

The Translation of English past perfect into Arabic in the Light of The old Man and The Sea

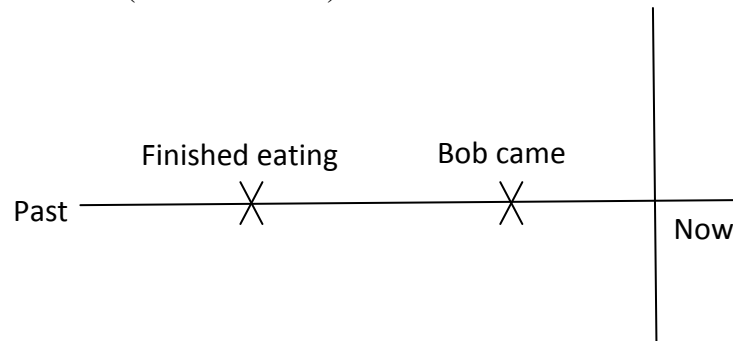
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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to check the translation of English past perfect into Arabic. This tense is somehow problematic forming a linguistic gap because it has no Arabic correspondent, the matter that imposes on the translator to put or compose certain formula that properly conveys both the tense and the aspect of past perfect. For this purpose I took Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea and its translation done by Monir Balbaki in order to examine and study how the translator dealt with it.*

Key words: past perfect, translation, kan, kan qad, gap.

INTRODUCTION

Past perfect is one of the English tenses that gives certain meaning about past events. This tense is used “to show that something had already happened before this time”, (Murphy 1993:44) For example “I had eaten when Bob came” (Azar 1992:189).



In this example, it is seen that there are two actions in the past, eating and coming, where one eating is done and finished before the other coming. In other words, when Bob came, in the past, the speaker had finished and completed the action of eating, which is also in the past.

Thus past perfect shows relation between past events where past perfect is used with the first one.

In Arabic such a meaning cannot be represented according to a systematic, specific formula like that of the past, the present and the future which are the three main Arabic tenses.

Since the translator cannot leave such an important tense untranslated, he must find a way to cope with it.

The Study

To examine how translators cope with past perfect and to see the strategies they follow in handing this gap, I took Hemingway's The old Man and the Sea and one of its translations made by Monir Balbaki. I carefully observed the cases and see how he translated them one by one, and then I came to these generalizations:

1. There are 97 past perfect cases in the novel.
2. These cases are translated through 4 ways: kan Qad+Past tense, Kan+present tense, past tense and Qad+past tense.

The way	Number
Kan Qad +past tense	23
Kan +present tense	5
Past tense	42
Qad+past tense	12
Other cases	14

The Translation into kan Qad +past tense

As shown in the table, 23 cases of past perfect in the novel are translated by the use of kan Qad +past tense. This formula tends to be the main way- generally- to render the English past perfect into Arabic as many comparative linguistics books show.

In Arabic, kan Qad+past tense means before an action there was another, Kan Qad is used with the first action. “/ka:na/ marks the past and /qud/marks the perfective” (Alkuli, 1999:45).

For example the sentence;

كان قد درس المشروع جيداً قبل أن يبدأ بتنفيذه (he had studied the project very well before he started it.)

Indicates, the same meaning that the past perfect does by the use of kan qad darasa as the equivalent to he had studied.

Similarly, the translator rendered “The Old man had taught the boy- to fish”. (Hemingway:6:8), which means that before this moment, the old man and the boy are at, the old man taught the boy fishing. Sometimes, the use of kan qad+ past tense is optional when coordinating conjunctions exist. For illustration, I mention this example “The breeze had risen steadily and was blowing strongly now.” (Hemingway: 104) was rendered into:

" وكانت الريح قد هبت رخاء، بادئ الأمر ثم أخذت في الاشداد فهي الآن قوية
عاصفة" (Balbaki: 122)

Here, Balbaki used the Arabic coordinating conjunction (ثم) ,thomma,which means then and which indicates the sequence of actions.

The translation in to Kan + present tense.

