accepted: 30.01.2024 • Published: 01.02.2024 • Final Version: 02.02.2024

Abstract: Arabic and English are members of distinct linguistic families. Arabic is a member of the Semitic group. This language has been synthesized. The Indo-European language family includes English. Commonly, it is an analytical and synthetic language. This study delves into an analytical analysis of the forms and usage of the present perfect tense (PPT) in Arabic and English based on the contrastive analysis theory (CA). The study utilized the descriptive-qualitative method to compare and analyze the data in this tense. The data utilized in this study were obtained from both prior and recent research. Based on the analysis, a tensional discrepancy exists between the Arabic and English languages, specifically concerning the present perfect tense. In Arabic, in contrast to English, it employs a variety of particles and adverbials to denote temporal reference. The perfective aspect in Arabic conveys abstract temporal characteristics. The formation of the present perfect tense in Arabic involves the use of the particles /*qad* or *laqad*/ before the perfective verb. Contrariwise, English present perfect tense is constructed by combining the subject with the auxiliary verb “*have*” or “*has*” and the past participle form of the main verb. Lastly, the realization of this particular tense in English language poses a significant challenge due to the absence of a clear translation or equivalent in other linguistic systems, especially Arabic.

Keywords: Arabic. English, present perfect tense (PPT), contrastive analysis

1. Introduction

Grammarians have historically and now paid close attention to the comparison of the verb systems in Arabic and English. Many academic studies have been carried out to investigate the parallels and differences between the verb systems, tense categories, and aspect categories of Arabic and English (see, for instance, Alasmari et al., 2017; Jubran & Kharis, 2023; Eisele, 1990; Mudhsh & Laskar, 2021; Mudhsh et al., 2021). There has been a lot of discussion on the concepts of action length, action points, and completeness/incompleteness (Reishaan & Ja'far, 2008).

In English, tenses have the ability to operate alone or in conjunction with other tenses and supplementary characteristics. Combining the present tense of a verb with the perfect tense aspect creates the present perfect tense. The comprehension of this particular tense in the English language poses a significant challenge due to the absence of a clear translation or equivalent in other linguistic systems, especially Arabic (Matter, 2003; Jubran & Kharis, 2023; Mudhsh, 2021).

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On the other hand, when compared to other languages, Arabic has a very restricted range of semantic expressions in terms of tense and aspect. In juxtaposition with English, which encompasses a diverse array of temporal attitudes and the interrelationship of events, Arabic primarily distinguishes between finished and uncompleted acts. Arabic language exhibits a contrast between imperfect and perfect acts. In Arabic, there are two distinct verb forms known as the perfective '*al-maaDii*' and the imperfective '*al-muDaari*' (Beeston, 1970; Alotaibi, 2020; Mudhshor et al., 2023). The perfective form is used to convey an activity that has been fully finished, while the imperfective form is employed to denote an action that is continuing or incomplete. The perfective form undergoes modification by the addition of an ending, while the imperfective form undergoes modification with the addition of a prefix. Both kinds undergo modifications according to the individual, the quantity, and the gender. In a context devoid of bias, the Arabic language has a distinct tense system, whereby verb forms manifest in both perfective and imperfective aspects. Arabic verb forms, similar to those in other languages such as English, may sometimes convey a relationship to the context rather than the immediate moment.

As opposed to the perfective, which considers a circumstance to be a singular, unanalyzable entity with a start and an end, the imperfective makes no mention of its start or end. It is said that the imperfective approaches a situation from within, whereas the perfective regards it from the outside (Comrie, 1976). Perfective form is commonly understood to denote a situation that is entire in nature, consisting of a beginning, middle, and end. The term '*imperfective*' can be defined as a perception of a situation that is influenced by its internal temporal structure, thus originating from within. Aspectual oppositions that are either perfective or imperfective may be reflected in languages. Furthermore, the imperfective is categorized as continuous and habitual. Continuous functions fall into two distinct categories: non-progressive and progressive.

Based on contrastive analysis theory, the current study attempts to compare and analyze the present perfect tense (PPT) in Arabic and English. To achieve this purpose, the study utilized the descriptive-qualitative method to compare and analyze the data taken from both languages. The data for the study were derived from previous and recent research. The study limits itself to comparing and analyzing only the present perfect tense in Arabic and English, which is the main aim of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background

The grammatical category of tense is grounded in the concept of time. The term is used as an additional linguistic idea, extending beyond the confines of language itself. Regardless of their linguistic background, every member of the human species has experience with the concept in question. According to Declerck (2006), there was a period lasting millions of years during which human beings and languages did not yet exist. The expression of time in language involves the use of auxiliary verbs and main verbs, as well as the inclusion of adverbs (such as "*nowadays*" and "*tomorrow*") and prepositional phrases (Greenbaum, 1996).

