



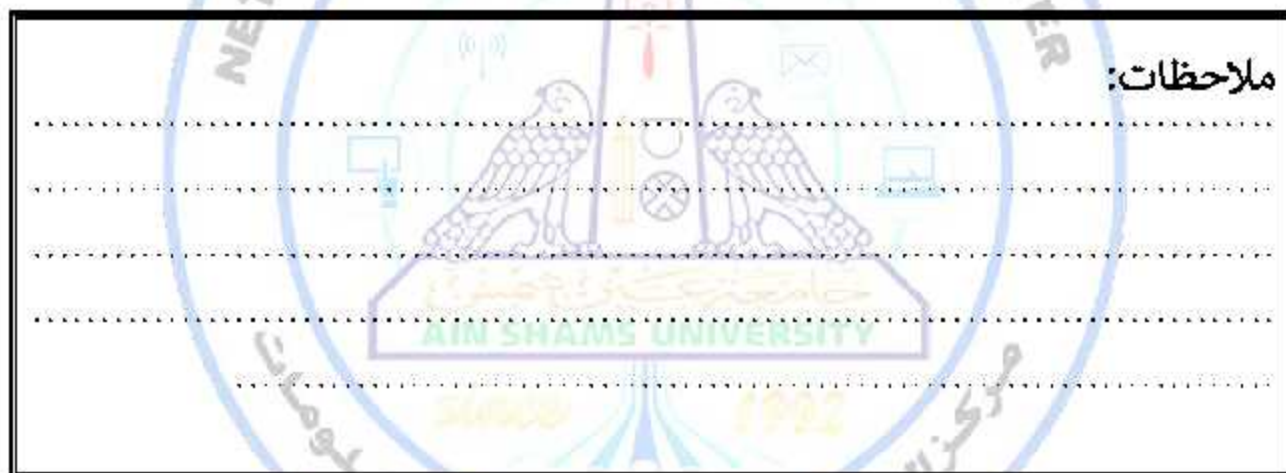
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ملاحظات:





Ain Shams University



كلية الآداب

Faculty of Arts
Department of English
Language and Literature

Imperfective Verbs in *Sūrat Al-Kahf* Within the Framework of Generative Grammar and Arabic Grammar

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Presented By
Nadia Amin Abdullah

Under the Supervision of

**Prof. Dr./ Huda Muhammad
Mahmoud Ghaly**

Professor of Linguistics
Department of English Language and
Literature
Faculty of Arts
Ain Shams University

**Prof. Dr./ Salah Ed-Din
Saleh Hassanain**

Professor of Linguistics
Department of Arabic Language and
Literature
Faculty of Arts
Beni-Suef University

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the debatable hypothesis that Arabic verbs are more Aspect-oriented than Tense-oriented. In all her research on the Arabic language, whether Qur’anic Arabic, Diriyah Arabic, or Cairene Arabic, H. Ghaly (1994-) has always advocated that the Arabic verb, whether Perfective or Imperfective, is Aspect-oriented. Hence, in this thesis, the researcher focuses on studying various Imperfective verb forms in Qur’anic Arabic, mainly from *Sūrat al-Kahf* [The Cave], to provide further evidence on the hypothesis and verify that such verbs are solely ‘timeless’ and denote no accurate time reference. In this regard, the study mainly relies on analysing different syntactic Imperfective constructions, within the framework of Chomsky’s Minimalist Program (MP) as well as the scope of traditional Arabic grammar. Following a descriptive and an analytical approach, the researcher reached a conclusion that there are three main basics that shall collaborate in order to indicate the actual timing upon which an Imperfective verb takes place: the first is to understand the context of the utterance, both linguistically and situationally; the second is to interpret the speaker’s approach regarding an utterance and his actual intended speech act, and the third is to express that ‘approach’ through morpho-syntactic devices in order to complement the meaning intended by the speaker. Thus, we can evidently say that Arabic Imperfective verbs have Aspect and not Tense nor Time, in the sense that an Imperfective verb is temporally ambiguous and has in itself no absolute indication of time. Accordingly, Imperfective verbs can denote both complete and incomplete acts, depending on the context and/or the speaker’s intended meaning behind an utterance.