A second way the translation used is Kan +present tense. In some cases, the context imposes the use of this formula because the past perfect does

not reflect the same meaning. For example, in translating “he had sung when he was by himself in the old day”

وكان في الأيام الخالية يعني وهو منفرد (Baklbki: 38) to (Hemingway: 31).

The translator did fine because in this sentence there is no action happened before another, Instead the author is giving a piece of information about this old man, In other words, his doing an event during a certain period of time. To clarify, the translator used *kan yoghani* i.e *kan* + present simple , in his rendition of *had sung* in order to indicate that the action of singing did not happen for once or did not happen before another action but it took a period of time- the old days- a meaning which is not conveyed by *kan* + past which indicates a finished action.

The translation into the past tense.

In some cases, the simple past tense is used as a translation equivalent of past perfect. In these cases, the event expressed is not related to another, but it means an event that occurred in the past without showing any relation with any later event.

To clarify, I will present the following example from the novel.

“But they did not show it and they spoke politely about the current and the depths they had drifted their lines at and the steady good weather and of what they had seen.” (Hemingway 6-7). In his translation, Balbaki rendered both *had drifted*” and “*had seen*” to:

" التي فذفوا بخيوطهم اليها" " عما شاهدوه" (9)

As we can see from this example, the translator rendered the two verbs to Arabic past tense because they are events that happened sometime in the past and they are not related to another event that drifting or seeing happened before.

In other cases, the translator used (*كما*) , *kama*, to give sequence of actions because “*كما*” gives the implication of comparing one action to another happened previously, Balbaki used the Arabic past tense in rendering the past perfect occurred in such cases. For example “They came. But they did not come as the Mako had come.” (Hemingway: 93) is translated to

" وأقبلا، ولكنهما لم يقبلا كما أقبلا القرش الأول – الـ" ماکو" (Balbaki:109).

' Here it is obvious that the Mako came before their coming.

The translation into Qad +past tense.

As I went through studying the novel and its translation, I found some cases where past perfect is translated to Qad+ past tense.

In Arabic, the combination of qad and past tense means certainty and that the action did happen.

In this example from the novel:

“He could see the fish and he had only to look at his hands and feel his back against the stem to know that this had truly happened and was not a dream: “(84),

Balbaki rendered had happened “into

وكان في ميسوره أن يرى السمكة، وكان بحسبه أن ينظر الى يديه ويتحسس ظهره بمؤخر الزورق لكي يدرك أن ذلك قد وقع فعلاً، ولم يكن حلاً من الأحلام " (100)

Here, he used the Arabic qad+ past tense to emphasis the certainty of the event because the word “truly” shows and indicates that the event did happen really.

Other ways

Other ways in dealing with past perfect in addition to the 4 strategies discussed above, I found nearly 14 cases where the translator used different ways to handle the translation of past perfect. I will discuss only 3 of them due to space limitation.

One of these ways is the use of a noun instead of using a verb. This is the way he used when the action itself is more important than the tense or the time it happened at.

Thus, we saw Balbaki rendered “he had won it quite easily since he had broken the confidence of the Negro.” (Hemingway: 59) into

" وكسب الشيخ الجولة في كثير من اليسر بعد أو وفق الى تحطيم معنوية الزنجي " (71)

Here, the verb “had broken” translated into (تحطيم) which is breaking or damaging i.e. a noun. To prove this point, we can rewrite the English sentence as: because of winning, the negro’s confidence was broken, thus, the broken confidence is the result of the winning of the old man. Here, we don’t give great importance or significant on the time but on the action itself.

Another way used for past perfect rendition is kan +adjective which carries the meaning of exaggeration known in Arabic as " صيغة المبالغة " .

To clarify, Balbaki rendered “But his left hand had always been a traitor” into

" ولكن يده اليسرى كان خؤونا ابداً "

The adjective (خؤونا) which is traitor, means that his hand always made him failing, so he was used to be failed by his left hand which did not obey him at all.

