VERBS IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC: A STUDY IN CONTRAST

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Comparison of two languages has been a fascinating thing. The writer of this paper, being a student of linguistics has attempted a contrastive study of the verbs in English and Arabic.

First, let me add a note what drew me to a deeper study of the two systems: It is the 'writing system' that led me to devote sometime for a deeper and closer look into the two languages.

The letters of the English alphabet are formed with anti-clockwise movement of the hand. Also we write English from left to right, for example, Yemen is a small country

On the other hand, the letters of the Arabic alphabet are formed with clock-wise movement of the hand. Also, we write from right to left, for example,

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The nature of the two languages being such, the Arabic learners should take special care to learn the correct formation of English letters. If they follow the Arabic method of drawing clock-wise circles, when they write English letters, it will considerably reduce their speed and they will take a long time to complete writing tasks. The clock-wise movement is quick when one writes from right to left, but not so when one writes from left to right.

Contrastive linguistics was popular with ELT experts in the 60s. According to them, such a study has a lot of pedagogical implications. It was believed that a contrastive study paves way for a closer look into the systems of the languages being compared (the Mother Tongue and the Target Language) and enables the teachers to devise suitable ways and means to teach the Target language effectively. This is especially more useful when the languages being contrasted / compared have very different systems.

But recently, the pedagogic implications of a contrastive study have been questioned. The ELT experts question the claims of contrastive analysis for effective teaching of FL/SL. So, this paper does not deal with the pedagogic aspect and aims at a study in contrast for its own sake.

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No claims are made here to the exhaustiveness of the study as I had to confine myself to the ‘data’ (of Arabic language) made available to me by the ‘informants’, who are native speakers of Arabic.

VERBS IN ENGLISH: FORM

TYPES: 1. LEXICAL VERB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>-s added</th>
<th>-ed added</th>
<th>-ing added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. AUXILIARIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>-s added</th>
<th>-ed added</th>
<th>-ing added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Many of the English verbs have five forms: The Base, the -s form, the Past, the -ing participle and the -ed/-en participle forms. Three of the five forms (the first three forms) indicate tense and are called FINITE FORMS. The other two forms, the -ing, -ed/-en participle forms are NON-FINITE and do not show tense. Thus, a lexical verb in English is inflected for 1) Simple Present Tense III person singular, (-s), 2) Past Tense (-ed) 3) Present participle (-ing) and 4) The Past Participle (-ed/-en)

Example: play

1) plays
2) take

The verbs, which take ‘-ed’ for the past tense, take the same suffix for the past participle form also. Such verbs are called ‘regular verbs’. The verbs, which do not take ‘-ed’ for the past tense, take ‘-en’ for the past participle. Such verbs are called ‘irregular verbs’.

VERBS IN ARABIC: (FORM)

In Arabic, as in English, a verb is that word or group of words, which states what action takes or took place, or what situation exists or existed.

TYPES: Arabic has Lexical verbs but no Auxiliaries as in English. A verb has three forms for tense, but it does not have the forms equivalent to present and past participle forms in English.

1. Past

2. Present
3. Command/Request ---- Feal Amere

The verbs get inflected for various tense forms. Besides this they are also inflected for Number and Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Write</td>
<td>kataba</td>
<td>aktoob</td>
<td>yaktab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Take</td>
<td>akhada</td>
<td>khood</td>
<td>yakhod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Drink</td>
<td>shariba</td>
<td>isharib</td>
<td>yasharib</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- English letters of the alphabet are used throughout this paper to represent Arabic words. Symbol : indicates the sound is long.

**TENSES:**

"Arabic has four simple (i.e. one word) tenses: perfect indicative, imperfect indicative, imperfect subjunctive and imperfect jussive. We shall follow the common practice and call these, the perfect, imperfect, subjunctive and jussive respectively" (John Mace, 1999 : 16)

**Perfect Indicative Tense ('Perfect')**
The perfect expresses a completed action or state, usually situated in the past:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>نُعم</th>
<th>Dhehba</th>
<th>He went / has gone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>صار</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>He became / has become</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Imperfect indicative tense ('Imperfect')**
The imperfect expresses an action or state, usually situated in the present or near future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>نُعم</th>
<th>Tadhah</th>
<th>She goes / is going, she will go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>يظهروا</td>
<td>yadharon</td>
<td>They seem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Imperfect Subjunctive ('Subjunctive')**
"The subjunctive expresses purpose, potential or will concerning the action of the verb ('He wanted to sell the house' 'Can you speak Arabic?' 'I prefer you stay')" (John Mace, 1999 : 24)
The subjunctive is formed from the imperfect by changing the endings only, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect</th>
<th>Subjunctive</th>
<th>Jussive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>يكتب  yaktobo</td>
<td>يكتب  yaktoba</td>
<td>he writes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نرجو  narju</td>
<td>نرجو  narjua</td>
<td>(do)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can note that the subjunctive is formed by changing the endings, to / Imperfect jussive tense (‘jussive’) ‘The jussive is formed from the subjunctive by changing certain of the endings only, as follows’ (John Mace, 1999: 26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Subjunctive</th>
<th>Jussive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We find</td>
<td>najeda يجد</td>
<td>najed يجد</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He says</td>
<td>yakhola يقول</td>
<td>yakhol يقل</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He comes</td>
<td>yaja يجيء</td>
<td>yaje يجه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We expect</td>
<td>narjua نرجع</td>
<td>narjo نرجة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She forgets them</td>
<td>tansahum تساعهم</td>
<td>tnsahum تسههم</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ASSAHEEH AND AL MOATAL VERB**

Assahee is a verb in which all the letters are consonants. It has three kinds.