Keywords:

Aspect – Tense – Time – Imperfective – Perfective – Qur’anic Arabic - *Sūrat al-Kahf* - Chomsky – Minimalism – Generative Grammar – Arabic Grammar – Syntax - Morphology

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List of Abbreviations

$\bar{C}$	C-bar
$\bar{V}$	V-bar
1	1 st person
2	2 nd person
3	3 rd person
A, ADJ	Adjective
Acc	Accusative case
ACC	Accusative particle
ADV	Adverb
AP	Adjectival phrase
AUX	Auxiliary
C	Consonant
C, COMP	Complementizer
CAUS	Particle of cause
CERT	Particle of certainty
COND	Conditional particle
CONJ	Conjunction
CONS	Particle of consequence
CP	Complementizer phrase
D	Determiner
d	Dual
DP	Determiner Phrase
E	Event Time
EMPH	Emphatic suffix
f	Feminine
FUT	Future
Gen	Genitive case
$\bar{I}$	I-bar
I, INFL	Auxiliary
IMPF	Imperfective
IMPR	Imperative
IND	Indicative mood
inf.	Infinitive
INTG	Interrogative particle
IP	Auxiliary phrase
JUS	Jussive
LF	Logical form representation

Little <i>pro</i>	Covert nominative-case pronoun
LOC	Location adverb
m	Masculine
m-case	Morphological nominal case
MP	Minimalist Program
m-vc	Morphological verbal case
N	Noun
NCase	Nominal case
NEG	Negation particle
nO	Null object
Nom	Nominative case
NP	Noun phrase
nV	Null verb
O	Object
Op	Null yes-no interrogative operator
p	Plural
P	Preposition
Pass	Passive
PERF	Perfective
PN	Proper noun
PP	Prepositional phrase
PRO	Covert null-case pronoun
PROHB	Prohibition particle
PRON	Pronoun
PROP	Particle of probability
PRP	Particle of purpose
Q	Quantifier
QP	Quantifier phrase
R	Reference time
REL	Relative pronoun
REM	Resumption particle
RES	Restriction particle
s	Singular
S	Subject, Speech time

SUB.CONJ	Subordinating conjunction
SUBJ	Subjunctive mood
SUP	Supplemental particle
T	time adverb
TCase	Temporal case

UG	Universal Grammar
V	Verb, Vowel
VC	Verbal case
VOC	Vocative particle
VP	Verb phrase

Phonemic Notation of the Arabic Language

i) Consonants

Arabic Letter	Transcription Symbol
أ	ʔ
ب	b
ت	t
ث	θ
ج	ʒ
ح	ħ
خ	χ
د	d
ذ	ð
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	ʃ
ص	ʂ
ض	ɖ
ط	ʈ
ظ	ḏ
ع	ʕ
غ	ɣ
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
هـ	h
و	w
ي	y

ii) Vowels

Arabic Letter	Phonetic Symbol	IPA ¹ Symbol
ـَ	a	Short vowel diacritic [a]
ـِ	i	Short vowel diacritic [i]
ـُ	u	Short vowel diacritic [u]
ـَٔ	∅	Inflectional absence in jussive mood
ـَٓ	-an	Accusative nunation
ـِٓ	-in	Genitive nunation
ـُٓ	-un	Nominative nunation
ا	ā	Long vowel [a:]
ي	ī	Long vowel [i:]
و	ū	Long vowel [u:]
اي	ay	Diphthong [aɪ]
او	aw	Diphthong [aʊ]

¹ IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Introduction

The Ever-Glorious Qur'ān employs many stylistic, linguistic, and rhetorical features that result in an effective and sublime style. This use of linguistic and rhetorical features challenges the readers, especially when trying to understand such artistic devices as referring to the present time using the Perfective and referring to the past time using the Imperfective.

In his book *Taʿwīl Mushkil Al-Qur'ān* [The Exegesis of the Controversial Verses in the Holy Qur'ān], Ibn Qutaybah said:

"وإنما يعرف «فضل القرآن» من كثرة نظره، واتسع علمه، وفهم مذاهب العرب واقتنائها في الأساليب، وما خص الله به لغتنا دون جميع اللغات؛ فإنه ليس في جميع الأمم أمة أوتيت من الغارضة، والبيان، واتساع المجال، ما أوتيته العرب خصيصاً من الله"

[Who recognize 'the virtue of the Qur'an' are those who have extended awareness, expanded knowledge, and have perceived the doctrines of Arabs and their perfection of styles, and realized what God has blessed our language solely. There is no nation among all nations that has such beauty of stylistic devices and wider scope of language use as the Arab nation has.]

