Translating Arabic Perfect Verbs into English: A Text-Based Approach

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Abstract

This paper proposes a model for translating Standard Arabic perfect verbs into English based on their contextual references. It starts with a brief introduction to tense and aspect in English and Arabic. Then, it shows the study aim and technique. After that, it provides an analysis of the study results by discussing the various translations of Arabic perfect verbs in the translations of two novels by Naguib Mahfouz. The study compares the translations with the original texts to highlight the different English renderings of the Arabic perfect verbs. A corpus of 250 sentences was randomly chosen from the two novels, 125 sentences from each novel. The structures in which Arabic perfect verbs occur are classified into four groups: the bare perfect form, `/qad/ +
perfect’, ‘/kaana/ + /qad/ + perfect’ and ‘/(sa-)yakuun/ + /qad/ + perfect.’ For each class, the various English translations are provided with a count of the examples representing them in the corpus and their percentages. Then, the contextual reference of each translation is explained.

0. Introduction:

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 Arabic verb has two aspectual forms whereas 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 paper seeks to identify and describe some of these clues for the purpose of throwing some light on the very complex problem of translating Arabic perfect verbs into English.

So, the paper proposes a model for translating Standard Arabic perfect verbs into English based on their contextual references. It starts with a brief introduction to tense and aspect in English and Arabic. Section (2) shows the study aim and technique. Section (3) provides an analysis of the findings of the study by discussing the various translations of Arabic perfect verbs in the translations of two novels by Naguib Mahfouz. For the phonemic symbols used to transcribe Arabic data, see Appendix (1) and for the abbreviations employed in the paper, see Appendix (2).

1. Tense/Aspect in English and Arabic:

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.” (Ibid: 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.

Shamaa (1978: 32) mentions the incongruity between Arabic and English tenses as one of the translation problems arising from indeterminacy of meaning. She says:

Another area of Arabic which occasionally gives the translator some trouble is the temporal and aspectual reference of a sentence. The problem stems from the fact that English has more grammatical categories for tense than Arabic. It therefore requires a greater degree of specification in the source text in order to match the several highly formalized tense and aspect forms available to it.

In Arabic, there are two aspectual forms of the 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. gaza 1-9ilm-u 1-faDaa?
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 /gadan/ ‘tomorrow’. Consider the Arabic examples in (2-3a) and their English translations in (2-3b):

(2) a. ?al?aana ya-nTaliq-u S-Saaruux now impf.3msg-depart-indic the-rocket
   b. Now the rocket is departing.

(3) a. gadan nu-saafir-u ?ila lqaahirah tomorrow impf.1pl-travel-indic to Cairo
   b. Tomorrow, we will travel to Cairo.

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

The tense differentiation between perfect and imperfect operates on three levels, and in various contexts any one of these levels of differentiation may receive the main emphasis, overshadowing or virtually eliminating the others:

i. The perfect points to past time, the imperfect to present or future time;

ii. The perfect points to a single action, regarded as instantaneous in its occurrence, the imperfect to habitual or repeated action, or to one visualized as covering a space of time;

iii. The perfect points to a fact, the imperfect to a
conceptual idea not necessarily realized in fact, and will often have to be rendered in English by ‘can, might, may, would, should.

El-Zeini (1994: 214) stresses the importance of tense as an important subcategory of structural equivalence. She shows that the incorrect use of tense in the translation can lead to a change in meaning. She also admits that:

The verb tenses in Arabic represent a real difficulty for the translator into English, particularly the past tense. .... the verb may have a past form but it actually does not refer to a past action. It can mean the present as well as the future. This is typical of short religious texts where the concept of time is hard to define. Therefore, the translator is faced with the problem of identifying the equivalent tense of a past form of an Arabic verb in the English text.

Consequently, translating Arabic verb forms into English must be a context-oriented process in order to convey the proper meanings of each form. The importance of meaning in translation has been emphasized by many researchers. For example, Zaky (2000: 1) asserts that “translation is, above all, an activity that aims at conveying meaning or meanings of a given linguistic discourse from one language to another.” He also confirms that there is a “shift of emphasis from referential or dictionary meaning to contextual and pragmatic meaning.”