1. **saːlim إصلام**
   - It is a verb, which has no vowel letters at all and none of its letters is ( ِ ) ‘hamza’
   - ex: dhahaba ذهب  went
   - khataba كتب  wrote
2. 

\[ \text{mahmu'z} \]

It is a verb in which one of its letters is (ء) 'hamza'. The 'hamza' can be at the beginning or at the middle or at the end as in the following:

Ex:

- akhada: asked
- sa'ala: asked
- ka:ra'a: read (past)

3. 

\[ \text{muddaf} \]

It is a verb in which one of the letters is doubled.

Ex: 

- jarra: pushed

**AL MOATAL VERBS**

Al Moatal verb is a verb in which some of the letters are vowels, in contrast to asaheech, which has no vowel letters. It has five kinds. They are:

1. 

\[ \text{Al mithal verb} \]

(First letter is a vowel) ex: wa'ada: promised

2. 

\[ \text{Alagwaf verb} \]

(The middle letter is a vowel) ex: gaool: speech

3. 

\[ \text{Alnagas Verb} \]

( The last letter is a vowel) ex: rami: throw

4. 

\[ \text{Alasfeef almakhron verb} \]

( It has two combined letters) ex: howa: fall

5. 

\[ \text{Alasfeef almalfrokh verb} \]

( It has two vowel letters, which are separate) ex: wakha: protect

**Al Mujaradh and Al Mazeed verbs**

1. 

\[ \text{Al Mujaradh Verb} \]

It is a verb which has no extra letters. It can be measured with three letters (ف ع ل) (f, a, l) if it is a tri-verb. But it can be a verb with four letters also. If we omit one of its letters, it becomes meaningless.

Ex:

- Jama'a: collected
- Dahraga: rolled

**University Researcher, January-March, 2005**
2. Al Mazeed Verb: It is a verb in which some of the letters are extra and even if we omit one of the letters, the verb remains meaningful.

Ex: Astakharaja explored

The extra letters in this word: استراح

THE EXTRA LETTERS IN AL MAZEED VERBS

A H A N A L A W A M A Y A T A S A A:

AGREEMENT

1. ARABIC: Arabic verbs are inflected for gender and number in both Subjunctive and Objective cases. An Arabic verb agrees with its subject (noun or pronoun) in number and gender.

Masculine

Yaktub attalib add rs (The boy student writes the lesson)

Feminine

Taktub attaliba add rs

(� ) (The girl student writes) attalib

Kataba add rs (The boy student wrote the lesson) At taliba katabat add rs

الطابة كتب الدرس

(� ) (The girl student wrote the lesson)

SUBJECTIVE CASE

Come here (boy) ta’a:1 hu:na:
Come here (girl) ta’a:li hu:na:
Come here (two boys & Two girls) ta’a:la hu:na:
Come here (many boys) ta’a:lu hu:na:
Come here (many girls) ta’a:lna hu:na:

OBJECTIVE CASE

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He told me hua kalamni
She told you hia kallamtuka
I told him ana kallamtuhu
He told her hua kallamaha
We told them nahnu kallamnahum
They told us hum kallamuna
You told him anta kallamtuhu

This is an important difference between the verbs of English and Arabic as English verbs are not inflected for number and gender.

Arabic has a word, ‘saofa’ سوف، which is almost equivalent to the word, ‘will’ in English. Its uses are very limited, unlike the English, ‘will’, which is a modal auxiliary verb in English.
Hua saofa yakon doctor هو سوف يكون دكتور
(He will be a doctor)

FUNCTIONS OF VERBS –(ENGLISH)

Syntactically an English verb plays a vital role. Any English sentence without a finite verb (tense-showing verb) in it, is ungrammatical and unacceptable.

He is a teacher. * He a teacher (ungrammatical)

Regarding the syntactic position of a verb in English, we can find that in all types of Declarative sentences, it is placed after the Subject. The pattern of an English sentence (declarative) is:
Subject +Verb+(Object)+(Complement)+(Adjunct) {Items in brackets are optional}

In interrogative sentences, there is a reversal of position and the verb is placed before the subject, as in,
Are you a student of this college?
Who gave you this pen?

In imperative sentences (commands / Requests) also the verb occupies the initial position:
Stand up
Please open the window

ARABIC

In Arabic, the verbs are not considered so vital as they are in English. Arabic permits statements and questions without a verb in them.
Ahmad doctor أحمد دكتور
Ayn Mohammad? ابن عمحمد؟
When we come to the syntactic position of a verb, we find that Arabic permits the verbs either to be at the initial position or after the Subject. The first type of sentence, which begins with a verb is called ‘Al jomlah Al fa'iah’ (الجملة الفعلية) And the second type, in which the verb follows the Subject is called ‘Al jomlah Alismiyah’ (الجملة الاسمية)

1. yaktobu Ahmad arresaleh (Ahmad writes the letter)
2. Ahmad yaktobu arresaleh (Ahmad writes the letter)
   (the underlined words are verbs)

Reference:

Arabic reference (Translations of the relevant chapters in English)

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