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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PAST SIMPLE IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC: USAGE, SIMILARITIES, AND DIFFERENCES

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Abstract: This paper presents a comparative analysis of the Past Simple tense in English and Arabic. Both languages utilize specific grammatical structures to express actions completed in the past; however, the nuances and application of these structures differ significantly. By examining the usage, similarities, and differences in the application of the Past Simple tense in both languages, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how past events are articulated in English and Arabic, and how these differences impact language learning and translation.

Keywords: Past Simple, English, Arabic, Comparative Analysis, Grammar, Language Usage, Tense, Linguistics

Introduction:

Tense plays a crucial role in both English and Arabic grammar, dictating how events are temporally anchored in discourse. The Past Simple tense, which is used to describe actions that have been completed at a definite point in the past, is a fundamental aspect of both languages. Despite the common function of conveying past actions, the linguistic approaches taken by English and Arabic differ in structure, usage, and contextual application. This paper aims to explore these differences and similarities, providing insights that can benefit students of both languages and linguists interested in cross-linguistic studies.

Main Part:

1. Explanation of Past Simple Tense in English and Arabic

1.1 English Past Simple Tense:

The Past Simple tense in English is a fundamental grammatical structure used to describe actions or events that were completed at a specific point in the past. It is one of the most straightforward tenses in English, both in terms of its formation and its usage.

- **Formation**: The formation of the Past Simple tense in English is relatively simple. For regular verbs, it involves adding the suffix "-ed" to the base form of the verb. For example, the verb "walk" becomes "walked," and "jump" becomes "jumped." However, English also has a large number of irregular verbs, which do not follow this pattern. These irregular verbs require memorization, as they change form in unpredictable ways. For example, the verb "go" becomes "went," and "see" becomes "saw" in the past simple form.

- **Usage**: The Past Simple tense is used to describe actions that have been completed in the past and are not connected to the present. Time expressions such as "yesterday," "last week," "in 1990," or "an hour ago" are often used to indicate when the action occurred. The tense is also

employed in storytelling or recounting events, where it serves to move the narrative forward by describing a sequence of actions. For example, "She went to the market, bought some fruit, and returned home."

- **Examples:**

  - "He finished his homework last night."

  - "They visited Paris in 2018."

  - "I saw a movie yesterday."

1.2 Arabic Past Simple Tense:

The Arabic equivalent of the Past Simple tense is known as "الفعل الماضي" (al-fi'l al-maadi), which directly translates to "the past verb." The Past Simple tense in Arabic is more complex than its English counterpart due to the inflectional nature of Arabic grammar, where verbs are modified according to tense, gender, number, and person.

- **Formation**: Unlike English, where verb conjugation in the past is relatively uniform, Arabic verbs are derived from roots, typically consisting of three consonants. The pattern applied to these roots determines the meaning and tense of the verb. For example, the root "كتب" (k-t-b) can be used to form "كتب" (kataba), meaning "he wrote," or "كتبت" (katabat), meaning "she wrote." The conjugation varies depending on the subject's gender and number (singular, dual, or plural). For instance:

  - Singular Masculine: "كتب" (kataba) - He wrote

  - Singular Feminine: "كتبت" (katabat) - She wrote

  - Plural Masculine: "كتبوا" (katabū) - They wrote (masculine)

  - Plural Feminine: "كتبن" (katabna) - They wrote (feminine)

- **Usage:** Arabic uses the Past Simple tense to describe completed actions in the past. Similar to English, it can describe events at a specific point in time, but Arabic often relies more on context rather than explicit time expressions. The tense also plays a crucial role in Arabic storytelling, where it sets the stage for narratives, similar to English. Furthermore, Arabic verbs in the past tense can carry aspectual meanings, indicating whether an action was completed, continuous, or repeated.

- **Examples**:

  - "كتب الطالب الدرس" (kataba al-tālib al-dars) - The student wrote the lesson.

  - "ذهبثُ إلى المدرسة" (dhahabat ilā al-madrasah) - She went to school.

