



# English past progressive aspect in Arabic translation: Theoretical and textual considerations

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DOI: 10.12807/ti.115202.2023.a03

**Abstract:** This paper deals with the translation of the English past progressive into Arabic by examining both theoretical and textual considerations. First, it shows how the English aspect formally corresponds to the auxiliary verb كان ‘was’ plus the simple present (SP) form or the active participle (AP) form. Second, it is argued that the choice between the SP and the AP is subject to several grammatical and semantic constraints on Arabic verbs: [+/- transitive], [+/- telic], [+/- completed], and [+/- manner of motion]. Third, the textual data (70 examples) drawn from two existing Arabic translations of *Leonardo DaVinci* by Walter Isaacs (2017) and *Hard Choices* by Hillary Clinton (2014) indicates that several translation procedures are employed to render the English past progressive, mainly including the past simple (48.57%), present simple (22.85%), formal correspondence (18.57%), and lexicalizing (7.14%). Finally, the qualitative analysis reveals that the progressiveness, emphasis, and dramatization that the English past progressive aspect may communicate are seriously compromised in Arabic translation. While there may be cases where some mismatches between English and Arabic verbs exist in terms of progressiveness which may call for the use of past simple or lexicalizing, the formal correspondence procedure is claimed to be the most valid and appropriate for capturing the functions of the English past progressive.

**Keywords:** English; Arabic; translation; translation procedure; progressiveness; aspect.

## 1. Introduction

*Tense* is understood to be an indicator of time reference or what Comrie (1985, p. 6) calls “the grammaticalization of location in time”. *Aspect*, by contrast, is taken to be an indicator of the type of temporal duration within a certain tense or “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation” (Comrie, 1976, p. 3). Both tense and aspect play an important role in English and Arabic grammars. In reference to tense, both grammars have two types of distinction: a three-way distinction involving *present*, *past* and *future* or, more economically, a two-way distinction involving *past* and *non-past* acts (Comrie, 1985; Dahl, 1985). As for Aspect, the issue becomes more complicated because one-to-one correspondence may not be available (for more details on Tense and Aspect, see (Wright, 1967; Radwan, 1975; Shamma, 1978; Dahl, 1985; Eisele, 1990; Gadalla, 2006a & 2006b; Mansour, 2011; Obeidat, 2014; Comrie, 1976 & 1985; Fleischman, 1990; Jarvie, 1993; Kerstens, Ruys & Zwarts, 2001; Declerck, 2006; Michaelis, 2006).

To explain, in few cases, English marks an aspect formally by means of a grammatical marker, whereas Arabic does this contextually. In such cases, a level shift (Catford 1965) or an instance of transposition (Newmark 1988) is called for. For example, the English present progressive ‘Mary is studying in her room’ is marked formally for this aspect (i.e., the auxiliary ‘be’ plus the ‘-ing’ on the main verb), whereas the corresponding Standard Arabic sentence *تدرس ماري في غرفتها* [study Mary in her room] is contextually marked to indicate this aspect, that is, the reader has to examine the context of the utterance in order to see whether the reference is to the present habitual aspect or the present progressive aspect. In this way, a formal shift from the present progressive aspect in English to the present habitual aspect in Arabic is made, a shift that leaves it to the immediate context of utterance to distinguish between the two aspects in Arabic, which may include lexicalizing the Arabic progressive aspect by adding *الآن* ‘now’, viz. *تدرس ماري في الآن* [study Mary in her room now] ‘Mary is studying in her room now’ (for more details, see Ghazala 2012; Al-Khawalda and Al-Oliemat, 2014).

In other few cases, an aspect that exists in English may completely be missing in Arabic. For example, English distinguishes between the simple past and the present perfect which both denote past acts mainly to indicate whether the act occurs at a specific time in the past (e.g., Mary insulted the manager two days ago) or is left unspecified (Mary has insulted the manager many times). Arabic, on the other hand, merges these two aspects by referring to the past activity using the simple past with *قد qad* (a discourse marker that is prefixed with the particles *la-*, *fa-*, and *wa-* in connected discourse, e.g. *لقد أساءت ماري إلى المدير قبل يومين* [*laqad* insulted Mary to the-manager before two days] ‘Mary insulted the manager two days ago’ or the simple past without *qad*, e.g. *أساءت ماري إلى المدير قبل يومين* [insulted Mary to the-manager before two days] ‘Mary insulted the manager two days ago’. Farghal (2019) shows that the choice between Arabic simple past aspect with *qad* and without *qad* is discursively governed, i.e. the choice is motivated by the flow of discourse rather than by grammar (aspect) or semantics. That is, the author/translator’s decision on this is solely guided by securing smoothness/cohesiveness of discourse rather than any other factors.