2. Study Aim & Technique:
This study aims to look into the translation of two literary Arabic texts, namely two novels by Naguib Mahfouz, to see how Arabic perfect verbs are translated into English. The first is *Al-Simman wa l-Kharif*, translated as *Autumn Quail* by Roger Allen (1985). The second is *Afrah Al-Qubbah*, translated as *Wedding Song* by Olive E. Kenny (1984). These two novels have been picked up because Mahfouz was the first Arab novelist to win the Nobel Prize in literature and his writing is an excellent representation of Modern Standard Arabic.

The study compares the translations with the original texts to highlight the different English renderings of the Arabic perfect verbs. A corpus of 250 sentences was randomly chosen from the two novels, 125 sentences from each novel. The sentences selected from each novel are then classified into three groups: 100 sentences represent the use of the bare perfect form, 20 sentences represent the use of the construction ‘/qad/ + perfect’ and 5 sentences represent the construction ‘/kaana/ + (/qad/) + perfect.’ All the sentences are compared with their translations in the target texts and analyzed in terms of syntactic and semantic features. A frequency count of the various translations of the perfect constructions was done to account for the ways in which Arabic perfect verbs can be transferred into English.

The technique employed to analyze and evaluate translations is the parallel texts technique stated in (Hartmann
1980: 37). This technique was first used in the contrastive analysis of languages, then later adapted to compare “translationally equivalent texts” (Hartmann 1980: 37). It is similar to the parallel reading technique adopted by Lindquist (1989: 23). About this technique he says: “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). In this study both methods are used for the comparison of the Arabic source texts with the English target texts.

3. Analysis of the Findings:

This section analyzes the results of the study. The structures in which Arabic perfect verbs occur are classified into four groups, the last of which is not represented in the corpus. These groups are related to: the bare perfect form, the construction ‘/qad/ + perfect’, the construction ‘/kaana/ + /qad/ + perfect’ and the construction ‘/(sa-)yakuun/ + /qad/ + perfect.’ For each class, the various English translations are provided with a count of the examples representing them in the corpus and their
percentages. Then, the contextual reference of each translation is explained and commented on.

### 3.1. Translation of the Bare Perfect Form:

Table (1) illustrates the frequency of occurrence of the various translations of the Arabic bare perfect form in the corpus selected from both ‘Autumn Quail’ and ‘Wedding Song’. By ‘bare perfect’, I mean the perfect form of the verb when used alone, i.e. without any preceding words or phrases that might change its aspectual function.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Autumn Quail</th>
<th>Wedding Song</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Past simple</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>48 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Present simple</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>3- Past perfect</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Present perfect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- ing-participle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Present conditional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- Past conditional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8- Past progressive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9- Past perfect progressive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated by Table (1), nearly half of the translations of the Arabic bare perfect form are in the English past simple. Careful investigation reveals that it is used when the perfect form indicates an action that happened in the past, i.e. before the time of speaking, as in:

(4) a. waqaf-a 1-qiTaar-u  
stop.pf-3msg the-train-Nom  

   b. The train drew to a halt.  
(Autumn 11)

(5) a. lima zur-ta 9abbaas yuunis ?ams  
why visit.pf-2msg Abbas Younis yesterday  

   b. Why did you go see Abbas Younis?  
(Wedding 13)

The perfect form can be employed to express past propositions in conditional sentences, particularly after the particles /kullamaa/ ‘whenever’ and /lammaa/ ‘when’. In this case, it is translated into English by the past simple form in both the condition and the result clause, as in:

(6) a. kullamaa ðahab-at li-ziyaarat-i-hi  
whenever go.pf-3fsg for-visiting-Gen-3msg  

   wajad-at-hu naa?im-an  
find.pf-3fsg-3msg sleeping-Acc  

   b. Whenever she went to visit him, she found him sleeping.

(7) a. lammaa Zahar-a l?-islaam-u
when come.pf-3msg the-Islam-Nom
?anqað-a l-mustaD9af-iin
save.pf-3msg the-oppressed-Acc.mpl
b. When Islam came, it saved the oppressed.