(Ibn Qutaybah, 2007: 17)

In the chapter '*Muxālafat ḍāhiri al-lafḍi maʿnāh*' [The Violation of the Apparent Word Meaning], Ibn Qutaybah (2007: 180) mentions that using the Perfective to describe the present time and using the Imperfective to describe the past time is of the Arabs' speech doctrines. Thus, Arabs have widened the use of the language by using the verb *faʿala* [he did/he has done] in contexts where the action has not been completed yet; and using verbs like *yafʿalu* [he does/he is doing] in describing actions that have been already completed.

1.1. Key Objectives

The main goal behind my thesis is to:

- provide a review of the literature on what linguists have said about the Imperfective verb form;
- define the Imperfective, and explain its affixes and its different mood inflections;
- present the function of context, modality, and morpho-syntactic devices in determining the aspectual connotation of an utterance and its denoted time reference; and
- analyse different Imperfective syntactic constructions mentioned in *Sūrat al-Kahf* [The Cave].

1.2. Research Questions

The main research questions tackled in the paper are:

- a) How do linguists differentiate between the concepts of Aspect and Tense?
- b) How do linguists differentiate between the Perfective and the Imperfective?
- c) What are Imperfective mood inflections?
- d) How can an Imperfective verb form have different indications of time?
- e) Do modality and particles play a role in defining the actual time reference of an Imperfective verb?

1.3. Research Methodology

The study is mainly Qur'anic research that bases its main activity on collecting and examining data from the Ever-Glorious Qur'ān, mainly *Sūrat al-Kahf* [The Cave], which is the primary source. Other main sources used are books, academic research papers, and other relevant articles and journals.

The research methodology followed in the study is more qualitative than quantitative, depending on interpreting both the linguistic and the situational context of different Imperfective constructions mentioned in the *sūrah*.

The approach followed is a descriptive-analytical approach, in which the researcher has worked on describing the aspectual connotation of some of the Imperfective constructions mentioned in the *sūrah* as well as analysing their different syntactic constructions, within the framework of Chomsky's Minimalist Program (MP) as well as the scope of Arabic grammar.

1.4. The Language Under Study

English and Arabic belong to two different language families; whereas English is an Indo-European language, Arabic is one of the largest Semitic languages (Thackston, 2000). Although English and Arabic are two distinctive languages, they both share some intrinsic fundamental features, and this what Chomsky (1975) has introduced in his theory of 'Universal Grammar' (UG) that all human languages share similarities in their principles (i.e., general essential rules) and differences in their parameters (i.e., variables).

This research mainly focuses on the Arabic language as one of the most important and widespread languages in the world, by virtue of being spoken by almost 420 million people around the world, making it the fifth most spoken language (according to

*Istizada*², 2020). Today, the Arab world is composed of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, where Arabic is an official language. Various countries also consider Arabic as a co-official language or have large Arabic-speaking communities.

Conventionally, the Arabic language is classified into three varieties: Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and Colloquial Arabic. Classical Arabic was commonly used in the pre-Islamic period, but it is currently seen in the language of the Holy Qur'ān, prophetic hadiths, and some traditional books. Modern Standard Arabic is the variety of Arabic used in newspapers, TV news, and in most formal speech. As for Colloquial Arabic, it is the informal spoken language used by people in their everyday communication (Owens, 2006).

The first book to be revealed and written down in pure Classical Arabic was the Holy Qur'ān. It is the one that has first established Arabic as a written language. The Qur'anic text is very rich in its vocabulary, morphology as well as its syntactic structures. It is unique in its style and eloquence, which makes it completely different from any other Classical Arabic text. Though it encompasses certain lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features that might have become archaic in time, the language of the Holy Qur'ān has laid down the bases of the Arabic linguistic theories and Arabic grammar that Arabs are using nowadays.

1.5. Significance of the Study

There are several opinions and discussions made by many linguists about the Imperfective verb form and how it is morphologically realized through affixation and mood inflections. Meanwhile, they tackled the fact that Imperfective verbs can indicate different time references such as the past, the present, and the future; but they did not exert much effort in explaining and analysing other different syntactic constructions and semantic contexts in which an Imperfective verb can be used. From here comes the idea behind my dissertation, which is to dig in more on the employment of the Imperfective verb in different contexts and explore different syntactic constructions where it can be used.