In some cases, however, we find formal (grammatical) correspondence between an English aspect and an Arabic aspect, among which the past progressive is a clear example (For more details, see Fayyad (1997, cited in Gadalla 2006 and Farghal’s (2019) critique of both of them). Both languages grammaticalize the aspect in which some activity was in progress in the past. English uses a past form of the auxiliary ‘be’ plus ‘-ing’ on the main verb (e.g., Mary was studying in her room), while Arabic employs a past form of the copula, e.g. *كان* ‘was/were’ followed by the simple present form *صيغة المضارع البسيط* [form the-present the-simple] of the main verb *يدرس* ‘study’ (e.g. *كانت ماري تدرس في غرفتها* [was Mary study in her room] ‘Mary was studying in her room). Arabic, however, may in some grammatically and lexically constrained cases replace the simple present form with *اسم الفاعل* ‘the active participle’ with no difference in meaning, e.g. *كان جون يجلس في الحديقة/كان جون* [was John sit in the-garden/was john sitting in the-garden] ‘John was sitting in the garden’. Section 2 below addresses the constraints involved in choosing between the simple present form and the active participle form for expressing the Arabic past progressive aspect from a grammatical as well as a translational perspective at sentence level.

## 2. Simple present (SP) vs. active participle (AP)

The choice between SP and AP as a formal (grammatical) correspondent in expressing the past progressive aspect in Arabic seems to be an intriguing question, which is relevant from both a grammatical and a translational perspective. From a grammatical perspective, it is interesting to find out when the swap between the two forms is possible and when it is not. From a translational perspective, this is an interesting case. When the swap is possible, we have two Arabic grammatical forms that formally correspond to one English grammatical form. The way the English past progressive is handled in Arabic translation is textually investigated in Section 3.

The most noticeable factor in the switch between the two forms is that of transitivity, that is, whether the main verb is [+ transitive], i.e. it requires an object or [- transitive], i.e. it cannot take an object. To explain, if the verb is intransitive, the switch is permitted, while if it is transitive, the switch is blocked. The examples in 1 - 4 below are illustrative (Gloss translation for the Arabic examples is provided between square brackets):

1. كان علي يجلس/جالساً في المقهى عندما وصلت.  
[was Ali sit/sitting in the-coffee-shop when arrived(I)]  
'Ali was sitting in the coffee shop when I arrived'.
2. كان زيد يستلقي/مستلقياً على الأريكة عندما وصلت.  
[was Zayd lie/lying on the-couch when arrived(I)]  
'Zayd was lying on the couch when I arrived'.
3. كان علي يقتل/قاتلاً الذباب عندما رأيته.  
[was Ali kill/\*killing flies when arrived(I)]  
'Ali was killing flies when I saw him'
4. كان زيد يؤيخ/مويخاً ابنه عندما وصلت.  
[was Zayd reprimand/\*reprimanding son-his when arrived(I)]  
'Zayd was reprimanding his son when I arrived.

Transitivity seems to be a strong factor in the choice between an SP and AP form for expressing the past progressive in Arabic. The examples in 1-4 above show that if the main verb is transitive, the verbal AP is blocked 3 and 4, whereas if the verb is intransitive the AP is sanctioned. However, the degree of transitivity seems to be a relevant factor when choosing between the SP and the AP. To explain, intransitive verbs like يجلس 'sit' and يستلقي 'lie down' which are marked as [+ intransitive, + strong] can allow both the SP and the AP 1 and 2 above. In no way such intransitive verbs can be used transitively in Arabic. By contrast, there are some Arabic transitive verbs such as يكتب and يلعب that may be used intransitively by omitting a cognitively-retrieved object, i.e. an object that is not phonetically realized. Such verbs, which are marked as [+ intransitive, - strong], may also block the AP option, unlike the intransitive verbs in 1 and 2, which are marked as [- intransitive, + strong]. Below are some illustrative examples:

5. كان علي يكتب/كاتبا في الحديقة عندما رأيته.  
[was Ali write/\*writing in the-garden when saw-him(I)]  
'Ali was writing in the garden when I saw him'.
6. كان زيد يلعب/لعباً في الحديقة عندما رأيته.  
[was Zayd play/\*playing in the-garden when saw-him(I)]  
'Zayd was playing in the garden when I saw him'.
7. كان علي يكتب/كاتبا رسالة في الحديقة عندما رأيته.  
[was Ali write/\*writing letter in the-garden when saw-him(I)]  
'Ali was writing a letter in the garden when I saw him'.
8. كان زيد يلعب/لعباً الشطرنج في الحديقة عندما رأيته.  
[was Zayd play/\*playing chess-pins in the-garden when saw-him(I)]

‘Ali was playing chess in the garden when I saw him’.