The English present simple has the second rate of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic bare perfect form in Table (1). The corpus shows that it is more frequent in *Wedding Song* than in *Autumn Quail*. However, in all of the examples in *Autumn Quail*, this use is justified since the present simple is used for the translation of the Arabic verbs which refer to the present state of affairs although they have a past form, like /ʔintahaa/ ‘to be over’ and /ʔi9taad-a/ ‘to be used to’. Consider the examples in (8b) and (9b) from *Autumn Quail*:

(8) a. ?intah-at ma9rakat-u 1-qanaal (Simman 7)
be over.pf-3fsg battle-Nom the-canal
b. The battle at the Canal is over. (*Autumn 13*)

(9) a. naknu qawm-un ?i9tad-na
we people-Nom be used to.pf-1pl
s-sijin-a wa-D-Darb (Simman 19)
the-imprisonment-Acc and-the-being beaten
b. We’re quite used to being imprisoned and beaten.
   (*Autumn 24*)

Thus, a translator has to pay particular attention to the difference between predicates which refer to states and those which refer to
events. In (8a), for instance, it is the adjective ‘over’ which introduces the idea of a past state (war) and of a past event (the end of the war). So, one can conclude certain predicates (like ‘over’) introduce entailments about time which are not expressed in the tense morphology. When translating one has to pay attention both to the tense morphology as an expression of temporal ideas and also to the temporal ideas which are introduced by (lexical) words.

In *Wedding Song*, the translator renders a big number of Arabic perfect verbs into English using the present simple. In some of these translations, she may be excused since she is trying to create a dramatic effect by making the past events run at the present time. This is often called the “narrative” or “historic” present, defined by Trask (1993: 128) as “the use of a present-tense form with past time reference, as sometimes occurs in narrative with the function of adding vividness.” The narrative present is intended to make the reader feel that the events described are closer, more immediate to the present and hence more interesting, as in (10-11b).

(10) a. *lamah-a-ni r-rajul* (*Afrah II*)
   catch sight.pf-3msg-1sg the-man
   b. The man catches sight of me. (*Wedding 4*)

(11) a. *naZar-at il-mar?at-u nahw-ii* (*Afrah II*)
   look.pf-3fsg the-woman-Nom toward-1sg
b. The woman looks in my direction. (*Wedding 4*)

One might call this a ‘displaced’ use of form. In other words, the present form normally refers to present states or habitual events. But here it is used to relate past events. So, there can be some displacement between the core meaning of an expression and its function in a particular conversational or narrative setting.

Nevertheless, in some of the translations of the perfect from in *Wedding Song*, the use of the present simple is not justified. Salem (2000: 176-7), for instance, points out to an error in this target text in which the translator changes tense without justification:

(12) a. hara9-tu ?ila ḥujrat-i
    rush.pf-1sg to room-Gen
    sarḥaan-i 1-hilaali (*Afrah 38-9*)
    Sarhan-Gen Al-Hilaly

b. I rush to Sirhan Al-Hilaly’s room. (*Wedding 19*)

Then, Salem explains why this translation is not correct:

The tense used by the translator is the present simple whereas the SL writer has used the past. This change of tense is unjustifiable. The speaker in the novel was navigating in his memory. He was telling his memories of the woman whom he used to love. The past tense opted for by the narrator is suitable for this situation. The TL writer, however, changed the tense into the present simple for no good reason.
Translating the Arabic perfect form into English by the present simple can of course be justifiable in religious texts where the perfect form refers to facts which are true at all times. This can be called the “aorist”, defined by Trask (1993: 17) as “a verb form marked for past tense but unmarked for aspect”, since it expresses universal or timeless truths - though Comrie (1976) recommends the avoidance of this term in linguistic theory. In other words, the perfect form here does not really imply a past action; it applies to past, present and future generations (cf. El-Zeini 1994: 218). Therefore, it should be rendered into English by the present simple. An example from the Quran is given in (13a) and one from the Hadith is provided in (14a). Notice how they are translated in (13-14b), respectively:

(13) a. kutib-a 9alay-kumu S-Siyaam
    prescribe.pf.pass-3msg unto-2mpl the-fasting

    b. Fasting is prescribed to you.

