A Stylistic Study of Aspectual Verbs in Selected English and Arabic Novels

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By

A'amir Ibrahim Jassim

Supervised by

Asst. Prof. Ya'arub Mahmood Hamiedi
(M.A.)

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Abstract

Aspectual verbs refer to those lexical items which indicate specific time segments of situations or events whether they continue for a long or a short time, whether they occur once or repeatedly, whether they are finished or still ongoing. Aspectual verbs can be recognised and analysed through applying certain semantic features which give each verb its aspectual identity and also through the syntactic environment that surrounds the verb which cooperates with the semantic discipline to reach a more accurate description and classification of each aspectual verb. The problem of the study is that since English and Arabic have different language systems, the aspectual verbs and the ways of expressing them are intended to be different. The aim of this study is to find out whether aspectual verbs in English differ from those in Arabic: the extent this difference reaches and how they function in both language systems. The adopted model of the analysis is based on Vendler's (1967:97-121) proposal of splitting up the category of verbs into four types, namely: state, activity, achievement and accomplishment verbs and also on Brinton's (1988: 9-28) suggested categories of aspectual verbs.

The study is based on the hypotheses that Vendler's proposal of splitting up the category of verbs of any natural language into four types: state, activity, accomplishment, and achievement is applicable to Arabic. It is also hypothesized that English and Arabic manifest some similarity in terms of the criteria used to classify aspectual verbs, yet areas of difference are assumed to be greater than those of similarity.

To achieve the aims of the study and verify its hypotheses, two types of procedures have been adopted: theoretical and analytical. In the theoretical procedures, a survey of aspectual verbs in each language has been presented. In

the analytical procedure, two novels have been selected: one is English, and the other is Arabic. These novels have been analysed in accordance with the adopted models. The types of aspectual verbs have been identified and classified to show how these verbs can work in both language systems. The study ends up with several conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study, of these conclusions is that Points of difference between English and Arabic aspectual verbs are not as many as those of similarity.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The Problem

The aspectuality of verbs is regarded to be one type of semantic classifications of verbs. The inherent meaning of a verb is determined largely by the temporal characteristics intrinsic in the semantics of the predicate in its unmarked, lexical form. The theory of aspectuality was produced by Vendler . He (1967:97-121) adopts the inherent lexical aspect as a criterion for classifying verbs into four types, namely: states, activities, achievements, and accomplishments. Several semantic features can also be used to reach an effective classification. Such features include: telicity, dynamicity, durativity, homogeneity, and others. It is quite obvious that English and Arabic have different linguistic systems because they belong to two different language families. Therefore, these two systems may pose basic contradictions of several linguistic levels including the syntactic and semantic levels. As a result, aspectual verbs are supposed to be tackled differently in both languages. So, it is thought that this is a problematic task especially for Arab learners of English.

1.2 Aims of the study

The current study aims at:

1. Investigating the possibility of applying the quadripartite temporal classification of verbs to the Arabic language.
2. Detecting the similarities and the differences between English and Arabic in the area of aspectual verbs.

3. Adopting a general model for the analysis of aspectual verbs in both English and Arabic novels to see how they function in both languages.

1.3 The Hypotheses

It is hypothesised that:

1. Vendler's proposal of splitting up the category of verbs of any natural language into four types: state, activity, accomplishment, and achievement is applicable to Arabic.

2. English and Arabic manifest some similarity in terms of the criteria used to classify aspectual verbs, yet areas of difference are assumed to be greater than those of similarity.

1.4 The Procedures

In order to prove the hypotheses of the study, the following procedures will be adopted:

A- Theoretical procedures that include:
  1. presenting a survey of aspectual verbs in English reviewing available related literature,
  2. presenting a similar survey of aspectual verbs in Arabic, and
  3. Adopting a general model for the analysis of aspectual verbs in both languages.

B- Analytical procedures that include analysing the types of aspectual verbs in selected English and Arabic novels in accordance with the models discussed within the theoretical framework.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The present study is limited to:

1- Studying the English and Arabic aspectual verbs, and
2- the sample of analysis is limited to two texts taken from English and Arabic modern novels which are entitled *"Tuesdays with Morrie"* by Mitch Albom, and " موسم الهجره الى الشمال " *"Season of migration to the North"* by Tayeb Salih.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to be useful for those interested in contrastive literature, particularly with regard to English and Arabic grammatical topics. The findings of this study could also be valuable to those concerned with teaching, learning and translating linguistic materials.