As can be observed in 5 and 6, the [+ intransitive, - strong] verbs block the AP, unlike the [+ intransitive, + strong] verbs in 1 and 2. By the same token, the [+ transitive, - strong] verbs in 5 and 6 block the AP. In this way, the degree of transitivity in transitive verbs may relax the transitivity constraint. Put differently, while strong transitive verbs like *يقتل* ‘kill’ block the AP unlike strong intransitive verbs like *يجلس* ‘sit’, transitively ambiguous verbs, i.e. verbs that may be used transitively and intransitively like *يلعب* ‘play’, loosen the transitivity constraint by blocking the AP, despite the fact that they are employed intransitively in 5 and 6 above.

In addition, some transitive verbs whose derived AP denotes a completed act [+ completed], which is construed as an adjectival AP (e.g., being drunk or being nude) rather than an act in progress [- completed] (e.g., climbing a tree or taking off clothes) may allow an AP, but with a difference in meaning. The examples below illustrate this point:

9. كان زيد يركب حماراً عندما رأيته  
[was Zayd riding donkey when saw-him(I)]  
‘Zayd was riding a donkey when I saw him’.
10. كان زيد راكباً حماراً عندما رأيته  
[was Zayd ride donkey when saw-him(I)]  
‘Zayd was atop a donkey when I saw him’.
11. كان علي يخلع ملابسه عندما رأيته  
[was Ali take off clothes-his when saw-him(I)]  
‘Ali was taking off his clothes when I saw him’.
12. كان زيد خالفاً ملابسه عندما رأيته  
[was Zayd taking off clothes when saw-him(I)]  
‘Zayd was nude when I saw him’.

Unpredictably, as can be observed, the strong transitive verbs *يركب* ‘ride’ and *يخلع* ‘take off’ allow the option of the AP unlike the strong transitive verbs in 3 and 4 above. That is why we need the [+/- completed] constraint on transitive verbs. To explain, if the transitive verb sanctions an adjectival form denoting a [+ completed] act in addition to the SP denoting [- completed] act, then the AP form is allowed with a difference in meaning. By way of illustration, the act of taking clothes in 11 was in progress [- completed], but it was already finished [+ completed] in 12. Hence, 11 and 12 receive different English translations. Under this constraint, therefore, the AP is formally permitted but with a semantically different meaning.

To sum up, firstly we have to distinguish between transitive verbs marked as [+ transitive, + strong], e.g. *يقتل* ‘kill’, on the one hand, and transitive verbs marked as [+ transitive, - strong], e.g. *يلعب*, on the other. While the former may allow the SP and block the AP only transitively, the latter may also sanction the AP intransitively. On the other hand, transitive verbs marked as [+ transitive, + strong] need to be distinguished in terms of [+ completed] act and [- completed] act as embodied in an AP. While a [+ completed] act verb, e.g. *يخلع* ‘take off’ sanctions the SP like other transitive verbs, yet it also allows the AP formally with a different meaning. Transitivity, therefore, should only be generally viewed as a strong factor when it comes to blocking the AP.

The situation is no less complex when considering intransitivity as a predictor in the choice between the SP and AP forms. Most relevantly, the main verb’s feature [+/- telic] (Xiao and McEnery, 2004) seems to be a strong factor. This feature refers to whether the act denoted by the verb has an endpoint or not; if it has an endpoint,

it is [+ telic], if not, it is [- telic]. By examining Arabic intransitive verbs, it can be clearly observed that [+ telic] verbs allow the verbal AP, while they block the SP. By contrast, [- telic] verbs sanction both the SP and AP. Following are some illustrative examples:

13. كان علي \*يذهب/زاهباً إلى المنزل عندما قابلته  
[was Ali \*go/going to home when met-him(I)]  
'Ali was going home when I met him'.  
14. كان زيد \*يسافر/مسافراً إلى باريس عندما اتصلت به  
[was zayd \*travel/travelling to Paris when called-him(I)]  
'Zayd was travelling to Paris when I called him'.  
15. كان علي يقيم/مقيماً في الفندق عندما قابلته  
[was Ali stay/staying in hotel when met-him(I)]  
'Ali was staying at the hotel when I met him'.  
16. كان زيد ينام/نائماً في غرفته عندما اتصلت به  
[was Zayd sleep/sleeping in room-his when called-him(I)]  
'Zayd was sleeping in his room when I called him'.

