

Chapter Three: Time and Tense

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Tense in English

3.3 The Present Tense

3.4 The Past Tense

3.5 Tense in Arabic

3.6 The Present Tense (The Imperfect Tense)

3.7 The past tense (The Perfect Tense)

3.8 Particles and Time Reference

3.9 Absolute and Relative Tenses

3.10 Comparison of Tenses in English and Arabic

3.1 Introduction

Time is a universal extra-linguistic concept usually divided into past, present and future.

Tense is a grammatical device used by a language to refer to time by means of contrast in verb forms.



3.2 Tense in English

There are two tenses in English – past and present.

The **present** tenses in English are used:

- to talk about the **present**
- to talk about the **future**
- to talk about the **past** when we are telling a story in **spoken** English or when we are summarizing a book, film, play etc.

Tense is connected with verb form.

in English the form go(es) expresses tense (present)

the form went expresses tense (past)

in Arabic the form يذهب expresses tense (imperfect)

the form ذهب expresses tense (perfect)

There are **four** present tense forms in English:

Tense	Form
Present simple:	I work
Present continuous:	I am working
Present perfect:	I have worked
Present perfect continuous:	I have been working

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the present simple, since the other types are called aspect which are going to be discussed in chapter (4).

We use these forms:

➤ to talk about the **present**:

- ❖ He **works** at McDonald's.
- ❖ He **has worked** there for three months now.
- ❖ He **is working** at McDonald's.
- ❖ He **has been working** there for three months now.
- ❖ London **is** the capital of Britain.

➤ to talk about the **future**:

- The next train **leaves** this evening at 1700 hours.
- I'll phone you when I **get** home.
- He's **meeting** Peter in town this afternoon.
- I'll come home as soon as I **have finished** work.
- You will be tired out after you **have been working** all night.

➤ We can use the present tenses to talk about the **past** ...

➤ **when we are telling a story:**

Well, it's a lovely day and I'm just **walking** down the street when I **see** this funny guy walking towards me. Obviously he's **been drinking**, because he's **moving** from side to side

➤ **when we are summarizing something we have read, heard or seen:**

I love Ian Rankin's novels. He writes about this detective called Rebus. Rebus **lives** in Edinburgh and he's a brilliant detective, but he's always **getting** into trouble. In one book, he **gets suspended** and they **tell** him to stop working on this case. But he **takes** no notice

The present tense is the **base form** of the verb:

I **work** in London.

But the third person (she/he/it) adds an **-s**:

She **works** in London.

We use the present tense to talk about:

- something that is true in the **present**:
 - I'm nineteen years old.
 - He **lives** in London.
 - I'm a student.

➤ something that happens again and again
(**repeated action**) in the present:

I **play** football every weekend.

*We use words like **sometimes, often, always,**
and **never** (adverbs of frequency) with the present
tense:*

- I **sometimes** go to the cinema.
- She **never** plays football.

- something that is **always true**:
 - The adult human body **contains** 206 bones.
 - Light **travels** at almost 300,000 kilometers per second.

- something that is **fixed in the future**.
 - The school term **starts** next week.
 - The train **leaves** at 1945 this evening.
 - We **fly** to Paris next week.

3.4 The Past Tense

The **past** tense in English is used:

- to talk about the **past**
- to talk about **hypotheses** – things that are imagined rather than true.
- for **politeness**.

There are **four** past tense forms in English:

Tense	Form
Past simple:	I worked
Past continuous:	I was working
Past perfect:	I had worked
Past perfect continuous:	I had been working

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the past simple, since the other types are called aspect which are going to be discussed in chapter (4).

We use these forms:

➤ to talk about the **past**:

➤ He **worked** at McDonald's. He **had worked** there since July..

➤ He **was working** at McDonald's. He **had been working** since July.

➤ to refer to the **present or future in conditions**:

➤ He could get a new job if he really **tried**.

➤ If Jack **was playing** they would probably win.

➤ **and hypotheses:**

- It might be dangerous. Suppose they **got** lost.
- I would always help someone who really **needed** help.