Klein (1994) analyzes three time spans—time of utterance (TU), time of situation (TS), and topic time—to describe tense. The tense indicates how TT and TU are related. Klein (1994, p. 4) defines topic time as "the temporal scope within which the speaker's assertion regarding this particular occasion is limited." Klein's definition designates the period preceding TU as the past, TU itself as the present, and the post-TU period as the future. Nevertheless, the traditional understanding of tense as straightforward past, present, and future is flawed due to the existence of numerous non-canonical

applications of tense (Comrie, 1976, 1985; Klein, 1994; Bybee et al., 1994). However, in general, tense denotes the temporal aspect of a given state, action, event, or process.

Declerck (2006) posits that tense is a grammatical category that encompasses the amalgamation of a morpho-syntactic form and its corresponding meaning. The semantic interpretation of the term signifies the chronological placement of a certain occurrence. The idea of tense in linguistics pertains to the various verb forms in a certain language that correspond to the time of the circumstance. The degree of variation differs across different languages. The concept of tense establishes a connection between the temporal occurrence of events in a phrase and the specific moment at which the words are spoken or written. On the other hand, the concept of aspect pertains to the manner in which the temporal occurrence of an event is seen rather than its specific position within the absolute framework of time (Greenbaum, 1996). The concept under consideration pertains to the internal structures associated with the occurrence or execution of an event or action at any given moment. Aspect is a linguistic attribute that is characterized by its formal nature within a given language.

The English language has two grammatical aspects, namely the continuous aspect and the perfect aspect. The auxiliary is used in conjunction with a subsequent verb to indicate a certain grammatical function. The perfect aspect is used to indicate the temporal relationship between one event and another occurrence, while the continuous aspect pertains to the length of a condition. The combination of two elements results in the progressive perfect.

2.2. Contrastive Analysis

Simply put, contrastive analysis (CA) refers to the methodical comparison of certain linguistic features in two or more languages. Its purpose is to identify both universal and language-specific properties of these languages. Initially, this type of comparative research was conducted within the framework of historical linguistics.

Charles Fries was the first to develop contrastive analysis in 1945. Then, Robert Lado (1957) elaborated and explained it. Later research confirmed and elucidated this premise by Lado (1957), who emphasized the significance of contrastive analysis in the field. Fries (1945) presumed that “the most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner” (p. 9). Lado (1957) stated that “individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture—both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives” (p. 2).

In addition, in 1957, Robert Lado proposed the concept of “*contrastive analysis*” in his book “*Linguistics Across Cultures*”, taking into account these notions. The main assertion of this study is that, via a methodical examination of the languages and cultures of both systems (L1 and L2), it is feasible to recognize and anticipate the challenging aspects that native speakers would encounter when learning a foreign language (Lennon, 2008; Lado, 1957). According to Lado (1957), the presence of learning difficulties is contingent upon the similarities and disparities between languages. Learning challenges arise when there is a disparity in languages and cultures. The level of variation is directly connected to the level of anticipated challenge.

On the other hand, if the two languages and cultures are alike, there will be no obstacles in the learning process. By conducting such an analysis, it is possible to anticipate the difficulties encountered when learning a foreign language, and therefore, appropriate steps can be implemented to mitigate these challenges. An examination of this nature allows for the preparation and

customization of educational materials based on the learner's specific needs (Lado, 1957). Lado (1957) himself explicitly declares that “the plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty by systematically comparing the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student” (p. 7).

2.3. Definition of Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect tense has always been a scorching topic for discussion by numerous grammarians. Several grammarians have defined the present perfect tense (see, for instance, Comrie, 1976; Leech, 1974; Azar, 2003; Uchiyama, 2006; Lewis, 1986). Comrie (1976, p. 52) states that “a perfect expresses the continuing present relevance of a past situation”. He proposed two examples to illustrate the difference between perfect and non-perfect: “*I have lost (perfect) my penknife*” and “*I lost (non-perfect) my penknife*” (Comrie 1976, p. 52). The first statement implies that the “*penknife*” is still gone, but the second sentence does not convey the same impression. While Uchiyama (2006) states that there are two distinct interpretations associated with this tense, firstly, it denotes the duration of time, indicating that the activity started in the past and has persisted up to the present moment. Secondly, in the absence of a temporal term, this tense often signifies that the action concluded in the past without specifying a precise timeframe. The underlying essence of the present perfect tense is that the speaker engages in retrospective contemplation, seeing the temporal trajectory from the present moment. This grammatical construction enables the speaker to convey their current perspective on an action or event that occurred at an unspecified point in the past (Lewis, 1986).

Declerk (2006) emphasized the situations that occurred in the past and persist up to the current moment. The concept being conveyed pertains to the length of time up to the current moment. Finally, the present perfect tense, while being categorized as a present tense, often conveys a significant correlation between the present and the past. Emphasizing the significance lies in the fact that this particular tense endeavors to convey an action or occurrence that occurred at an undefined point in time prior to the present, with a primary focus on the outcome rather than the deed itself. The comprehension of this situation has proven challenging for those who possess little knowledge of the appropriate use of the present perfect tense.