As can be observed, the Arabic verbs 'go' and 'travel' in 13 and 14 are [+ telic], i.e. they have the endpoints 'home' and 'Paris'. By contrast, the Arabic verbs 'stay' and 'sleep' in 15 and 16 are [- telic], with acts lacking endpoints. Therefore, the SP is blocked in the former, while both the SP and AP are allowed in the latter.

However, if the [+ telic] Arabic verb semantically specifies the manner of motion, it will sanction both the SP and the AP. This semantic constraint [+ manner of motion] can be seen in 17 and 18 below, whose main verbs 'run' and 'walk' indicate the manner of motion, unlike 'go' and 'travel' in 13 and 14, which do not specify the manner of motion, e.g. one can travel via different ways.

17. كان علي يركض/راكضاً إلى المدرسة عندما رأيته  
[was Ali run/running to the-school when saw-hi(I)]  
'Ali was running to school when I saw him'.  
18. كان زيد يمشي/مائشياً إلى المدرسة عندما رأيته  
[was Zayd walk/walking to the-school when saw-him(I)]  
Zayd was walking to school when I saw him'.

As can be observed, the Arabic verbs 'run' and 'walk' in 17 and 18 allow both the SP and the AP because they are marked as [+ telic, + manner of motion], whereas the SP is blocked in 13 and 14 because the verbs 'go' and 'travel' are marked as [+ telic, - manner of motion]. Thus, this semantic constraint determines the choice between the SP and the AP for telic verbs.

The employment of the Arabic AP in the past progressive, as can be noted above, is subject to both syntactic and semantic constraints. This may be due to the fluid nature of the AP because it can function as verbal, nominal, or adjectival depending on the features of the lexical verb in question (for different views on the AP, see Hasan, 1990; Radwan, 1981; Gadalla, 2017, among others). By way of illustration, note how the AP occurs as a verbal, a nominal, and an adjectival in (19-21), respectively:

19. كان علي جالساً في المقهى  
[was Ali sitting in the-coffee-shop]  
'Ali was sitting in the coffee shop'  
20. كان علي نادلاً في المقهى  
[was Ali waiter in the-coffee-shop]

‘Ali was a waiter in the coffee shop’  
 21. كان علي مبتسماً في المقهى  
 [was Ali smiling in the-coffee-shop]  
 ‘Ali was smiling in the coffee shop’

In fact, all accounts of the AP emphasize its eventivity and agentivity. Gadalla (2017, p. 62), for example, defines it as “a morphological form derived from a verb to refer to the person or animate being that performs the action denoted by the verb”. By contrast, Radwan (1981) views the AP as an adjective denoting an action, its incidence and its agent. In sum, the multivalency of the AP causes its ambiguous nature in Arabic grammar.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Aims of the study

The present study aims to respond to the following two research questions:

1. How does formal correspondence between English and Arabic past progressive show up in translating connected discourse?
2. What other Arabic translation procedures are used to render English past progressive in connected discourse and how successful are they as translation equivalents?

#### 3.2 Data

The textual data in this study consists of 70 instances of the English past progressive aspect which are juxtaposed with their Arabic translation counterparts. They are equally drawn from *Leonardo DaVinci* (Isaacs, 2017) and *Hard Choices* (Clinton, 2014) and Arabic translations of the two books; ليوناردو دافنشي (Bani Saeed, 2020) and مذكرات هيلاري كلينتون: خيارات صعبة (Yunis, 2018). The choice of the two books was motivated by their importance in the Anglo-Saxon culture in particular and in the world at large, in general.

#### 3.3 Procedure

The translation corpus is closely examined to lay hand on Arabic translation procedures in rendering the English past progressive textually in connected discourse. Sufficient context is provided for each example in the data to insure the soundness of the critical analysis. The quantitative part presents the frequency and percentages of each procedure, while the qualitative part assesses each procedure in terms of its adequacy as a translation equivalent.