➤ **and wishes:**

- I wish it **wasn't** so cold.

➤ **something that happened once in the past:**

- I **met** my wife in 1983.
- We **went** to Spain for our holidays.
- They **got** home very late last night.

➤ **something that happened again and again in the past:**

- When I was a boy I **walked** a mile to school every day.
- We **swam** a lot while we were on holiday.
- They always **enjoyed** visiting their friends.

➤ **something that was true for some time in the past:**

- I **lived** abroad for ten years.
- He **enjoyed** being a student.
- She **played** a lot of tennis when she was younger.

➤ **we often use phrases with *ago* with the past tense:**

- I met my wife a long time **ago**.

➤ **In conditions, hypotheses and wishes**, if we want to talk about the **past**, we always use the **past perfect**:

- I would have helped him if he **had asked**.
- It was very dangerous, What if you **had got** lost?
- I wish I **hadn't spent** so much money last month.

➤ We can use the past forms to talk about the **present** in a few **polite expressions**:

- Excuse me, I **was wondering** if this **was** the train for York.
- I just **hoped** you **would** be able to help me.

Tense in Arabic

3.5 Tens in Arabic

- ❖ There are two verb forms in Arabic (the perfect الماضي & the imperfect المضارع)
 - ❖ Those forms express among other things, time reference.
 - ❖ There are two systems of tense; Absolute and Relative
 - ❖ Absolute tense takes the moment of speaking as it's reference point.
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- * يذهب اخي الى هناك كل يوم (my brother goes there everyday)
- (**Absolute**: Point of reference is the moment of speaking (now))

❖ **Relative** tense takes other moment than the moment of speaking as its reference point.

* علمت آنذاک ان اخي يذهب هناك كل يوم (Then I knew that my brother *went* there everyday)
(**Relative**: point of reference is indefinite in the past)

Absolute and **Relative** systems of tense will be discussed in section 3.10 in this chapter.

The present Tense in Arabic

- ❖ The verb form is called the “imperfect” المضارع .
- ❖ It basically refers to the present time if the point of reference is the moment of speaking.

❖ هو ما يحدثُ الآن ويقوم به الفاعل، ولا يزال مُستمراً في جريانه، والفعل المضارع يبدأ بالأحرف المَزِيْدَة التي تأتي جميعها في كلمة (نأتي). مثالٌ على الفعل المضارع: شَرِبَ؛ هذه الحروف الثلاثة أصلية للفعل، وبتحويل هذا الفعل إلى مُضارع يكون التالي: نشربُ، أشربُ، تشربُ، يشربُ، والأصل بالفعل المضارع أن يكون مُعرباً؛ أي أن يكون مرفوعاً، وتظهر الحركة على آخره

❖ There are three main uses for the imperfect tense in Arabic

a) As in English , the present tense may refer to the general present, namely a repeated action, a fact or an ability in the present .

□ أذهب الى السوق مرة كل أسبوع (I go to the market once a week)

□ قلما يحضر إبراهيم الاجتماعات (meetings)
Ibrahim rarely comes to the

□ يروي النيل مساحات واسعة من مصر (The Nile irrigates large areas)
(of land in Egypt)

□ لا تسقط الامطار في الصيف في هذه البلاد (Rain does not fall in)
(summer in this country)

b) Unlike the English present tenses, the Arabic present tense may often refer to the present moment .

□ انه يكتب قصيدة طويلة (He is writing a long story)

□ ليلي تشتغل في المطبخ (Layla is working in the kitchen)

□ لا أرى أحدا في المنزل (I cannot see anyone in the house)

c) It could be used for the future and past time

(the use of the present tense to refer to an action will happen in future time must be combined with the use of an appropriate adverbial)

□ يغادر اخي الى البصرة غداً. (My brother leaves for Basra tomorrow)

□ The present tense is regularly used for past time in newspaper headlines

□ رؤساء الدول العربية يعقدون اول اجتماع لهم في بغداد.

