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Article abstract

This paper proposes a model for translating Standard Arabic imperfect 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 imperfect verbs in the translations of two novels written by Naguib Mahfouz. The study compares the translations with the original texts to highlight the different English renderings of the Arabic imperfect verbs.

# Arabic Imperfect Verbs in Translation: A Corpus Study of English Renderings

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article propose pour traduire en anglais des verbes arabes standard à l'inaccompli un modèle basé sur les références contextuelles. Il commence par une brève introduction sur le temps et l'aspect en anglais et en arabe. Ensuite, il présente le but et la technique d'étude. Il fournit une analyse des résultats d'étude en s'appuyant sur les diverses traductions des verbes arabes à l'inaccompli dans les traductions de deux romans de Naguib Mahfouz. L'étude compare les traductions aux textes originaux pour accentuer les différents réalisations en anglais de ces verbes arabes.

## ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a model for translating Standard Arabic imperfect 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 imperfect verbs in the translations of two novels written by Naguib Mahfouz. The study compares the translations with the original texts to highlight the different English renderings of the Arabic imperfect verbs.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

corpus study, Arabic, imperfect verbs, contextual references

## Introduction

One of the definitions of translation is that it is “the replacement of a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language” (Hartmann & Stork 1972, in Bell 1991: 20). Therefore, translation must be a text-oriented process. While English has sixteen tense forms, Arabic has only two aspectual forms. Therefore, each Arabic form can be rendered by several English tenses, which causes a problem for the translator. However, a good Arabic-English translator who fully understands the Arabic context in which a verb form occurs will have no difficulty in choosing the suitable tense for that form.

This paper attempts to show the contextual clues that can assist a translator to select the proper English equivalents of Arabic imperfect verbs. It starts with a brief background about tense and aspect distinctions in English and Arabic. Then, it explains the study aim and technique. Section (3) presents an analysis of the results of the study by discussing the different translations of Arabic imperfect verbs in the English translations of two novels written 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 Distinctions in English and Arabic

In Standard Arabic, the basic distinctions in the verb are fundamentally aspectual, not tense-related. However, they are often treated as tense distinctions for the sake of those who speak such a language as English. The earliest grammar book of the Arabic language, the */kitaab/* of Sibawayh states that there are three forms of the Arabic verb: one signaling the past time, the other indicating the present or future, while the third expresses commands or orders. The early Arab grammarians call the first form */ʔal-maaDi/* which merely means 'the past' and call the second form */ʔal-muDaari9/* which means 'that which is similar (to the noun)'. Modern linguists now use the terms perfect(ive) and imperfect(ive) for the two forms, respectively. The two forms are distinguished morphologically as stated by Gadalla (2000: 76): "The perfect form is obtained by the attachment of suffixes only, whereas the imperfect form is obtained via the addition of confixes, i.e., combinations of prefixes and suffixes."

While some linguists, such as Eisele (1990), propose that the distinction between these two forms corresponds to a distinction between past and non-past, others assert that there is no one-to-one correspondence between aspect and tense. Therefore, Radwan (1975: 30) affirms that:

Aspect and tense should be treated as two independent categories. .... Both terms are used to name two different features of verbal patterns. The term 'Aspect' covers the semantic ranges of completion versus non-completion and continuation versus non-continuation, whereas 'Tense' covers time reference.

Nida (1964: 198-9) indicates that while tense marks the relative time of events, aspect defines the nature of the action. He also asserts that "when translating from one language to another, it is necessary not only to adjust to quite a different system, but also to reckon with the special restrictions which may exist within such a system." Needless to say that the tense/aspect systems differ from one language to another, particularly in languages which belong to different families such as English and Arabic. That is why Nida (1964: 199) affirms that "regardless of the formal or semantic differentiations made in the tense system, the important fact is that no two systems are in complete agreement."

Shamaa (1978: 32-3) also explains the reason behind the difficulty encountered in translating Arabic tenses into English:

temporal contrasts in Arabic are less systematic, i.e., they are not clearly marked by verb-forms. ... temporal reference in Arabic is expressed by means of verb forms in conjunction with time adverbials and other lexical items. It is, however, the context which ... finally places the action or event in its true temporal and aspectual perspective. But since context may not provide the same clear-cut and easy determinations afforded by some European [e.g. English] tense systems, it is therefore a source of occasional ambiguity.

To stress the role of aspectual reference in Arabic English translation problems, Shamaa (1978: 36-7) states that:

It is the aspectual rather than the temporal reference of an Arabic verb, that can lead to difficulties in translation. To render the original meaning as faithfully as possible, it is therefore essential to determine whether a given action is completed or in progress, instantaneous or enduring, momentary or habitual, etc.

A translator must give primary attention to the context, as “context is the overriding factor in all translation, and has primacy over any rule, theory or primary meaning” (Newmark 1995: 113). Therefore, the process of translating Arabic verb forms into English must be based on the context in order to convey the correct aspectual reference of each form. A good translator must fully understand the context of an Arabic tense form before attempting to render it into English. Understanding the context helps him to understand the meaning of each form, which is very important for translation. The importance of meaning in translation has been stressed by many scholars. For instance, Larson (1984: 6) affirms that: “To do effective translation one must discover the meaning of the source language and use receptor language forms which express this meaning in a natural way.”