### 4. Analysis and discussion

The close examination of the textual corpus has revealed many translation procedures for rendering the English past progressive into Arabic. Table 1 below names each procedure, its frequency (out of 70 instances), and its percentage (The procedures are ordered in terms of frequency):

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of translation procedures in corpus.

Procedure	Frequency	Percentage
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Shift (to Past Simple)	34	48.57%
Shift (to Present Simple)	16	22.85%
Formal Correspondence	13	18.57%
Lexicalizing	5	7.14%
Others	2	2.86%

Table 1 above shows that the grammatically established formal correspondence between the English past progressive and the Arabic past progressive lags largely behind the past simple procedure (18.57% vs. 48.57%) and slightly behind the present simple procedure (18.57% vs. 22.4385%). At face value, this finding implies that formal correspondence in aspect involves grammatical rather than textual relevance. That is, what happens in rendering aspect in connected discourse is largely different from rendering it at sentence level. The justification may be that the translation of aspect at sentence level is structure based, while it is semantics based in connected discourse. The following discussion provides a qualitative assessment of each procedure supported by authentic examples from the corpus. Let us start with formal correspondence, which has been discussed in detail in Section 2 above.

#### 4.1 Formal correspondence

Despite the fact that the formal correspondence procedure comes third after the past simple and the present simple in rendering the English past progressive aspect into Arabic, it remains to be the most valid procedure to capture this aspect, other things being equal (see discussion below). The following examples are illustrative (Henceforth, the study items are highlighted in boldface and the discussion is exclusively focused on them):

22. ...., it might not have been convenient or appropriate to have a pregnant and then a breastfeeding peasant woman living in the crowded DaVinci family home, especially as Sir Piero **was negotiating** a dowry from the prominent family whose daughter he was planning to marry. (Isaacs, 2017, p. 13)

...، على الرغم من أسباب تشير إلى أنه قد لا يكون ملائماً أن تعيش فلاحاً حاملاً ثم مرضعة في منزل عائلة دافنشي، ولا سيما أن السير بييرو كان يتفاوض على مهر مع العائلة الشهيرة التي يخطط للزواج من ابنتها.  
(Bani Saeed, 2020, p. 25)

[on despite from reasons indicate to that-it may not appropriate that live farmer pregnant then breast-feeder in home family DaVinci especially that Sir Piero was negotiate on dowry with the-family the-reputed which plan(he) to-marrying from daughter-it]

23. Twenty years later, Accattabriga **was working** in a kiln that was rented by Piero, ... (Isaacs, 2017, p. 14)

بعد عشرين سنة، كان أكاتابريغا يعمل في فرن أستأجره بييرو (Bani Saeed, 2020, p. 26)

[after twenty years, was Accattabriga working in kiln rented-it Piero]

24. I expressed what I **was feeling** at the time: 'I am happy being a Senator from New York. (Clinton, 2014, p. 14)

عبرت عما كنت أشعر به آنذاك: "أنا سعيدة كوني سيناتوراً من نيويورك". (Yunis, 2018, p. 31)

[expressed(I) what was feeling(I) of-it then: "I happy being Senator from New York"]

25. People **were hurting** and needed a champion to fight for them. (Clinton, 2014, p. 15)

كان الشعب مألوماً ويحتاج إلى بطل يكافح من أجله. (Yunis, 2018, p. 32)

[was the-people painng and-needs to hero struggle from sake-it]

In 22-24, the translators have succeeded in capturing the progressiveness of the activities for an unspecified period in the past by formally rendering them into the past progressive in Arabic by the SP, which performs the same function in Arabic. However, while replacing the past progressive with the past simple in ST and TT in 22 would destroy the progressiveness and naturalness of the flow of discourse intended by the writer/translator in a subordinate clause, the replacement of the past progressive in 23 and 24 with past simple would be tolerated in both ST and TT as it mainly affects progressives intended for emphasis. Consider 23 and 24 repeated in 26 and 27 below, using the past simple in ST and TT.

26. Twenty years later, Accattabriga **worked** in a kiln that was rented by Piero, ...

بعد عشرين سنة، عمل أكاتابريغا في فرن أستأجره بييرو، ...

[after twenty years, worked Accattabriga in kiln rented-it Piero]

27. I expressed what I felt at the time: 'I am happy being a Senator from New York'.

عبّرت عما شعرت به آنذاك: "أنا سعيدة كوني سيناتوراً من نيويورك".