(14) a. buniy-a 1-?islam-u 9ala xams
    raise.pf.pass-3msg the-Islam-Nom on five

    b. Islam is raised on five pillars.

An example representing the translation of the Arabic perfect form by the English present simple when it refers to all-time truths comes from *Autumn Quail*:

(15) a. rahim-a ilaah-u ?imra?-an
    have mercy.pf-3msg God-Nom man-Acc
9araf-a qadr-a nafs-i-h (Simman 19)
know.pf-3msg worth-Acc self-Gen-3msg

b. God should have some mercy on a man who knows his own worth. (Autumn 23)

The perfect form of the verb can refer to the present or the future time when it indicates a prayer or a curse. These are usually translated into English by the present subjunctive or by ‘may + base verb’:

(16) a. ?akram-a-ka llaah
bestow honors.pf-3msg-2msg God
b. (May) God bestow honors upon you!

(17) a. la9an-a-hu llaah
damn.pf-3msg-3msg God
b. (May) God damn him!

Returning to Table (1), one observes that the third rank of occurrence in translating the Arabic perfect form is occupied by the English past perfect. The corpus shows that this tense is employed when the perfect verb expresses an action that was completed in the past before another action or time in the past:

(18) a. wa-gaDib-a waqt-a-ðaak (Simman 8)
and-lose temper.pf-3msg time-Acc-that
b. He ... had lost his temper at the time. (Autumn 14)

(19) a. qaal-a l-bawwaab-u ?inna-hu
say.pf-3msg the-doorman-Nom comp-3msg
b. The doorman told me he’d left carrying his briefcase.

(Wedding 25)

The fourth rank of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic perfect form, as shown by Table (1), is filled by the English present perfect. This happens when the Arabic perfect verb refers to an action that has been completed and is still complete at the time of speaking, or an action that started in the past and still continues to the present time, as in:

(20) a. ?u9lin-at il-?ahkaam-u 1-9urfiyyah
declare.pf.pass-3fsg the-laws-Nom the-martial

(Simman 14)

b. Martial law’s been declared. (Autumn 19)

(21) a. balag-at-nii ?ašyaa?-un 9an mawDuu9-i
hear.pf-3fsg-1sg things-Nom about plot-Gen
l-masraḥiyyah

(Simman 48)

b. I’ve heard things about the plot of the play. (Autumn 25)

Table (1) also shows that the Arabic perfect form can be rendered into English by an -ing participle. This is resorted to
when the perfect form has an adverbial function of circumstance, as in (22) or of manner, as in (23):

(22) a. fa-qarrar-a
    so-decide.pf-3msg
    ?an
    ya-šuqq-a
    comp
    impf.3msg-walk-subj
    T-Tariiq-a
    ?ila
    maskan-i-h
    the-way-Acc
    to
    home-Gen-3msg
    wa-xuyyil-a
    ?ilay-hi
    ?anna
    and-imagine.pf.pass-3msg
    to-3msg
    comp
    dahr-an
    Tawiil-an
    sa-ya-mDii
    (Simman 9)
    time-Acc
    long-Acc
    fut-impf.3msg-pass

b. He ... decided to head for home, imagining that ... he would have to spend a long time. (Autumn 15)

(23) a. wa-qad
    and-already
    kaððab-at
    belie.pf-3fsg
    tawaqqu9aat-ii
    expectations-1sg
    fa-краfaZ-at
    9ala
    z-zawjiyyat-i
    and-keep.pf-3fsg
    up
    the-marriage-Gen
    hatta
    wafaat-i-haa
    (Afrah 24)
    until
    death-Gen-3fsg

b. She belied my expectations, keeping up her marriage until her death. (Wedding 11)

In conditional sentences, the Arabic perfect form used in a condition clause is translated into English by the past simple and
that in the result clause is translated by the present conditional, i.e. ‘would/could/should + base verb’, as in:

(24) a. ?iða saad-a t-ta9aawun-u
    if prevail.pf-3msg the-cooperation-Nom
d-duwaliyy-u qall-at
    the-international-Nom become less.pf-3fsg
?asbaab-u l-ħuruub
causes-Nom the-wars

b. If international cooperation prevailed, the causes of wars would become less.