## 2. Study Aim & Technique

This study aims at analyzing the translation of two literary Arabic texts, namely two novels written by Naguib Mahfouz to find out how Arabic imperfect verbs are rendered into English. The first novel is *Al-Simman wa l-Kharif*, translated by Roger Allen (1985) as *Autumn Quail*. The second is *Afraḥ Al-Qubbah*, translated by Olive E. Kenny (1984) as *Wedding Song*. These literary texts have been chosen because Mahfouz was the first Arab literary figure to win the Nobel Prize and his works are highly representative of Modern Standard Arabic.

The study compares the translations with the original texts to shed light on the various English translations of Arabic imperfect verbs. A corpus of 430 sentences was randomly selected from the two novels, 215 sentences from each novel. The sentences chosen from each novel are then sorted into six groups:

- 100 sentences represent the use of the bare imperfect form,
- 25 sentences represent the use of the construction ‘/sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect’,
- 25 sentences represent the use of a subjunctive particle before the imperfect,
- 25 sentences represent the use of the construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’,
- 25 sentences represent the use of ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’, and
- 15 sentences represent other imperfect constructions.

All the sentences are compared with their equivalents in the target texts and analyzed in terms of syntactic and semantic features. A frequency count of the different translations of the imperfect constructions was performed to explain the ways in which Arabic imperfect verbs can be rendered into English.

In this study, two methods are utilized for the comparison of the Arabic source texts with the English target texts. The first is the parallel texts technique mentioned in (Hartmann 1980: 37) and the other is the parallel reading technique adopted by Lindquist (1989: 23). The first method was employed at the beginning in the contrastive analysis of languages, and after that adapted to compare “translationally equivalent texts” (Hartmann 1980: 37). Lindquist (1989: 23) says about the second method: “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.”

3. Analysis of the Results

This section analyzes the findings of the study. The structures in which Arabic imperfect verbs occur are sorted into ten classes, the last two of which are not represented in the corpus. These classes are related to:

- 1. the bare imperfect form,
- 2. the construction ‘/sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect’,
- 3. a subjunctive particle + imperfect,
- 4. the construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’,
- 5. the construction ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’,
- 6. the construction ‘/qad/ + imperfect’,
- 7. the construction ‘/maa zaala/ + imperfect’,
- 8. the construction ‘/li-/ + imperfect’,
- 9. a conditional particle + imperfect, and
- 10. the construction ‘/la-/ + imperfect’.

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 studied and accounted for.

3.1. Translation of the Bare Imperfect Form

Table (1) indicates the frequency of occurrence of the different translations of the Arabic bare imperfect form in the corpus selected from ‘Autumn Quail’ and ‘Wedding Song’. The term ‘bare imperfect’ here means the imperfect form of the verb when it is used alone, i.e., without any preceding words or phrases that might modify its aspectual function.

TABLE (1)  
English Translations of the Arabic Bare Imperfect  
in *Autumn Quail* & *Wedding Song*

English Translation	Autumn Quail	Wedding Song	Total	Percentage
1. Present simple	19	48	67	33.5 %
2. Present progressive	11	21	32	16 %
3. Past simple	17	12	29	14.5 %
4. -ing participle	21	6	27	13.5 %
5. Past progressive	17	3	20	10 %
6. Future simple	5	4	9	4.5 %
7. Present conditional	3	2	5	2.5 %
8. Present perfect	1	3	4	2 %
9. be going to + base verb	2	1	3	1.5 %
10. Past perfect	3	--	3	1.5 %
11. Present progressive conditional	1	--	1	.5 %
Total	100	100	200	100 %

As shown in Table (1), one third of the translations of the Arabic bare imperfect form are in the English present simple. Examination of the corpus reveals that this

translation is used when the imperfect form expresses an action that happens regularly or habitually. This is the basic meaning of the Arabic bare imperfect form. Regular actions are exemplified by (1) from *Autumn Quail* and habitual actions are illustrated by (2) from *Wedding Song*:

- (1) a. ?inna-naa                      na-stanšiq-u  
           certainly-1pl                impf.1pl-inhale-indic  
           1-fasaad-a                ma9a                l-hawaa? (*Simman* 20)  
           the-corruption-Acc        with-the-air  
       b. We inhale corruption in the very air we breathe. (*Autumn* 24)
- (2) a. ?al-mar?at-u                laa                ta-kuff-u  
           the-woman-Nom            not                impf.3fsg-stop-indic  
           9an                il-?ahlaam                (*Afra*h 40)  
           from                the-dreams  
       b. The woman never stops dreaming. (*Wedding* 21)

The Arabic bare imperfect form can also be used to refer to all-time truths or scientific facts. In this case, it can be called the “gnomic” or “generic” form, defined by Trask (1993: 119) as “denoting the aspectual form expressing a general or universal truth.” It is also expressed in English by the present simple tense. All time-truths are illustrated by (3) from *Wedding Song* and scientific facts are exemplified by (4) which is not in the corpus:

- (3) a. ?al-?afyuun-u                ya-hdim-u  
           the-opium-Nom            impf.3msg-ruin-indic  
           kull-a                      šay? (*Afra*h 50)  
           every-Acc                thing  
       b. Opium ruins everything. (*Wedding* 27)
- (4) a. ta-tamaddad-u                l-ma9aadin-u                bi-t-tasxiin  
           impf.3fsg-expand-indic    the-metals-Nom    on-the-heating  
       b. Metals expand on heating.