[expressed(I) what felt of-it then: "I happy being Senator from New York"]

One should note that the reader of both ST and TT in 26 and 27 would not be sensitive to swapping the past progressive with the past simple, but, in contrast, would feel shocked by replacing 'was negotiating' (كان يتفاوض) with 'negotiated' (تفاوض) in 22 due to the importance of progressiveness in the subordinate clause. This may explain why both translators have frequently resorted to this translation procedure when rendering the English past progressive into Arabic (Section 4.2 below).

As for 25 above, it is the only case in the corpus where the translator has opted for the AP instead of the SP in rendering the English past progressive. Apart from the constraints involved in this choice (Section 2 above), it is clear that when it comes to formal correspondence, the SP is given priority over the AP as a translation equivalent, if both of them work. Apparently, the SP is less marked than the AP when the choice between them is possible; hence it is more frequently used than the AP. Note that the translator could have used the AP in 24 and the SP in 25 above, as can illustrated in 28 and 29 below, respectively:

28. عبّرت عما كنت شاعراً به آنذاك: "أنا سعيدة كوني سيناتوراً من نيويورك"

[expressed(I) what was feeling(I) of-it then: 'I happy being Senator from New York']

29. كان الشعب يتألم ويحتاج إلى بطل يكافح من أجله

[was the-people painning and-need to hero struggle from sake-it]

To conclude this section, other things being equal (see discussion below), formal correspondence employing the SP and/or the AP as appropriate in rendering the English past progressive is the most valid and accurate translation procedure for capturing the progressiveness in the English past progressive, regardless whether it is used for grammatical and/or emphatic reasons in connected discourse. That is why translators between English and Arabic need to be sensitized to this aspect in the two grammars, in order to perfect their translation activity. The translational picture of this aspect in connected discourse is far from adhering to this principle as the following sections clearly demonstrate.

#### 4.2 Shift (to past simple)

Rendering the English past progressive as past simple takes the lion's share in the textual corpus. Almost half of the cases (48.57%) show this translation procedure,



which is frequently used by both translators (18/35 in Isaacs, 2017 and 16/35 in Clinton, 2014). The question that arises here is whether this option affects the readability and quality of the translation. Let us start with the opening paragraph in Clinton, 2014 and see how the past progressive is tackled in it.

30. Why on earth **was I lying** on the backseat of a blue minivan with tinted windows? I **was trying** to leave my home in Washington, D.C., without being seen by the reporters staked out front. (p. 1)
- لِمَ استلقيت يا ترى، على المقعد الخلفي لشاحنة صغيرة زرقاء نوافذها ملونة؟ سؤال جيد. حاولت مغادرة بيتي في واشنطن دي سي من دون أن يراني المراسلون الصحفيون المرابطون سرا قبالتة. (Yunis, 2018, p. 19)
- [why lay wonder(I) on the-seat the-back for-truck small blue windows-it colored? Good question. tried(I) leaving home-my in Washington D C without that see-I the-reporters the-journalists the-waiting secretly opposite-it]

The reader should note that while Hillary Clinton has dramatized the situation through the effective use of two instances of the past expressive, the translator has offered a flat, solely informative account that seriously lacks the dynamism in the ST by replacing the two instances of the past progressive with the past simple. If we are to cite Nida's (1964) Equivalent Effect principle or Toury's (1995) Adequacy notion, does this translation pass the test? The answer is definitely in the negative due to the TT's deficit in both dramatization and effectiveness, in addition to the feature of progressiveness. While the reader of the ST will be highly impressed by how Clinton dramatizes her message, the reader of the TT will view the text as mainly informative, which, theoretically, reflects badly on the author rather than the translator. In terms of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986), the tone of the ST is supposed to be part and parcel of the cognitive effects produced in the receiver, something which is largely lacking in the TT. To observe the difference between the Arabic rendition in 30 and a rendition which takes care of the dramatic tone in the ST, we offer 31 below:

31. لِمَ كنت مستلقيا/أستلقي يا ترى، على المقعد الخلفي لشاحنة صغيرة زرقاء نوافذها ملونة؟ سؤال جيد، فقد كنت أحاول/محاو لا مغادرة بيتي في واشنطن دي سي من دون أن يراني المراسلون الصحفيون المرابطون سرا قبالتة.