2.4. The Form of Present Perfect Tense

The constructive form of the present perfect tense is constructed by combining the subject with the auxiliary verb “*have*” or “*has*” and the past participle form of the main verb. The negative form is formed by adding “*not*” after the auxiliary verb. In the interrogative form, the auxiliary verb “*have*” or “*has*” is placed before the subject, followed by the past participle verb, and concluded with a question mark. In this tense, the past participle assumes the role of the main verb. In spoken discourse, it is common for individuals to contract the subject and auxiliary verb when using the present perfect tense. For instance, the contraction “*I have written a story*” is used in place of “*I have written a story*”, while “*He has written a story*” is used instead of “*He has written a story*”.

3. Comparison and analysis of the forms and usage of PPT in Arabic and English.

Both Arabic and English have different verb systems. When it comes to understand specific grammatical tenses in the English language, that presents a notable difficulty since Arabic lacks a distinct translation or counterpart in other linguistic frameworks, as in the present perfect tense. Typically, there is a lack of alignment between English and Arabic in relation to tenses, namely the present perfect tense (Matter, 2003; Jubran & Kharis, 2023). As a whole, the perfect category distinguishes itself from other aspectual categories by its lack of information on the internal temporal structure of a situation. Instead, it serves to establish a connection between a given situation and the setting before it (Comrie, 1976).

In Arabic, in contrast to English, as far as the verb form is concerned, it employs a variety of particles and adverbials to denote temporal reference (Beeston, 1970; Benmamoun, 2000; Buckley, 2004; Elmansouri, 2002). For instance, the perfective aspect in Arabic conveys abstract temporal characteristics. It is employed to encode meanings related to events that have occurred, are occurring, or will occur. These are conveyed through a combination of auxiliary verbs and particles (Farghal & Shunnaq, 1998; Wright, 1889), as cited in the Abu-Joudeh et al. (2013) study. For example:

1. */laqad ʔintaqla ʒvrʒ wa māri ila ʃiqa ʒadi:da/*

“already move.3ms George and Mary to apartment new”.

“George and Mary have moved into a new apartment”. (Farghal & Shunnaq, 1998; Wright, 1889) as cited in Abu-Joudeh et al. (2013) study.

2. */biʃtuka haða/*

“sell.2ms this”

“I sell thee this”.

3. */qad ʒamila al-wāziba al-bajtij/*

“He has done the homework”.

In Arabic, there is no equivalent tense for the present perfect in a formal sense. The present perfect tense in English is constructed by combining the auxiliary verbs “has” or “have” with the past participle of the main verb. For example, “I have completed the homework assignment”. Arabic possesses the perfective aspect, which is constructed by placing the verb after the particle */qad* or *laqad/* in order to convey the present perfect tense (Kechoud, 2010) as in the above example (3).

The formation of the present perfect tense in Arabic involves the use of the particle “*qad*” before the perfective verb, as demonstrated in instances (4) and (5) (Al-Saleemi, 1987; Comrie, 1976) as cited in Mudhsh (2021). According to Al-Saleemi (1987), the perfective form, when used with the particle “*qad*”, indicates an action, as shown in example (4), or refers to an activity that has just been completed at the time of speaking, as shown in example (6).

4. */qad kataba/*

“qad write-past-he”

“He has written”. (Chomsky, 1976, p. 81)

5. */qad katabt/*

“qad write-past-I”

“I have written”. (Al-Saleemi, 1987, p. 42)

6. */qad biʃtuka haða/*

“qad sell-past-I you this”.

“I have sold you this”. (Al-Saleemi, 1987, p. 42)

To illustrate more, the present perfect tense in Arabic is formed by combining the auxiliary verb “*qad*” with the perfective aspect. In English, the present perfect tense is occasionally employed to indicate ongoing circumstances that started in the past and continue into the present. In Arabic, the present simple tense or the past tense is used to convey the same meaning (Kechoud, 2010). For example:

7. */sakanto fi ħamāna mundu sanatajni/*

“I have lived in Amman for two years”.

8. */ʔaskunu fi ħamāna mundu sanatajni/*

“I have lived in Amman for two years”.

According to Eckehard et al. (2000), “the Arabic perfect tense corresponds to both the English past tense and present perfect” (p. 56).

4. Conclusion

Arabic language possesses a distinctive verb system that differs from the one employed in English. The verb holds paramount significance in Arabic sentences, as it serves to communicate both the action and the temporal aspect. In English, verb forms convey information regarding actions or events, such as the passage of time, the relationship to another action or event, and so forth. This review study analyzed the present perfect tense in Arabic and English in terms of their forms and usage based on contrastive analysis. A qualitative approach was employed to compare and analyze this tense. The data for the study were based on previous and recent literature. The analysis shows that there is a notable difference between the Arabic and English languages, particularly when it comes to the use of the present perfect tense. Arabic, unlike English, utilizes a range of particles and adverbials to indicate temporal reference. The perfective aspect in Arabic expresses abstract temporal attributes. In Arabic, the present perfect tense is formed by incorporating the particles */qad* or *laqad* before the perfective verb. Conversely, the English present perfect tense is formed by combining the subject with the auxiliary verbs “*have*” or “*has*” and the past participle form of the main verb. The understanding of this specific tense in English is particularly difficult because there is no direct translation or counterpart in other languages, especially Arabic.

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