  - "أكلوا العشاء في المنزل" (akalū al-ʿashāʾ fī al-manzil) - They ate dinner at home.

2. Usage of Past Simple Tense

2.1 Usage in English:

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The Past Simple tense is primarily used to describe actions that have been completed at a specific time in the past. It is essential in constructing sentences that narrate past events, describe habitual actions in the past, or state facts about the past.

- **Specific Past Events**: The Past Simple is commonly used to indicate a specific event that occurred at a particular time in the past. The action is seen as finished and not connected to the present. For example:

  - "I visited my grandparents last weekend."

  - "They moved to Canada in 2015."

- **Habitual Actions in the Past**: The Past Simple can also describe actions that were habitual or repeated regularly in the past but no longer occur. For example:

  - "When I was a child, I played soccer every day."

  - "She always walked to school when she lived in the city."

- **Past Facts or Generalizations:** This tense is used to state facts or generalizations about the past, often in a historical or biographical context. For example:

  - "The Wright brothers invented the airplane."

  - "Einstein developed the theory of relativity."

2.2 Usage in Arabic:

In Arabic, the Past Simple tense (الفعل الماضي) is similarly used to describe actions that have been completed in the past. However, its application can be more nuanced, especially given the rich context that often accompanies Arabic discourse.

- **Specific Past Events**: Just like in English, the Arabic Past Simple is used to describe actions that occurred at a particular moment in the past. However, Arabic does not always require a specific time expression to accompany the verb, as the context often makes the timing clear. For example:

  - "زارَ محمد مكة" (zāra Muhammad Makkah) - Muhammad visited Mecca.

  - "ذهبْتُ إلى السوق أمس" (dhahabtu ilā al-sūq ams) - I went to the market yesterday.

- **Narrative Function**: In storytelling, Arabic heavily relies on the Past Simple to set the sequence of events. The verbs are inflected to match the subject's gender and number, which adds depth to the narrative. For example:

  - "كانَ هناكَ رجلٌ فقيرٌ" (kāna hunāka rajulun faqīrun) - There was a poor man.

  - "أحبّ الأمير الفتاةَ الجميلةَ" (aḥabba al-amīr al-fatāt al-jamīlah) - The prince loved the beautiful girl.

- **Aspectual Nuances**: In Arabic, the Past Simple tense can sometimes carry aspectual meanings, indicating not just that an action was completed, but also how it was completed. For instance, the

verb can imply whether the action was a one-time event, repeated, or continuous, depending on the context and accompanying words. For example:

- "كان يقرأ كلّ يوم" (kāna yaqraʾu kulla yawm) - He used to read every day (indicating habitual past action).

3. Similarities between English and Arabic Past Simple Tense

- Definiteness of Time: Both English and Arabic use the Past Simple tense to refer to actions completed at a specific time in the past.

- Narrative Function: In both languages, the Past Simple tense is a key element in storytelling, used to advance the narrative by describing successive actions.

- Basic Concept of Completion: The basic function of the Past Simple tense—to indicate completed actions—is shared between English and Arabic.

4. Differences between English and Arabic Past Simple Tense

- Verb Conjugation: English relies on a simpler system of regular and irregular verb forms, whereas Arabic verb conjugation is more complex, involving changes based on the subject's gender and number.

- Use of Time Expressions: English often requires explicit time expressions to clarify when an action occurred, while Arabic can rely on context without needing an explicit time marker.

- Aspectual Nuances: In Arabic, the Past Simple tense can also imply the completion or continuity of an action, which is less commonly conveyed by the English Past Simple.

Conclusion:

The comparative analysis of the Past Simple tense in English and Arabic reveals both significant similarities and distinct differences. While both languages use this tense to describe actions completed in the past, the methods of conjugation, the need for time expressions, and the aspectual nuances vary. Understanding these differences is crucial for language learners, translators, and linguists, as it deepens their grasp of how each language structures past events and how these structures influence communication and interpretation.

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