[why was(I) lying/lie wonder(I) on the-seat the-back for-truck small blue windows-it colored? Good question, faqad was(I) try/\*trying leaving home-my in Washington D C without that see-I the-reporters the-journalists the-waiting secretly opposite-it]

Note that the SP and the AP are both sanctioned in the first occurrence because the verb 'يستلقي' 'lie' is [+ completed], but the AP is blocked in the second occurrence because the verb 'يحاول' 'try' is [- completed].

Following is an example in which the continuity for an unspecified period of time of the acts mentioned is replaced with a mere instance of each of them, thus distorting the meaning intended in the ST:

32. Some scholars have assumed that he **was describing** a fantasy hike or **riffing** on some verses by Seneca. (Isaacs, 2017, p. 20)
- افترض بعض العلماء أنه وصف فنتازيا نزهة، أو ارتجل بعضاً من أشعار سينيكا. (Bani Saeed, 2020, p. 32)
- [assumed some scientists that-he described fantasy hike or riffled some from verses Seneca]

By using the past progressive in the ST, the reference in 32 is to two activities which were continuing for an unspecified period of time in the past. To explain, the referent (Leonardo) recurrently described a fantasy hike and riffed on some verses by Seneca over an unspecified stretch of time. The Arabic rendition of 32, however, communicates the message that Leonardo may have performed the acts of ‘describing a fantasy hike’ and ‘riffing on some verses by Seneca’ only once, in a lecture by him, for instance, which distorts the meaning as intended in the ST. One should note that the TT reader would take the message at face value, being unaware of the continuity notion intended in the ST. Cases like these come under what House (1981) calls ‘covert errors’, i.e. errors that are discovered only when the ST is juxtaposed with the TT; otherwise, they go unnoticed. To relay the continuity missed in the Arabic rendition, consider the suggested translation in 33:

33. افتترض بعض العلماء أنه كان يصف فنتازيا نزهة، أو يرتجل بعضاً من أشعار سينيكا  
[assumed some scientists that-he was describe(he) fantasy hike or riffle some from verses Seneca]

In some cases, the replacement of the English past progressive, which is meant for emphasis only, with the Arabic past simple is a less sensitive issue, as can be observed in 34 and 35:

34. Huma called Reggie Love, and soon I **was congratulating** the President-elect. (Clinton, 2014, p. 11)  
اتصلت هيوما بريجي لوف، وهنأت فوراً الرئيس المنتخب. (Yunis, 2018, p. 28).  
[called(she) Huma to-Reggie Love and-congratulated immediately the-President the-elect]

35. ..., it is unclear who was influencing whom, ... (Isaacs, 2017, p. 44)  
... لم يكن واضحاً من أثر على من؟! (Bani Saeed, 2020, p. 55)  
[... not was clear who influenced on who]

Despite the fact that the notion of progressiveness intended for emphasis in 34 and 35 is compromised, the Arabic renditions can still function as workable equivalents. For example, in 34 we cannot imagine Hillary Clinton recurrently calling the President-elect to congratulate him; it was only one single call. Therefore, the past progressive is only meant for emphasis and can be readily replaced with the past simple in ST, thus merely affecting the notion of emphasis. It goes without saying that capturing the emphasis here in Arabic translation is better than ignoring it. In 34, the progressive aspect may be captured by employing the change-of-state verb ‘هممت’ ‘started’ and nominalizing the main verb ‘بتهنئة’ ‘with congratulating’ as in 36 below. As for (35), the SP formal correspondent which captures progressiveness is readily available in 37 below:

36. اتصلت هيوما بريجي لوف، وسرعان ما هممت بتهنئة الرئيس المنتخب.  
[called(she) Huma to-Reggie Love and-soon started(she) to with-congratulating the-President the-elect]

37. ... لم يكن واضحاً من كان يؤثر على من؟!  
[... not was clear who was influence on who]

However, there are some cases where the English past progressiveness may not be formally rendered due to the contrasting nature of some verbs between the two languages, a situation which may call for the switch to the past simple in Arabic. For example, the English verbs ‘rise’, ‘become’ and ‘leave’ may be progressively

used, while their Arabic counterparts ارتفع, أصبح and ترك may not. The two examples below are illustrative:

38. With the help of the writings of Alberti and the development of mathematical perspective, the social and intellectual standing of painters **was rising**, and a few **were becoming** sought-after-names. (Isaacs, 2017, p. 34)