Table (1) indicates that the Arabic perfect form can be translated into English by the present conditional. This is usually resorted to in the result clause of conditional constructions, as in:

(25) a. maa 9asaa ?an ya-quul-a
    what would comp impf.3msg-say-subj
    law sami9-a nidaa?-a
    if hear.pf-3msg shout-Acc
    l-mu?aamarah (Simman 8)
    the-conspiracy

b. What would he say if he could hear these shouts? (Autumn 14)

(26) a. law-laa ?umm-u haani la-tašarrad-tu
    if-not Umm-Nom Hany emph-be derelict.pf-1sg
    fi T-Turuqaat (Afrāh 16)
in the-roads
b. If it weren’t for Umm Hany, I’d be a derelict. *(Wedding 6)*

In the result clause of a conditional sentence, the Arabic perfect form can be used to convey a hypothetical meaning about continuous past actions. This is transferred into English by the present progressive conditional, i.e. the future progressive in the past, which is formed by ‘would + be + V + ing’, as in:

(27) a. *law ðaakar-ta bi-jidd-in*
   if *study.pf-2msg with-hard work-Gen*
   *la-tabawwa?-ta manzilat-an 9aaliyah*
   *emph-hold.pf-2msg position-Acc high*

b. If you studied hard, you would be holding a high position.

The perfect form can express wishes and unrealized or unrealizable desires if it is employed after the particle /layta/ ‘wish’ or a verb of wishing (e.g. /wadda/ or /tamannah/) followed by the particle /law/ ‘that’ (cf. Kharma 1983: 65). This is transferred into English by the verb ‘wish’ followed by the modal verb ‘could’ and a base verb:

(28) a. *layta-nii saafar-tu ?ila l-qamar*
   wish-1sg travel.pf-1sg to the-moon

b. I wish I could travel to the moon.

(29) a. *?a-wadd-u law najah-tu*
   impf.1sg-wish-indic that succeed.pf-1sg
   *fii ?ixtibaar-i l-qiyaadah*
   in test-Gen the-driving
b. I wish I could succeed in the driving test.

The corpus also shows that the Arabic perfect form can be rendered into English by the past conditional, i.e. ‘would/could/should + have + past participle’. This occurs also in translating the verb /wadda/ ‘would like’, as in (30b) and in conditional constructions when the result clause refers to something that could have happened in the past, as in (31b):

(30) a. wadd-a law ya-staTi9-u
       would like.pf-3msg that impf.3msg-be able-indic
       ?an yu-qni9-a-hum (Simman 8)
       comp impf.3msg-convince-subj-3mpl

b. He ... would have liked to have been able to stop them.
   (Autumn 14)

(31) a. law-laa l-xawanat-u la-?awqaf-na
       if-not the-traitors-Nom emph-stop.pf-1pl
       l-malik-a 9ind ḥuduud-i-hi
       the-king-Acc at limits-Gen-3msg
d-dustuuriyyah (Simman 20)

b. If it weren’t for this treachery, we could have kept the
   King within his constitutional limits. (Autumn 24)

The Arabic perfect form can be translated into English by the past progressive tense, as indicated in Table (1). This occurs
when the perfect form refers to an action that was continuous at the time of another action in the past. For instance, at the beginning of Chapter Four of *Al-Simman wa l-Kharif*, Mahfouz describes the celebration of Isa’s engagement to Salwa, how the guests were being welcomed, and how all of them were sitting. So, the target language writer rightly translates the perfect form verbs describing that situation in the past progressive, as in:

(32) a. wa-jalas-a fi l-bahw-i l-?axDar-i ... 
   and-sit.pf-3msg in the-room-Gen the-green-Gen 
   ?aSdiqaa?-u 9iisa l-hamiim-uun (Simman 23)
   friends-Nom Isa the-close-Nom.mpl
   b. While Isa’s close friends ... were all sitting in the green room. *(Autumn 27)*

In one example from the corpus selected from *Wedding Song*, the Arabic perfect verb is rendered into English by the past progressive:

(33) a. fa-lammaa talaaš-at ... talaašaa 
   so-if walk out.pf-3fsg ... go away.pf.3msg 
   ma9a-ha l-?amn-u (Afrah 21)
   with-3fsg the-trust-Nom
   b. If she walked out on me ... she was taking my trust in life ... with her. *(Wedding 9)*
The least frequent translation of the Arabic perfect form is the English past perfect progressive. It is employed when the Arabic perfect emphasizes the duration of an action that continued for a certain time, then was completed before another time or event in the past. This is represented in the corpus by one example from *Autumn Quail*:

(34) a. ?allati sa9-at ?usrat-u-haa Tawiil-an
   who try.pf-3fsg family-Nom-3fsg long-Acc
   li-tazwiij-i-haa min-hu *(Simman 18)*
   for-marrying-Gen-3fsg from-3msg
   b. Whose family had been trying for ages to get him to marry her. *(Autumn 22)*

Finally, it must be stressed here that the perfect form of verbs following the pattern [Fa9uL-a, ya-F9uL-u], which simply attributes a quality to the subject, cannot be rendered in English by any finite verb. It should be translated by an adjective because this type of verbs has no particular time reference:

(35) a. hasun-a xuluq-u-h
   be good.pf-3msg manner-Nom-3msg
   b. He is good mannered.

### 3.2. Translation of /qad/ + Perfect:

Table (2) shows the frequency of occurrence of the various translations of the Arabic construction “/qad, laqad/ ‘already’ +
perfect” in the corpus selected from both ‘Autumn Quail’ and ‘Wedding Song’.
Table (2)

English Translations of the Arabic Construction
‘/qad/ + perfect’ in *Autumn Quail & Wedding Song*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Autumn Quail</th>
<th>Wedding Song</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Past Simple</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Present simple</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>22.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Present Perfect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Past Perfect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Past Progressive</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2) reveals that more than one third of the translations of the Arabic construction ‘/qad, laqad/ + perfect’ are in the English past simple. This occurs when such a construction simply signifies an action that occurred in the past, as in (36):

(36) a. wa-qad gaadar-tu l-wazaarat-a
    and-already leave.pf-1sg the-ministry-Acc
    li?-aaxir-i yawm-in *(Simman 46)*
    for-last-Gen day-Gen

b. I left the ministry for the last time today. *(Autumn 48)*

(37) a. laqad ra?ay-tu-ka kamaa
    already recognize.pf-1sg-2msg just as
ra?ay-tu  nafs-ii  (Afrah 8)
recognize.pf-1sg  self-1sg

b. I recognized you ... just as I recognized myself (Wedding 2)

Immediately after the past simple comes the present simple in the translation of the Arabic construction ‘/qad/ + perfect’, as shown in Table (2). The corpus shows that the present simple is used when the construction ‘/qad/ + perfect’ refers to a present state of affairs, as in:

(38) a. laqad  amm-a  l-fasaad-U  (Simman 20)
   already  spread.pf-3msg the-corruption-Nom

   b. There’s widespread corruption. (Autumn 24)

(39) a. laqad 9?a9maa-ka  l-hiqd-U  (Afrah 14)
   already  blind.pf.3msg-2msg the-hate-Nom

   b. You’re blinded by hate. (Wedding 6)

The English present perfect has the third rate of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic construction ‘/qad/ or /laqad/ + perfect’, as illustrated in Table (2). This translation occurs when such a construction conveys the meaning of an action that started in the past and still continues to the moment of speaking, as in:

(40) a. wa-qad  ixtur-tu  ?ana
   and-already  choose.pf.pass-1sg  I
   naa?ib-an  li-l-mudiir  (Simman 61)
   deputy-Acc  to-the-director

   b. I’ve been chosen as deputy director. (Autumn 61)
(41) a. laqad najah-a 9abbaas yuunis
already succeed.pf-3msg Abbas Younis
fii ?iqnaa9-ii (Afrah 7)
in persuading-1sg

b. Not only has Abbas Younis persuaded me ...
(Wedding 2)

It can be added here that the construction ‘/qad, laqad/ +
perfect’ can also indicate the repetition of past actions. This is
also transferred into English by the present perfect tense, as in:
(42) a. laqad zur-tu xaalat-ii sab9-a
already visit.pf-1sg aunt-1sg seven-Acc
marraat-in haaða l-9aam
times-Gen this the-year

b. I have visited my aunt seven times this year.