The English present progressive has the second rate of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic imperfect in Table (1). The corpus shows that this translation is employed when the imperfect form denotes an activity that is occurring at or around the moment of speaking:

- (5) a. ?al-jayš-u                ya-taḥadda                l-malik                (*Simman* 34)  
           the-army-Nom            impf.3msg-defy    the-king  
       b. The Army’s defying the King. (*Autumn* 36)

In Table (1) the third rank of occurrence in translating the Arabic bare imperfect form is occupied by the English past simple tense. The corpus shows that this tense is utilized when the imperfect form indicates an action that happened in the past, i.e., before the moment of speaking:

- (6) a. 9ayn-aa-hu                ta-9kis-aani  
           eye-Nom.du-3msg            impf.3fsg-give off-indic.du  
           naZrat-an                ǧariibah (*Afra*h 52)  
           look-Acc                queer  
       b. His eyes gave off a queer look. (*Wedding* 29)

The fourth rank of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic imperfect form, as indicated in Table (1), is occupied by the English -ing participle. This happens when the Arabic imperfect verb refers to an action that is/was continuous at the time of another action:

- (7) a. fa-hataf-a                      wa-huwa    ya-?xuḏ-u  
           so-yell.pf-3msg            while-he    impf.3msg-start-indic  
           fi            l-jary            (*Simman* 6)  
           at            the-running  
       b. The man yelled, moving on. (*Autumn* 12)

The fifth rank of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic bare imperfect form is filled with the English past progressive, as revealed by Table (1). This is resorted to when the imperfect form signifies continuous actions in the past. So, when the novelist, for example, uses the stream of consciousness to describe continuous past actions, the translator employs the past progressive to render Arabic imperfect verbs, as in:

- (8) a. ?al-juu9-u                      ya-Truq-u  
           the-hunger-Nom    impf.3msg-knock-indic  
           baab-a                                      l-bayt-i    l-qadiim (*Afrah* 61)  
           door-Acc    the-house-Gen            the-old  
       b. Hunger was knocking at the old house's door. (*Wedding* 32)

Table (1) also reveals that the Arabic bare imperfect form can be translated into English by the future simple construction, which includes 'will' or 'shall' and the base form of the verb. This happens when the imperfect verb refers to a future action:

- (9) a. ʔumma    nu-saafir-u                      ?ila    ?uurubbaa  
           then    impf.1pl-travel-indic    to    Europe  
           ba9da    ʔaalika                      mubaaʔarat-an    (*Simman* 32)  
           after    that                      directly-Acc  
       b. And afterwards we'll travel directly to Europe. (*Autumn* 35)

The Arabic bare imperfect is also translated into English future simple when it occurs in the result clause of a conditional sentence, as in:

- (10) a. nu-?ayyid-u                      š-šayTaan-a                      ?iḏa  
           impf.1pl-support-indic    the-devil-Acc                      if  
           ta-Tawwa9-a                      li-?inqaaḏ-i                      s-safiinah  
           volunteer.pf-3msg    for-saving-Gen    the-ship (*Simman* 21)  
       b. We'll support the devil himself if he volunteers to save the ship. (*Autumn* 25)

The English present conditional, i.e., 'would/could/should + base verb' is sometimes used to translate the Arabic bare imperfect form. The corpus shows that this translation is adopted when the imperfect form expresses a hypothetical meaning:

- (11) a. limaaḏa                      ya-qtul-u                      tahiyyah (*Afrah* 45)  
           why                      impf.3msg-kill-indic    Tahiya  
       b. Why would he kill Tahiya? (*Wedding* 23)

According to Table (1), the Arabic imperfect form can sometimes be rendered into English by the present perfect tense. The corpus shows that this translation is employed when the imperfect form refers to actions that began in the past and still continue up to the present moment or still have their effects in the present:





TABLE (2)

**English Translations of the Arabic Construction  
'/sa-/ + Imperfect' in *Autumn Quail* & *Wedding Song***

English Translation	<i>Autumn Quail</i>	<i>Wedding Song</i>	Total	Percentage
1- Future simple	13	16	29	58%
2- Present conditional	8	2	10	20%
3- be going to + base verb	2	5	7	14%
4- Future progressive	2	–	2	4%
5- Present progressive	–	1	1	2%
6- Present simple	–	1	1	2%
Total	25	25	50	100%

Table (2) indicates that the most frequent English translation of the Arabic construction ‘/sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect’ is the future simple construction which includes ‘will’ or ‘shall’ and the base form of the verb. This translation is adopted when the construction ‘/sa-/ + imperfect’ signifies prediction or determination that something will happen in the future:

- (16) a. *sa-ta-tasarrab-u*                      *l-ʔaxbaar-u*  
          fut-impf.3fsg-leak out-indic      the-new-Nom  
          bi-Tariiqat-in    ʔaw    bi-ʔuxraa (*Afrah* 8)  
          in-way-Gen      or      in-another  
       b. One way or another, the news will leak out. (*Wedding* 2)

One fifth of the English translations of the Arabic construction ‘/sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect’ are in the present conditional, according to Table (2) above. This translation is utilized when that Arabic construction expresses a hypothetical action:

- (17) a. *haaḏa*      *T-Tuufaan-u*      *sa-ya-qtali9-u*  
          this          the-flood-Nom      fut-impf.3msg-uproot-indic  
                          l-hukuumah (*Simman* 7)  
                          the-government  
       b. This flood would uproot the government. (*Autumn* 12)

The third rank of occurrence in the translation of the Arabic construction ‘/sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect’ is occupied by the English construction ‘be going to + base verb’. The corpus reveals that this translation is adopted when that Arabic construction denotes future of present intention or future of present cause (cf. Quirk et al. 1972: 88):

- (18) a. *ʔal-maḥruus-u*                      *sa-ya-tazawwaj-u*  
          the-mama’s boy-Nom      fut-impf.3msg-marry-indic  
          min    tahiyya      (*Afrah* 20)  
          of      Tahiya  
       b. Mama’s boy is going to marry Tahiya. (*Wedding* 9)

According to Table (2), the English future progressive can be employed to translate the Arabic construction ‘/sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect’. This occurs when such a construction implies continuous future action:

- (19) a. sa-nu-ʔarrix-u bi-haaḏa  
 fut-impf.1pl-date-indic with-this  
 l-yawm-i Tawiil-an (*Simman* 10)  
 the-day-Gen long time-Acc
- b. We'll be dating things from today for a long time to come. (*Autumn* 16)

The English present progressive tense can also be used in the translation of the Arabic construction 'sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect', as indicated by Table (2). This occurs when that construction refers to future arrangements or planned events:

- (20) a. sawfa na-tazawwaj-u fi l-ḥaal (*Afrah* 22)  
 will impf.1pl-marry-indic on the-spot
- b. We're getting married right away. (*Wedding* 10)

The English present simple can also be employed in translating the Arabic construction 'sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect', according to Table (2). This happens when such a construction signifies a fixed time-table or programmed event:

- (21) a. sa-ya-bda-ʔ-u t-tadriib-u  
 fut-impf.3msg-begin-indic the-rehearsal-Nom  
 gad-an (*Afrah* 25)  
 tomorrow-Acc
- b. Rehearsals begin tomorrow. (*Wedding* 12)

At the end of this section it can be noted that in very few cases, the verb /ya-kuun/ 'be.impf' is inserted between the particle /sa-/ or /sawfa/ and the imperfect form, to imply a continuous future action. In such cases, the English future progressive tense is utilized, as in the following example which is not in the corpus:

- (22) a. mataa sa-ta-kuun-u tu-Daakir  
 when fut-impf.2msg-be-indic impf.2msg-study
- b. When will you be studying?

### 3.3. Translation of Subjunctive Particle + Imperfect

Table (3) shows the frequency of occurrence of the various translations of the Arabic construction 'subjunctive particle + imperfect' in the corpus selected from '*Autumn Quail*' and '*Wedding Song*'. Subjunctive particles are /ʔan/ 'to', /lan/ 'not', /li-, kay, likay/ 'in order that' and /hattaa/ 'until'. They are employed before the imperfect form to convey the subjunctive mood which the Arab grammarians call /ḥaalatu n-naSb/.

TABLE (3)

**English Translations of the Arabic Construction ‘Subjunctive Particle + Imperfect’ in *Autumn Quail* & *Wedding Song***

English Translation	<i>Autumn Quail</i>	<i>Wedding Song</i>	Total	Percentage
1- Infinitive	17	15	32	64%
2- Neg. future simple	–	8	8	16%
3- Present conditional	4	–	4	8%
4- Present simple	2	–	2	4%
5- Neg. present progressive	–	2	2	4%
6- Past simple	1	–	1	2%
7- Past conditional	1	–	1	2%
Total	25	25	50	100%

As indicated by Table (3), nearly one third of the translations of the construction ‘subjunctive particle + imperfect’ are in English infinitive, i.e., ‘to + base verb’. The corpus shows that this translation is adopted for the construction ‘/?an/ ‘to + imperfect’, as in:

- (23) a. ?a-lam                      ya-kun-Ø                      il-?ajmal-u  
           interrog-not    impf.3msg-be-juss                      the-best-Nom  
                               ?an                      ?a-tazwwaj-a                      (*Simman* 17)  
                               to                      impf.1sg-marry-subj
- b. Wouldn’t it be better ... to get married?                      (*Autumn* 21)

The English infinitive is also used in the translation of the Arabic construction ‘/li-/ ‘in order to’ + imperfect.’ In Arabic grammar books, the subjunctive prefix /li-/ ‘in order to’ is called /laamu t-ta9liil/ ‘the /i-/ of justification’ because it is used “to indicate the purpose for which, or the reason why, a thing is done” (Wright 1967: 291):

