The Past Tenses System of English and Arabic: A Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract:

This paper aimed at investigating and describe the differences and similarities between English and Arabic in past tenses, among Preparatory Year Deanship (PYD) students' of Majmah University. A descriptive method was adopted to reveal the similarities and differences for pedagogical purposes. It was found that both English and Arabic add a morpheme at the end of the verb for to form the regular past tense; as well as both languages have irregular verb form to designate the past tense. The differences were found that Arabic has a verb base for constructing its past tense, whereas English has a verb form for the same purpose. Also, Arabic has bound morphemes as prefixes for the past form to indicate the pronouns, while English has a free morpheme for the same for its pronouns. The past form in Arabic mostly precedes the subject , but in English the subject precedes. Difficulties are predictable due to their different cognate, but the awareness of them could make things under control.

Key words: Arabic; contrastive; differences; English; past tense; similarities

1. INTRODUCTION

Language represents means of communications among societies, communities, regions, countries, and nations. The major purpose of each language is the same, but this or that language will be necessarily either completely or partially different from another language. Instead, one language can be partially similar to another language but not necessarily completely similar to that or this language. This paper attempts to find how English and Arabic languages differ from each other from different aspects of grammar. The purpose behind this is to describe these differences and to show how they can form learning problems for Arab students of English as a foreign language (EFL). Moreover; understanding of the area of the differences between English and Arabic will help to suggest effective teaching techniques to cope with such difficulties. Moreover, the study investigates the distributional differences and similarities between English and Arabic past tenses system. Due to the differences Arab native speakers learning English as a foreign language confront a lot of difficulties in past tense structure.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Differences in past tenses system that exist between English and Arabic languages are attributed to their different origins – i.e., English is an Indo-European language whereas Arabic is Semitic language. The current study endeavors to explain the differences between English and Arabic past tense to understand what are the effects that hinder the teaching and learning process of English language for Arab students.

1.2 Objectives of the Study:

The paper aims at:

1. revealing the distributional differences and similarities of English and Arabic past tenses system

2. predicting the difficulties that PYP learners encounter in the EFL context.

1.3 Questions of the Study:

The study endeavors to answer the following questions:
1.What are the distributional differences and similarities between English and Arabic past tenses system?
2. What are predictable linguistic problems that PYP as EFL learners confront during the learning process?

1.4 Significance of the Study:

This paper aimed to cite the usefulness of the study of specific groups. Language teacher's linguists and all those who interested with these comparative of English and Arabic grammar will benefit from his research.

Moreover, the study attempts to throw light on the factor considering the possibility of language transfer from the Arabic tense/ aspect system to English tense in an attempt to see how L1 and L2 influence each other.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

English is considered the most widespread language in the world. Many countries have it as a first or second language, however in the Arab world is taught in schools and colleges as foreign language. On the other hand, Arabic is one of the most important languages in the world. This importance emerges out because for many reasons: it is the official language of the Arabic League, which consists of not less than 22 countries with more than 205 million speakers; in addition, there are more than 1.5 billion people worldwide use Arabic for liturgical purposes – it is the language of an entire Muslim civilization. Consequently, this fact alone makes Arabic worthwhile to be one of the most important languages on the globe to be studied, along with its counterpart English language.

2.1 Arabic past Tense System

Arabic, as a language, is one of the most important languages in the world. It is spoken as a native language by not less than four hundred million people in different countries and places in the Arab world. Furthermore, Arabic is spoken or learned as a second language in all over the world (Alduaisi, 2012). It is also admitted as an official language by the United Nations (Chejne, 1969). Generally speaking, Arabic is divided into three types; Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and Colloquial Arabic.

Classical Arabic was used in pre-Islamic period in the Arab peninsula, and surly, it is the most accurate and eloquent variety of Arabic. Currently, it is used only in the holy Quran, Prophetic hadiths, and traditional books. Modern Standard Arabic is the variety of Arabic used by the educated people in academic settings, TV news, and formal settings. It is a correct variety of Arabic in terms of grammar with some common errors, but not up to the classical Arabic in terms of eloquence. However, colloquial Arabic is the language used by people to communicate with each other. It is mostly an incorrect variety of Arabic; grammar is not observed while using colloquial Arabic (Owens, 2006). Moreover, there are many varieties of colloquial Arabic. There are the Saudi Arabian dialect, Yemeni dialect, Egyptian dialect, Sudanese dialect and many others.

2.2 English past tense system

Similarly, English language it's also important as it is a language spoken widely in the world; more than over one billion people speak English (Statistical Portal Online, 2018). English is the language of science and technology across the globe in the present time. English, like Arabic, has so many varieties and dialects. For instance, Standard English is spoken only in academic settings, newspapers, TV news and the likewise. However, many other dialects, accents, or English are spoken all over the world.