The fourth rank of occurrence in the translation of the
Arabic construction ‘/qad/ + perfect’ is occupied by the English
past perfect tense. The corpus shows that this translation is
employed when such a construction shows the completion of an
action before another action or time in the past, as in:
(43) a. fa-ra?aa Suurat-an li-l-biik qad
and-see.pf-3msg picture-Acc of-the-Bey already
hall-at mahall-a S-Suurat-i
take.pf-3fs place-Acc the-picture-Gen
t-taqliidiyyat-i li-l-malik (Simman 51)
b. He noticed that a picture of the Bey ... had taken the traditional place of the King. (*Autumn 52*)

(44) a. wa-qad baššar-a ?umm-a haani ... and-already give hints.pf-3msg Umm-Acc Hany ... bi-rujuu9-ii ?ilay-haa (*Afrāh 24*) about-returning-1sg to-3fsg

b. He’d already given hints to Umm Hany about my returning to her. (*Wedding 11*)

The least frequent translation of the Arabic construction ‘/qad/ or /laqad/ + perfect’ is in the English past progressive. This happens when the context refers to an action that was continuous in the past or when the SL writer describes a past situation, as in:

(45) a. fa-qad waajah-a rijaal-u l-hizb-i and-already face.pf-3msg men-Nom the-party-Gen rijaal-a s-saraay (*Simman 25*) men-Acc the-palace

b. The Party men were all facing the Palace men. (*Autumn 28*)

3.3. Translation of /kaana/ + /qad/ + Perfect:

Table (3) reveals the frequency of occurrence of the various translations of the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + (/qad/) + perfect’ in the corpus selected from both ‘*Autumn Quail*’ and
‘Wedding Song’. The word /qad/, meaning ‘already’, is placed between brackets to show that it is optional in this position.

Table (3)

English Translations of the Arabic Construction
‘/kaana/ + (/qad/) + perfect’ in *Autumn Quail & Wedding Song*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Autumn Quail</th>
<th>Wedding Song</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Past Perfect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Past Simple</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated by Table (3), most of the examples in which the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ ‘be.pf’ + (/qad/ ‘already’) + perfect’ occurs are translated into English by the past perfect tense. This is due to the fact that such a construction usually stresses the completion of a past action, as in:

(46) a. wa-kaan-at il-wazaarat-u qad
     and-be.pf-3fsg the-ministry-Nom already
     ?uqiil-at (Simman 16)
     dismiss.pf-pass-3fsg

b. The ministry had been dismissed. (*Autumn 20*)

(47) a. wa-kaan-at qad faqad-at
     and-be.pf-3fsg already loose.pf-3fsg
ruwaa?-a-haa  wa-ḥayawiyyat-a-haa (*Afrah 167*)
beauty-Acc-3fsg and-vitality-Acc-3fsg

b. She had lost most of her fresh beauty and all her vitality.  
(*Wedding 92*)

Table (3) also shows that the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + (/qad/) + perfect’ can be translated by the English past simple tense. This is utilized to refer to simple past actions, as represented by the following example from *Autumn Quail*:

(48) a. ?a-mina  l-jaa?iz-i  ?an
interrog-from the-possible-Gen comp
ta-kuun-a ḥayaat-u-naa  qad
imperf.3fsg-be-subj life-Nom-1pl already
xuliq-at  kamaa  xuliq-at
create.pf.pass-3fsg like create.pf.pass-3fsg
haaðihi  S-Suurah (*Simman 136*)
this the-shape

b. Is it possible that our life was created like that shape up there? (*Autumn 124*)

The English present perfect can also be employed in the translation of the construction ‘/kaana/ + (/qad/) + perfect’, as revealed by Table (3). This is employed to show the present effect of a past action, as exemplified by the following sentence from *Wedding Song*:

(49) a. ḥiða  kaan-a  ntaḥar-a
The construction ‘/kaana/ + /qad/ + perfect’ can also be utilized in a result clause of a conditional sentence to signify an action that would have completed in the past, but something prevented it from completion. This is translated into English by the past conditional, i.e. the future perfect in the past, which is formed by ‘would/could/should + have + past participle’:

(50) a. law kaan-uu qad ?aqaam-uu
    if be.pf-3mpl already establish-3mpl
    manzil-an jadiid-an la-kaan-uu
    house-Acc new-Acc emph-be.pf-3mpl
    qad intaqal-uu ?ilay-h
    already move-3mpl to-3msg

b. If they had established a new house, they would have moved to it.

3.4. Translation of /(sa-)ya-kuun/ + /qad/ + Perfect:

The construction ‘/(sa-)ya-kuun/ + /qad/ + perfect’ is not represented in the corpus. It usually signifies an action that will be completed before another action or time in the future. This is expressed in English by the future perfect:
The construction ‘/sa-ya-kuun/ + /qad/ + perfect’ can also be used to signify the duration of a future action that will be completed before another time or event in the future. This is rendered in English by the future perfect progressive:

(52) a. sa-ya-kuun-u munhak-an li?anna-hu
    fut-impf.3msg-be-indic exhausted-Acc because-3msg
    sa-ya-kuun-u qad 9amil-a
    fut-impf.3msg-be-indic already work.pf-3msg
    fi-l-maSna9-i Tawaal-a n-nahaar
    in-the-factory-Gen throughout the-day

b. He will be exhausted because he will have been working in the factory all day.

4. Conclusion:

This study demonstrates that the difficulty in translating Arabic verbs into English lies in that Arabic and English verb forms divide the space of meanings in different ways, and the meanings of each form (both in English and in Arabic) are not
necessarily unitary. The Arabic perfect form, for example, has various meanings; it is very difficult to reduce it to a single interpretation. Its interpretation depends on the syntactic context. Therefore, understanding the contextual references of each Arabic perfect verb form is very important for translating it into English. Following are the constructions in which Arabic perfect verbs can be placed, their English translation equivalents and the contextual reference of each translation.

First, the Arabic bare perfect form can have the following English translations in order of occurrence:
1- past simple for past actions and in hypothetical clauses,
2- present simple for narrating past events in the present, which is called “narrative present” and for all-time truths, which is called the “aorist”,
3- past perfect for completed past actions,
4- present perfect for past actions that still continue to the present
5- -ing participle for the circumstance or manner of an action,
6- present conditional in hypothetical result clauses and for wishes and unrealizable desires,
7- past conditional for hypothetical result clauses with past reference,
8- past progressive for continuous past actions, and
9- past perfect progressive for the duration of completed past actions.
Second, the Arabic construction ‘/qad, laqad/ + perfect’ can have the following translations:
1- past simple for past actions,
2- present simple for present states,
3- present perfect for past actions that still continue to the present and for repeated past actions,
4- past perfect for completed past actions, and
5- past progressive for continuous past actions.

Third, the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + /qad/ + perfect’ can have the following translations:
1- past perfect for completed past actions,
2- past simple for past actions,
3- present perfect for the present effect of past actions, and
4- present conditional for hypothetical result clauses.

Finally, the Arabic construction ‘/(sa-)ya-kuun/ + /qad/ + perfect’ can have the following translations:
1- future perfect for completed future actions, and
2- future perfect progressive for the duration of completed future actions
### Appendix 1

**A. Consonants of Standard Arabic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiodental</th>
<th>Interdental</th>
<th>Dento-Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Uvular</th>
<th>Pharyngeal</th>
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<td>k</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>?</td>
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**B. Vowels of Standard Arabic**

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Appendix 2
List of Symbols & Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Case</th>
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<th>Morpheme</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Third Person</td>
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</table>

/ / phonemic transcription
- morpheme boundary

Simman Al-Simman wa l-Kharif (Mahfouz 1962)
Autumn Autumn Quail (Allen 1985)
Afrah Afrah Al-Qubbah (Mahfouz 1981)
Wedding Wedding Song (Kenny 1984)
References


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