- (24) a. sa-?a-bðul-u                      maa                      ?a-staTii9-u  
           fut-impf.1sg-do-indic what                      impf.1sg-be able to-indic  
                               li-?u-waffir-a                      la-kumaa  
                               to-impf.1sg-give-subj                      for-2du  
           hayaat-an                      kariimah                      (*Afrah* 83)  
           life-Acc                      decent
- b. I’ll do all I can to give you a decent life.                      (*Wedding* 45)

The English negative future simple, i.e., ‘will not + base verb’ is adopted in the translation of the Arabic construction ‘/lan/ ‘not’ + imperfect.’ This signifies the negation of a future action, as in:

- (25) a. lan                      ya-ta9aaTaf-a  
           not                      impf.3msg-sympathize-subj  
                               l-jumhuur-u                      ma9a-hu                      (*Afrah* 25)  
                               the-public-Nom                      with-3msg
- b. The public won’t like him.                      (*Wedding* 12)

Table (3) shows that a subjunctive particle followed by the imperfect can be translated into English by the present conditional. The corpus reveals that this is

- (30) a. fa-man                    kaan-a                    la-hu                    qariib-un  
          and-anyone        be.pf-3msg            with-3msg            relative-Nom  
                              ka-9ali            bik        sulaymaan            wajaab-a  
                              like-Ali        Bey        Sulaiman            should.pf-3msg  
          9alay-hi            ?an                    yu-waθθiq-a  
          on-3msg            to                    impf.3msg-strengthen-subj  
                              9alaaqat-a-hu                    bi-hi                    (*Simman 18*)  
                              relation-Acc-3msg                    with-3msg  
b. Anyone with a relative like Ali Bey Sulaiman should have kept in as close contact as possible. (*Autumn 22*)

### 3.4. Translation of /lam/ + Imperfect

Table (4) illustrates the frequency of occurrence of the various translations of the Arabic construction “/lam/ ‘not’ + imperfect” in the corpus selected from ‘*Autumn Quail*’ and ‘*Wedding Song*’.

TABLE (4)

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

English Translation	<i>Autumn Quail</i>	<i>Wedding Song</i>	Total	Percentage
1- Neg. past simple	14	9	23	46%
2- Neg. present perfect	2	8	10	20%
3- Neg. present simple	2	7	9	18%
4- Neg. past perfect	4	–	4	8%
5- Neg. present conditional	2	–	2	4%
6- Neg. past perfect prog.	1	–	1	2%
7- Neg. present progressive	–	1	1	2%
Total	25	25	50	100%

As revealed by Table (4), nearly half of the translations of the Arabic construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’ are in the English negative past simple. This is due to the fact that this construction is utilized to negate the Arabic perfect form and usually signifies the negation of past actions.

- (31) a. lam ya-truk-Ø                      ?ab-ii              šay?-an (*Afrah* 33)  
           not    impf.3msg-leave-juss    father-1sg    thing-Acc  
       b. My father left me nothing. (*Wedding* 16)

According to Table (4), one fifth of the translations of the Arabic construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’ are in the English negative present perfect. This translation is employed when that Arabic construction negates the occurrence of a past action until the moment of speaking. That is why it is sometimes followed by such words and phrases like /ba9d/ ‘yet’ or /hatta l-?aan/ ‘so far’.

- (32) a. lam ?a-staTi9-Ø                      il-?ittiSaal-a  
           not    impf.1sg-be able to-juss    the-contact-Acc  
                  bi-waziir-ii              hatta    l-?aan (*Simman* 11)  
                  with-minister-1sg    till    now  
       b. I haven’t been able to contact my minister so far. (*Autumn* 17)

The third rank of occurrence in the English translations of the Arabic imperfect preceded by /lam/ is occupied by the negative present simple, as indicated in Table (4). The corpus shows that this translation is employed when the construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’ negates the occurrence of actions at or around the moment of speaking:

- (33) a. dulla-nii              9ala              rukn-in              waahid-in              lam  
           show-1sg              to              sector-Gen              one-Gen              not  
                  ya-nDah-Ø                      bi-l-fasaad              (*Simman* 21)  
                  impf.3msg-ooze-juss              with-the-corruption  
       b. Just show me a single sector that doesn’t ooze with corruption. (*Autumn* 25)

Table (4) also shows that the Arabic construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’ can be rendered into English by the negative past perfect. This occurs when that Arabic construction negates the completion of past actions:

- (34) a. ?al-9ašarat-u      l-?a9waam-u      lam  
           the-ten-Nom      the-years-Nom      not  
           ta-Sna9-Ø      min-nii      šay?-an  
           impf.3fsg-turn into-juss      of-1sg      thing-Acc  
           radii?-an      (*Simman* 30)  
           awful-Acc  
       b. Ten years hadn’t turned me into something awful. (*Autumn* 33)

In a few cases, the English negative present conditional ‘could + not + base verb’ can be utilized to translate the Arabic construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’. This is used as a variant of the negative past simple:

- (35) a. wa-laakinna-hu      lam      ya-jid-Ø      ?ahad-an  
           and-but-3msg      not      impf-find-juss      one-Acc  
           fii      ?intiZaar-i-h      (*Simman* 5)  
           on      waiting-Gen-3msg  
       b. He could see no one waiting for him. (*Autumn* 11)

The least frequent translations of the Arabic construction ‘/lam/ + imperfect’ are the English negative past perfect progressive and negative present progressive. The former is used to negate the duration of completed past actions and the latter to negate the duration of present actions, as in the following examples, respectively:

- (36) a. wa-lam      ya-ntaZir-Ø-hu      ?ahad      (*Simman* 5)  
           and-not      impf.3msg-wait-juss-3msg      one  
       b. No one had been waiting for him. (*Autumn* 11)  
       (37) a. ?a-lam      ta-hDur-Ø      tahiyyah      (*Afrah* 19)  
           interrog-not      impf.3fsg-come-juss      Tahiya  
       b. Isn’t Tahiya coming? (*Wedding* 8)

### 3.5. Translation of /kaana/ + Imperfect

Table (5) indicates the frequency of occurrence of the various translations of the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’ in the corpus selected from ‘*Autumn Quail*’ and ‘*Wedding Song*’. According to this table, nearly one third of the English translations of the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’ are in the past progressive. This is due to the fact that the basic function of this construction is to stress the continuity of past actions:

- (38) a. kaan-at      riiri      ta-jilis-u  
           be.pf-3fsg      Riri      impf.3fsg-sit-indic  
           tahta      miZallah      (*Simman* 153)  
           under      umbrella  
       b. Riri was sitting under an umbrella. (*Autumn* 139)

TABLE (5)

**English Translations of the Arabic Construction  
'/kaana/ + Imperfect' in *Autumn Quail* & *Wedding Song***

English Translation	<i>Autumn Quail</i>	<i>Wedding Song</i>	Total	Percentage
1- Past progressive	12	3	15	30%
2- Past simple	6	8	14	28%
3- used to + base verb	5	2	7	14%
4- Past perfect	2	5	7	14%
5- Present perfect	–	2	2	4%
6- Present conditional	–	2	2	4%
7- Past perfect prog.	–	1	1	2%
8- Present simple	–	1	1	2%
9- Past conditional	–	1	1	2%
Total	25	25	50	100%

The second rank of occurrence in the English translation of the Arabic construction '/kaana/ + imperfect' is filled by the past simple. This is resorted to in the case of English nonprogressive verbs:

- (39) a. kaan-a                      yu-hibb-u                      l-marhuum-a  
           be.pf-3msg      impf.3msg-love-indic      the-late-Acc  
                             waalid-a-k                      (Simman 17)  
                             father-Acc-2msg  
       b. He loved your late father.      (*Autumn* 21)

When the Arabic imperfect form of the verb is preceded by /kaana/, it can indicate a reiterative action in the past. In that case, it is rendered into English by the construction 'used to + base verb':

- (40) a. kun-tu                      ?a-shar-u                      l-layl (*Afrah* 137)  
           be.pf-1sg                  impf.1sg-stay up-indic      the-night  
       b. I used to stay up late at night. (*Wedding* 74)

Equally frequent in the English translation of '/kaana/ + imperfect' is the past perfect. This is when that Arabic construction expresses the completion of a past action:

- (41) a. wa-qadiim-an kaan-a                      yu-maaris-u  
           and-old-Acc    be.pf.-3msg                  impf.3msg-live-indic  
                             hayaat-a                  l-?a9yaan      (Simman 112)  
                             life-Acc                  the-notables  
       b. In the old days, he had lived like a notable. (*Autumn* 105)

Table (5) also shows that the construction '/kaana/ + imperfect' can be translated into English by the present perfect, when it denotes a relationship between the past and the present:

- (42) a. kun-tu                      ?a-miil-u                      ?ila    ?umm-i  
           be.pf-1sg                  impf.1sg-like-indic      for    Umm-Gen  
                             haani                      (Afrah 108)  
                             Hany  
       b. I have always had a liking for Umm Hany. (*Wedding* 58)

The English present conditional can also be employed in the translation of the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’, as indicated by Table (5). This expresses hypothetical meanings:

- (43) a. lam      ya-kun                      yu-waafi-q-u  
           not      impf.3msg-be.juss      impf.3msg-agree-indic  
                  9ala      hayaat-i-naa      (*Afrah* 45)  
                  to      life-Gen-1pl  
       b. Abbas just couldn't accept our way of life. (*Wedding* 23)

The least frequent translations of the Arabic construction ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’ are the past perfect progressive, the present simple and the past conditional. The past perfect progressive is used when that Arabic construction expresses the duration of completed past actions. The present simple is employed when the translator makes past events run at the present time. The past conditional is utilized when ‘/kaana/ + imperfect’ signifies a hypothetical past action. The three translations are represented respectively in the following examples:

- (44) a. kun-naa      na-siir-u                      fii      šaari9-i  
           be.pf-1pl      impf.1pl-walk-indic      along      street-Gen  
                  jalaal-in      fi      n-niSf-i                      T-Taani  
                  Galal-Gen      in      the-half-Gen                      the-second  
           mina      l-layl      (*Afrah* 16)  
           of      the night  
       b. We'd been walking after midnight along Shari' Galal. (*Wedding* 7)
- (45) a. kun-tu      ?a-taraddad-u                      9ala      l-masrah-i  
           be.pf-1sg      impf.1sg-visit-indic      to      the-theater-Gen  
                  bayna      l-hiin-i                      wa-l-hiin      (*Afrah* 80)  
                  between      the-time-Gen      and-the-time  
       b. I make frequent visits to the theater. (*Wedding* 42)
- (46) a. man      kaan-a                      ya-taxayyal-u                      tilka  
           who      be.pf-3msg      impf.3msg-imagine-indic                      that  
                  l-hayaat-a                      maSiir-an                      li-haliimah      (*Afrah* 121)  
                  the-life-Acc                      lot-Acc                      of-Halima  
       b. Who could have imagined that this kind of life would become the lot of ...  
           Halima? (*Wedding* 65)

### 3.6. Translation of Other Imperfect Constructions

Five imperfect constructions remain to be discussed in this section, the last two of which are not represented in the corpus:

1. /qad/ + imperfect,
2. imperative /li-/ + imperfect,
3. /maa zaala/ + imperfect,
4. conditional particle + imperfect, and
5. emphatic /la-/ + imperfect.

The corpus shows that the examples representing the first construction, “/qad/ ‘may’ + imperfect,” are mostly transferred into English by ‘may/might/would + base verb’. This is due to the fact that such a construction usually suggests the possibility, probability or uncertainty of present or future actions:



- (47) a. qad      na-jid-u                      9amal-an    fii   šarikah    (*Simman* 40)  
           may    impf.1pl-find-indic    job-Acc in    company  
       b. We might find a job in a company.    (*Autumn* 42)

The English construction 'may/might + have + past participle' can be utilized in the translation of Arabic '/qad/ + imperfect'. This is resorted to when the reference is to past possibility:

- (48) a. qad                      ta-kuun-u                      faatirat-a  
          may                      impf.3fsg-be-indic                      phlegmatic-Acc  
   T-Tab9                      (*Simman* 49)  
   the-nature  
      b. She might have been a little phlegmatic by nature.    (*Autumn* 50)

The corpus also indicates that the Arabic construction ‘/qad/ + imperfect’ can be transferred into English by ‘it is possible that’ or ‘maybe’ followed by present simple or present perfect, if it expresses present possibility:

- (49) a. qad                      ya-mrah-u  
           may                      impf.3msg-be in high spirits-indic  
                                       jawaasiis-u                      l?-injiliiz                      (*Simman 14*)  
                                       spies-Nom                      the-English
- b. It is possible that English spies are in high spirits.    (*Autumn 18*)
- (50) a. qad                      ya-kuun-u                      li-safar-i-him  
           may                      impf.3msg-be-indic                      to-journey-Gen-3mpl  
                                       9alaaqat-un                      bi-l-harakah                      (*Simman 35*)  
                                       relation-Nom                      with-the-movement
- b. Maybe their journey abroad has got something to do with the movement.  
       (*Autumn 37*)

The construction '/qad/ + imperfect' can also be rendered into English by 'it is possible that' or 'maybe' followed by past simple, if that Arabic construction expresses past possibility:

- [illegible]

The second Arabic construction, formed by the imperative prefix /li-/ ‘let’ and the imperfect, is mostly rendered into English by ‘let + base verb’. This is because such an Arabic construction basically expresses a command, a direct or an indirect request.

- (52) a. fa-l-ya-bqa                      fii    makaan-i-h         (*Afrha* 107)  
so-let-impf.3msg-stay.juss    in   place-Gen-3msg  
b. Let him stay where he is. (*Wedding* 57)

The construction ‘/li-/ + imperfect’ can also be translated by the English ‘hope + will + base verb’ when the reference is to hopes or wishes:



1983: 56). Conditional particles are like /ʔin/ 'if', /man/ 'whoever', /mahmaa/ 'whatever', /kullamaa/ 'whenever', /ʔaynamaa/ 'wherever' and /kayfamaa/ 'however'. The imperfect in the condition clause is translated by the present simple form, whereas that in the result clause should be translated by the future simple:

- (59) a. ʔin ta-ħtarim-Ø in-naas-a  
           if    impf.2msg-respect-juss   the-people-Acc  
                   ya-ħtarim-uu-k  
                   impf-respect-3mpl-2msg  
       b. If you respect people, they will respect you.