Grammar of English and Arabic Sentence, whatever the language is considered the largest part of a language in terms of grammar (Humboldt, 1988). They are marked with a certain beginning and a certain ending, and following certain punctuation marks (Leech, 2006). Sentences either in English or Arabic have main component parts of speech; namely, they have nouns, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. However, English and Arabic are not identical in terms of sentence structure. Arabic has some features making its syntax complex in comparison to English and other European languages. Arabic has two main types of sentences; nominal sentence in which the subject is the "mubta'da" and then comes a predicate which can be presented by different types of phrases (El- Shishiny, 1990). The second type of sentences in Arabic is the verbal sentence, and which starts with a verb. Verbal sentences can be followed by either a subject phrase, or a subject phrase and a compliment (El- Shishiny, ibid.).

Unlike Arabic, English has five main types of sentences; they are the intransitive type, the verb to be requiring adverbs of time or space type, the linking verb with adjectival subject complement type, the linking verb type with a nominal subject complement type, and the transitive type (Klammer et al, 2000). Verbs in English and Arabic can act differently. English, for instance, represents modals; those verbs which cannot be conjugated, whereas, Arabic does not have such a kind of verbs, though it can express modality using verbs that can be conjugated (Aziz, 2010). Likewise, the sentence pattern in English and Arabic is not similar. Simple sentences in English usually consist of the basic elements, which are subject, verb, object, and compliment, and each simple sentence should have at least two obligatory elements, namely, a subject and a predicate (Hussein, 2009). In Arabic, it is too complicated to tell the pattern of a sentence. Arabic has the characteristic of fronting and deferring. Put simply, in Arabic, we need not to keep a certain pattern; for example, an object can precede its

subject, or a verb can come after or before the subject depending on what semantic stress the writer or the speaker wants to highlight. However, Aziz (1989) suggested eight patterns which all fall under the umbrella of nominal or verbal pattern. Verbs are a main component of the parts of speech. The verb, according to grammarians, is a token which expresses a state or a fact happening in the past, present, or future. Moreover, verbs can be either complete or deficient. In Arabic, states of verbs can be classified as follows:

- According to Mood: past, confirm (present or future), or imperative.
- According to Time: past, present, or future.
- According to Number of original letters: trilateral or quadrilateral.
- According to End-case analysis: declined or structured.
- According to Confirmation: Confirmed or unconfirmed. According to Defective letters:
- Sound: intact, doubled or with the Arabic character Hamza [ء].
- Defective: modal, hollow or deficient.
- According to Affirmation: affirmative or negative.
- Mixed: separated or joint.
- According to Radicals:"denuded or augmented". (Al-Muhtaseb & Mellish, 1998)

On the other hand, English shares Arabic some of the above mentioned categorizations; however, differences look to be greater. English has two tenses (present and past), whereas, it has 13 aspects as classified by grammar analysis books.

2.3 Contrastive Analysis
Nobody can ignore the deep interrelationship and effect of contrastive and error analysis in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. However, Gass & Selinker (1992, 2001) state that comparative studies between the first and the second

languages are one important preliminary step to understanding language transfer. These comparisons often guides researchers to understanding the hypotheses related to language transfer phenomena. Wardhaugh (1970) defines contrastive analysis as a means of comparing learners' L1 and L2 to analyze possible difficulties that the learners might encounter in a L2 learning situation. Contrastive analysis assumes that the patterns and rules of L1 cause difficulties to L2 learning.

Contrastive analysis is concerned with the study of two languages aiming at discovering their structural similarities and differences. Almaloul (2014) supports the belief that contrastive analysis studies the similarities and differences between two languages or more. It asserts the claim that learners tend to depend on and refer back to their native language when they encounter target language items that greatly differ from their mother- tongue. Malzan (2015) considers contrastive analysis as a method that was widely used in the 1960s and early 1970s to explain why some features of a target language were more difficult to learn than others.

Lado (1957) claims that those item of a target language that are similar to the learners' first language will be easy for them to learn. In addition, those items of a target language that are different from the learners' first language will be difficult for them to acquire. The student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy, while others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his/her mother tongue will be simple for him/her. While those elements that are different will be difficult as confirmed by Lado (1957:2).

As stated by Weinreich (1953:2), the greater the difference between the two systems, i.e. the more numerous the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each, the greater the learning problem and the potential area of interferences. Language that is similar to the student's native language will be simple, while those elements that are different will be

difficult. Thus, where differences exist, errors would be bidirectional. Eric (2008) states that contrastive analysis hypothesis is based on the claim that the difficulty of a second language acquisition could be discovered or foretold depending on the degree of difference between the learners' first and second language. She adds that there are certain problems with this hypothesis. One problem, for instance, is that this hypothesis does not predict many of the errors the learner makes in the second language acquisition. Another problem is that this hypothesis predicts interference errors where none would arise.