(Arab countries presidents hold their first meeting in Baghdad)

The Past Tense in Arabic

- ❖ The verb form is called the “perfect” الماضي .
- ❖ It basically refers to an action, states, situations before the present time (absolute tense)

يمكن تعريف الفعل الماضي على أنه الفعل الذي يدلُّ على الحدث الحاصل في وقتٍ قد مضى، أي حدث وانتهى قبل لحظة الكلام، ويأتي مبنياً؛ فلا تتغير حركته بتغير موقعه في الجملة، وقد يكون ثلاثي المصدر، مثل: أكلَ، أو رباعي المصدر، مثل: أمعنَ، وفي هذه الحالات تكون الهمزة همزة قطع، أو يكون خماسي المصدر، مثل: انخفضَ، أو سداسي المصدر، مثل: استعملَ، وفي هذه الحالات تكون الهمزة همزة وصل.

This Tense has the following uses:

- a) All types of acts completed before the present moment: long acts, short acts, reported acts, etc. which indicate definite past time

□ عاش ليو في باريس وهو طفل) Leo lived in Paris when he (was a child

□ رأيته مرتين في العام الماضي (I saw him twice last year)

□ وصل القطار قبل قليل (The train arrived a short time ago)

b) **Past** action in the definite past. Such actions are usually expresses in English by the perfect aspect and present tense. قد is occasionally used with the perfect form, but its use is restricted to affirmative statements.

□ وصلت الطائرة (The plane has arrived)

□ فقدت كتابي (I have lost my book)

□ لقد ناقشنا هذه الأمور (We have already discussed these points)

□ ما فعلت هذا (I have not done this)

□ هل رأيته قبل الان (Have you seen him before?)

□ قد انتهى من كتابة الرواية (He has finished writing the novel)

c) Wishes, prayers and curses

(May God have mercy on him) رحمه الله

(God Bless you) بارك الله فيك

(God Curse him) لعنه الله

(Long live justice) عاشت العدالة

c) For proverbs, maxims or what is in print

(Al-Mutanabbi says) قال المتنبي

(The writer says) قال الكاتب

e) A minor use is for Future actions, it is found in (negative) promises, is mostly found in literary style nowadays.

(By God I shall not stay in this town) والله لا اقامت بهذه البلدة

(I will certainly sell you this) بعثك هذا

Absolute and Relative Tenses

Absolute Tenses have as their point of reference the present moment of speaking for example

- I go * He goes
- It is said to be in the present tense because they refer to actions which happen at a time which includes the present moment (which is different from saying that they happen at the present moment).
- The same issue is found in Arabic
- يذهب الرجل * ذهب الرجل

Relative tenses use as their point of reference any moment in the sentence or context, including the present moment.

- A) The non-finite forms of the English verbs
- B) The infinitives
- C) The —ing form
- D) Past participles

Said To have relative tense

*** Relative tense takes the time reference from the main verb**

For example:

1) He wants Mary *to see* a doctor —————→ to + infinitive

- The infinitive *to see* takes its time reference from the main verb “wants” (the finite form) and refers to another time reference which is different from the main verb time reference. The time reference of “to see” in the above example is future, but in example no. 2 below the time reference of the verb “to see” is past.

2) He wanted Mary *to see* a doctor.

❖ In English and Arabic the present and the past “ I go, I went, يخرج, يخرج ” are absolute tenses.

❖ The non-finite forms

- The infinitive to go
- The –ing form going
- Past participle gone

Express Relative tenses because their time reference is taken from the main verb time reference which is the same in the Arabic sentence.

Relative tenses in Arabic is derived from the time reference of the main verb and it is known by the indirect speech as in the following examples:

He said that he went to the market every day.

قال انه يذهب الى السوق كل يوم .

I entered the room while he was singing.

دخلت الغرفة وهو يغني

you will listen to him while he is singing.

سوف تسمعه وهو يغني

I will go to him when he finishes/ has finished

سأذهب اليه وقد انتهى من عمله