Finally, the imperfect form can imply a future action when it is used after the emphatic prefix /laamu t-tawkiid/, literally 'the /la-/ of emphasis'. This is transferred into English by 'will certainly + base verb':

- (60) a. la-ʔu-krim-a-nna  
           emph-impf.1sg-be generous to-subj-emph  
                   jiiraan-ii                   wa-ʔaSdiqaaʔ-ii  
                   neighbors-1sg           and-friends-1sg  
       b. I will certainly be generous to my neighbors and friends.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study illustrates that understanding the contextual references of each Arabic imperfect construction is essential to translating it into English. Following are the constructions in which Arabic imperfect verbs can be placed, their English translation equivalents and the contextual reference of each translation:

First, the Arabic bare imperfect form can have the following English translations in order of frequency:

- 1- present simple for regular and habitual actions, all-time truths and scientific facts
- 2- present progressive for continuous present actions
- 3- past simple for past actions
- 4- -ing participle for actions continuous at the time of others
- 5- past progressive for continuous past actions
- 6- future simple for future actions and hypothetical result clauses
- 7- present conditional for hypothetical actions
- 8- present perfect for past actions related to the present
- 9- be going to + base verb for near future actions
- 10- past perfect for completed past actions
- 11- present progressive conditional for continuous future in the past

Second, the Arabic construction 'sa-, sawfa/ + imperfect' can have the following English translations in order of their frequency:

- 1- future simple for prediction or determination of future actions
- 2- present conditional for hypothetical actions
- 3- be going to + base verb for future actions with present intention
- 4- future progressive for continuous future actions
- 5- present progressive for future arrangements or planned events
- 6- present simple for time-table or programmed events

Third, the Arabic construction 'subjunctive particle + imperfect' can have the following English translations:

- 1- infinitive in the case of '/ʔan/ or /li-/ + imperfect'
- 2- negative future simple in the case of '/lan/ + imperfect'
- 3- present conditional in the case of /li-, kay, likay, hattaa/ followed by the imperfect
- 4- present simple in the case of '/hattaa/ + imperfect'.
- 5- past simple for past actions
- 6- past conditional for hypothetical result clauses with past reference.

Fourth, the Arabic construction '/lam/ + imperfect' can be rendered into English by the following translations in order of frequency:

- 1- negative past simple for the negation of past actions
- 2- negative present perfect for the negation of the occurrence of past actions to the present moment
- 3- negative present simple for the negation of present actions
- 4- negative past perfect for the negation of the completion of past actions
- 5- negative present conditional for the negation of past actions
- 6- negative past perfect progressive for the negation of the duration of completed past actions
- 7- negative present progressive for the negation of the duration of present actions

Fifth, the Arabic construction '/kaana/ + imperfect' can have the following English translations in order of frequency:

- 1- past progressive for continuous past actions
- 2- past simple for non-continuous past actions
- 3- used to + base verb for reiterative past actions
- 4- past perfect for completed past actions
- 5- present perfect for past actions that are related to the present
- 6- present conditional for hypothetical actions
- 7- past perfect progressive for the duration of completed past actions

Sixth, the construction '/qad/ + imperfect' can be transferred into English by the following constructions:

- 1- may/might/would + base verb for present or future possibility
- 2- may/might + have + past participle for past possibility
- 3- it is possible that / maybe + present simple/present perfect for present possibility
- 4- it is possible that / maybe + past simple for past possibility

Seventh, the Arabic construction '/li-/ + imperfect' can be rendered into English by one of the following forms:

- 1- let + base verb for commands and requests
- 2- hope + will + base verb for hopes and wishes
- 3- present conditional for hypothetical actions
- 4- (May) + base verb for prayers and curses

Eighth, the construction '/maa zaala/ + imperfect' can be translated into English by the following structures:

- 1- still + present simple/present progressive to show the present duration of a past action
- 2- still + past simple to show the continuity of past actions

Ninth, the construction ‘conditional particle + imperfect’ is transferred into English by the present simple. The imperfect verb in the result clause is transferred by the future simple.

Finally, the construction ‘/la-/ + imperfect’ is rendered into English by ‘will certainly + base verb’. This expresses emphatic future actions.

APPENDIX 1

A. Consonants of Standard Arabic

Place					Dento-Alveolar						
Manner	Voicing				Non -	Emphatic					
Stop	Voiceless Voiced	b			t d	T D		k	q		ʔ
Fricative	Voiceless Voiced		f	ð	s z	S Z	š	x g		ħ ʕ	h
Affricate	Voiced						j				
Flap	Voiced				r						
Lateral	Voiced				l						
Nasal	Voiced	m			n						
Glide	Voiced	w					y				

B. Vowels of Standard Arabic

	Short			Long		
	Front		Back	Front		Back
High	i		u	ii		uu
Mid						
Low		a			aa	

APPENDIX 2

List of Symbols & Abbreviations

sg	singular	Nom	Nominative
du	dual	Acc	Accusative
pl	plural	Gen	Genitive
pf	perfective	indic	indicative
impf	imperfective	subj	subjunctive
comp	complementizer	juss	jussive
emph	emphatic	pass	passive
1	First Person	fut	future
2	Second Person	interrog	interrogative
3	Third Person	m	masculine
/ /	phonemic transcription	f	feminine
-	morpheme boundary	Ø	zero morpheme
Simman	Al-Simman wa l-Kharif (Mahfouz 1962)		
Autumn	Autumn Quail (Allen 1985)		
Afrah	Afrah Al-Qubbah (Mahfouz 1981)		
Wedding	Wedding Song (Kenny 1984)		

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