Sometimes, we found Balbaki ignoring the past perfect tense maybe because of his wanting to focus on the action itself. So, he translated “Then when he had seen the fish come out of the water. . .before he feel”(Hemingway: 84) to

" حتى اذا انطلق السيف من أعماق الماء ... قبل أن يسقط في اللجة " (100)

The verb “had seen” was not rendered at all because, I think, Balbaki wanted to focus on the action of the coming out of the fish rather than his seeing it. There is no need to mention the verb had seen because it neither decreases nor increases the meaning of the sentence.

Conclusion

Thanks to its flexibility, Arabic can easily capture and represent the past perfect, which expresses an action that is completed, done and finished before another one or before a certain point in the past, although it-Arabic language — does not have a specific equivalent that can represent the meaning of the past perfect. The translator, using his understanding, competence and intelligence can create many solutions to cope with this gap.

Monir Balbaki in his translation of Hemingway’s master piece **The Old Man and the Sea**, found many strategies to bridge this gap. He used kan qad+; past tense, kan+ present tense and qad +past tense, in addition to many other individual ways.

As shown in the previous discussion, (kan qad + past tense)is the way used generally to express the Arabic equivalent of the past perfect, but some times and due to the context, other ways can be used such as qan +past tense or the past tense alone or even an adjective or a noun.

After this study I honestly can assert that Balbaki was very successful in his work and his translation of this problematic tense.

Appendix

كان قد + الماضي Kan qad+ past tense	صيغة الماضي Past tense	كان + المضارع Kan qad +present	قد + الماضي Qad+past tense	حالات أخرى other
Had gone كان قد سلخ	Had told قال	Had hoped كان يرجو	Had sold قد باعها	After the dropped أن أنقلب غاضباً
Had taught كان قد علم	Had drifted قذفوا	Had sung كان يغني	Had slowed قد تباطأت	Had first star يخاطب نفسه
Had taken كانوا قد حملوا	Had seen شاهدوا	Had considered كان يؤمن	Had turned قد اتجهت	Had probed started يتكلم
Had brought كان قد أتى	Had Backed انقلبت	Had passed كان يتعدى	Had seen قد رأى	Had found الى ان يستند
Had eaten كانا قد تناولنا	Had never gone لم يعثرهما الوهن قط	Had known كان يتوقع	Had sung لقد غنى	Had risen قدمت الشمس
Had given كان قد أعطاه	Had attained تعود		Had tried ولقد حاول	Had made كان اعشاب اللحم
Had pushed كان قد ضغط	Had taken down انزعها		Had felt فقد استشعر	Had not even see him go وفق الى ان يراه يطير
Had taken كان قد رفع	Had left فارقة		Had turned قد اتجهت	Had cut الى انتزاع
Had cut كان قد قطعها	Had hooked أوقعها		Had happened قد وقع	Had held ممسكة به
Had seen كان قد رأى	Had hooked القمها الطعم		Had backed قد ارتدت	Had ever seen له أن يراها
Had uncramped كان قد أذهب عنها	Had stayed أقامت		Had seen لقد رأى	That he had proved it اثباته ذلك
Had looked at the arms وكان هو قدرنا	Had dried حفت		Had been there لقد قصد الى هناك	Had seen
Had gone وكان قد سلفا	Had chosen اختارت			Had broken
Had asked وكانوا قد طالبوا	Had gaffed جذب			Had been traitor
Had been up وكان قد طلع	Had caught صادوا			

Had risen كانت قد ارتفعت	Had gone انصرف			
Had rigged وكان قد أعد	Had severed بترهما			
Had turned وكان قد حال	Had taken وقعت			
Had come up وكان قد انطلق	Had played لعب			
Had sailed وكان قد	Had unleashed افرج			
Had gone down وكانت جنحت	Had finished أنهى			
Had been in وكان قد انقض	Had called خلع			
Had risen وكانت الريح قد هبت	Had made أحدثه			

Had been ليثت
Had worried أقلقته
Had been on the point of felling استشعر
Had summoned حشد مما
Had eaten التهم
Had come up غادر
Had settled تشككت
Had dispersed تبددت
Had cut اقتطعه
Had identified قادر ك
Had come أقبل
Had taken نهشه
Had checked فحص
Had come أقبل
Had slept استرسل
Had gone back غرق
Had gone اجتاز
Had happened ما حدث

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