Hence, the main aim of this thesis is to analyse several Imperfective constructions in *Sūrat al-Kahf* at various levels of analysis (i.e., morphologically, syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically). On a morphological level, it studies the internal structure and the formation rules of an Imperfective verb form as well as its inflectional morphology. On a syntactic level, the study examines different syntactic constructions for an Imperfective verb and illustrates their representations in terms of syntactic derivations and syntactic tree-diagrams within the framework of Chomsky's Minimalist Program. On

²<http://istizada.com/complete-list-of-arabic-speaking-countries-2014/>

a semantic level, the study works on analysing the context of the utterance, both linguistically and situationally, and examining how the context might alter the aspectual connotation of the Imperfective and their modify its denoted time-reference. However, on a pragmatic level, the study tackles the concept of ‘modality,’ and looks for the pragmatic interpretations of Imperfective mood inflections, and how they might determine the intended speech act behind an utterance as well as the speaker’s attitude or psychological behaviour.

1.6. Chapterisation

This research work is composed of five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction that brings out the significance of the study, the main objectives, the tackled research questions, the methodology used in the data collection, and a brief about the study findings.

Chapter Two provides a literature review about the difference between the notions of Tense and Aspect then moves on to indicate the difference between both the Perfective and the Imperfective, based on some linguists such as Comrie, Benmamoun, Socin and others.

Chapter Three introduces the study’s theoretical framework by giving a glimpse about the Arabic verbal morphology in general then moves on to discuss the morphological form of Imperfective verbs and explains different Imperfective mood inflections.

Chapter Four tackles various syntactic derivations for different Imperfective constructions and works on confirming the fact that the Minimalist Program is adequate in analysing different constructions in Standard Arabic (SA) and the language of the Qur’ān. Finally, chapter Five outlines the conclusion through listing the main findings of the study.

1.7. About *Sūrat al-Kahf* [The Cave]

Sūrat al-Kahf [The Cave] is the 18th chapter in the Qur’ān. It was revealed in Makkah مكة and was named after the story of the dwellers of the cave. It describes for humankind the heavenly world we could have had if they had believed in the existence of Allah and accepted Muhammad (PBUH) as Allah’s final Prophet. Yet, they have not, and history ended in the exact opposite way, i.e., with a world in which hell awaits those who have disbelieved in the Oneness of Allah and rejected Muhammad (PBUH), or who have accepted him but went on to betray him when they were tested. This is indicated in the *sūrah* in the following verse:

﴿وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَرْضًا﴾ الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غَطَاءٍ عَنْ ذِكْرِي وَكَانُوا لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَمْعًا³
wa-ṣaraḍnā žahannama yawmaʔiḍin lil kāfirīna ṣarḍan ﴿al-laḍīna kānat ʔaṣyunuhum
fī ʔiṭāʔin ṣan ḍikrī wa-kānū lā yastaʔīṣūna samṣan

[And We shall present Hell that day for Unbelievers to see, all spread out,
 (Unbelievers) whose eyes had been under a veil from Remembrance of Me, and who
 had been unable even to hear.]
 (Sahīh International)

1.8. The Narrative Technique in the *Sūrah*

A narrative technique is a writing style that presents a series of connected events in a logical sequence. It is mainly used in telling stories since it provides deeper meaning for the reader and helps them use their imagination to visualize different situations. The narrative technique in *Sūrat al-Kahf* is clearly obvious and predominant, in which there are about four main stories narrated in the *sūrah*. At the very beginning comes the story of the dwellers of the Cave, and the story of the two gardens, then it moves on to narrate the story of *Mūsā* [Moses] along with *Al-Khiḍr* [Khidr], and finally tells the story of *ḍul-Qarnayn* [Dhul-Qarnayn]. Almost all the verses of the *sūrah* are mainly talking about these stories, and most of the remaining verses are just commenting on the events that took place throughout the stories.

1.8.1. The Story of the Dwellers of the Cave

This is a story of a few young men who have lived in a disbelieving town. They decided to migrate for the sake of Allah, as it was difficult for them to preserve their faith. They feared execution or conversion to disbelief. They fled and retreated into a cave. Then, they had invoked Allah for guidance and assistance, Who responded to their sincere prayers and rewarded them with mercy. They were put into a deep sleep for 309 lunar years, and when they woke up, they found that the entire village had embraced Islam.

1.8.2. The Story of the Two Gardens

This story highlights a potential trap of wealth that arrogant people fall into, discarding their faith. Allah gives an example of two men: one is rich and blessed with two gardens and plentiful fruit, whereas the other is a poor Muslim. The wealthy man denied the Hereafter, as he was charmed with this world and its adornments. He proudly stated that if the Hour occurred, he would be provided with an even better share since he is dear to Allah. The poor believer warned him of Allah's punishment; but eventually, the

³*sūrat al-kahf* [The Cave]: verse (18: 100-101)