3. METHODOLOGY

The PYP for the Colleges of in Saudi Arabia, for example, is one of the limited-duration English programs. The program uses the three volumes of the New Headway series as core textbooks for the three-level program. Core textbooks are taught over a period of 80 hours in each level. The 80-hour duration allocated for each textbook suit the time plan of the New Headway series.

3.1 Method
This paper used descriptive method. It describes the similarities and differences of English and Arabic in past tenses. This method helps to achieve the objective of this study "to find out the similarities and the differences between English and Arabic language in past tenses.

3.2 Sample
The participants of the study are PYP students at the second semester who study English as a main subject besides other courses at the University of Majmmah. The second type of participants EFL teachers of English at Majmmah University. The sample investigated in this study is composed of three of participants. The first group (A) consists of (20) PYP students

as experimental group, the second group (B) consists also of (20) PYP students as controlled group, the third group (C) composed of (50) EFL teachers who teach the subjects of this study English language.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In analyzing the data, the researcher used contrastive analysis technique. According to Whitman (2006) that contrastive analysis has four procedures, they are:

1. Description. In this step, the researcher describes English and Arabic language in past tense based on the rules of the both.
2. Selecting. In this step, the researchers elected the past tense in English and Arabic language on their uses.
3. Contrasting. In this step, the researcher contrasted the use of past tenses in English and Arabic language systematically.
4. Predicting. In this step, the researcher predicted the difficulties which may occur based on the three previous steps.

In collecting the data, the researcher focused at the similarities and the differences of English and Arabic past tenses form at such how the use of past tenses in grammar. The main data are from: The tools used for collecting data are the questionnaire and the test.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This paper investigated the similarities and differences between Arabic and English for Arabic speaking learners of English language in terms of particularly past tense system. Two research instruments are used. The first instrument is based on PYP experiment in the form of English grammar and Arabic tasks were designed to acquire data on English

morphological forms selected by learners for both past tense and functions. Moreover, the second tool is based on EFL teachers' perspectives at Majmaah University in K.S.A.

The results of the study revealed that most of the PYP learners experience problems in L2 grammar of English past tense in contrast with L1. Some learners experienced this issue because of their early learning at elementary and/or secondary school. On the other hand, most EFL teachers have observed PYP sluggish development with regard to grammar course at PYP level. The findings also showed that PYP learners experience challenges to absorb English language tense structure. This is due to they depend primarily on language input from classroom encounters with little input from social situations outside. Most of learners are unaware of the differences between English past tense structure of English and Arabic past tenses structure. Consequently, English time notions must be explained clearly to the learners.

PYP learners also ignore the functional differences between English and Arabic past tenses and thus produce awkward utterance.PYP learners violate the syntactic representation of English and Arabic languages and produce ungrammatical sentences. They are not familiar to different forms in the input which is the basic prerequisite for learning. PYP learners confuse between the semantic representation of English and Arabic languages. It is clear that verb type, function and form are intertwined and teaching has to be approached from a much more meaningful functional perspective.

The results of this paper also showed that interactive environment is not available for practical purposes and educational guidance. It can be stated that simply providing grammar course does not guarantee its proper use in production stage. Therefore, it is necessary to convince EFL teachers of the usefulness and benefits of instilling the contrastive aspects between English and Arabic past tenses in

improving learning and facilitates the exposure of English language. This suggests the need for effective guidance, support and training for teachers in employing innovative teaching methods into language instruction through more hands-on and direct practical experience. It can be understood that there is a need for ongoing training and assistance in helping English language teachers to better employ communicate methods in teaching situations in and out classrooms.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary

This paper titled: A contrastive analysis of English and Arabic past tenses system has been successfully carried out using the PYP of students of Majmmah University as a case. The study adopted contrastive method of analysis. Two of the major findings include the students' difficulties to differentiate the usage of English and Arabic past tenses, as well as lack of opportunity to practices what they are learning outside the school environment. Consequently, the study has provided possible solutions towards addressing the aforementioned challenges.

It is found that There are some differences and similarities between English and Arabic past tense system. PYP Arabic speaking learners find difficulties in understanding the semantic of English language past tenses system. Since the Arabic speaking learners of English face some linguistic problems to understand English past tense system; in return, it is expected to find the same difficulties with the English native speakers when they want learn Arabic.

6.2 Recommendations

- A special attention needs to be given to the students in relation to the teaching of English and Arabic past tenses.

- A special avenue should be provided for students to be able to practice what they are been taught in the university, hence its evident that the only time they spend during the teaching learning process couldn't be enough for them to learn the two differences in question.

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