على إثر كتابات ألبيرتي وتطور المنظور الرياضي، ارتفع مقام الرسامين الاجتماعي والفكري وأصبح بعضهم أسماء يسعى إليها الناس. (Bani Saeed, 2020, p. 45)

[on following writings Alberti and-development the-perspective the mathematical rose standing the-painters the-social and-the-intellectual and-became some-them names sought to-them people]

39. She wrote that being Secretary of State was “the best job in government” and that she was confident she **was leaving** the Department in good hands. (Clinton, 2014, p. 33)

كُتبت أن منصب وزارة الخارجية "أفضل وظيفة في الإدارة"، وهي على ثقة أنها تركت الوزارة في أيدي أمينة. (Yunis, 2018, p. 51)

[wrote(he) that post ministry of the-exterior “best job in the-administration”, and-she on confidence that-she left(he) ministry in hands good]

One should note that the verbs 'rise' and 'become' in 38 cannot be used progressively in Arabic and, as a result, the translator has appropriately replaced them with the past simple forms. This shows that the English verbal system is more flexible when it comes to marking verbs for progressiveness. In Arabic, neither the SP, i.e. \*كان يرتفع and \*كان يصبح, nor the AP \*كان مرتفعاً and \*كان مصباحاً are acceptable in the rendition of 38. Similarly, the translator of 39 has appropriately switched to the past simple form 'ترك' (she) left' instead of the incorrect past progressive form 'كانت تترك/تاركة' (she) was leaving'. Therefore, in cases where English verbs contrast with their Arabic counterparts in terms of progressiveness, a switch to the past simple in Arabic is inevitable insofar as the verbal aspect system is concerned.

Does this mean Arabic cannot capture the notion of progressiveness in cases like these? The answer is certainly in the negative because aspect may be expressed using lexicalizing means instead of verbal means (the SP and AP). To explain, the progressiveness in 38, for instance, can be captured by deverbalizing 'rise' in a prepositional phrase 'في ارتفاع' 'in rising' and adding an adverbial 'أكثر فأكثر' 'more and more' as post-qualification of the verb 'أصبح' 'became', as can be seen in 40 below:

40. على إثر كتابات ألبيرتي وتطور المنظور الرياضي، كان مقام الرسامين الاجتماعي والفكري في ارتفاع وأصبح بعضهم أسماء يسعى إليها الناس أكثر فأكثر.

[on following writings Alberti and-development the-perspective the mathematical was standing the-painters the-social and-the-intellectual in rising and-became some-them names sought to-them people more and-more]

To conclude this section, it is clear from the textual data that both translators have not taken the issue of relaying progressiveness expressed by the English past progressive seriously by approximating it to the past simple in Arabic. Only in a few cases of verbs such as 'become' and 'leave' where English allows progressiveness while Arabic blocks it can the past simple be a workable option. And even in such cases, the competent translator may capture progressives by resorting to lexicalizing the progressive component. Thus, in the bulk of cases, approximating the English past progressive to the Arabic past simple shows

different degrees of deficit. Most seriously, it may change the notion of recurrence in the past to only single instances. Equally important is stripping the TT of the dramatizing effect inherent in the English past progressive, thus offering a translation lacking the dynamism in the ST. Of relative weight also is the disposal of emphasis expressed in English by using the past progressive instead of the past simple when approximating it to the Arabic past simple.

### 4.3 Shift (to present simple)

The use of the Arabic present simple as a translation procedure to render the English past progressive accounts for almost 23% of the corpus, beating that of formal correspondence (18.57%). It may stem from the fact that Arabic grammar allows tense discord by indexing a present simple form in an embedded clause with a simple past form in the main clause. By contrast, English usually adheres to tense concord, that is, the tense of the verb in the embedded clause must be the same as that of the verb in the main clause. To see this contrast, consider the two illustrative examples below:

41. The telephone rang while John *\*is/was* reading a novel.  
 42. رنّ الهاتف وجون يقرأ رواية  
 [rang the telephone and-John read novel]  
 ‘\*The telephone rang while John reads a novel’.

As is clear, English observes tense concord by not allowing past tense in the main clause to index with present tense in the embedded clause in 41, while Arabic does sanction this in 42.

Apparently and surprisingly, this grammatical feature of Arabic has lured the two translators into inappropriately replacing the English past progressive in many embedded clauses with the Arabic present simple, as can be seen in 43 - 45 below from Isaacs (2017) and Bani Saeed (2020), respectively:

43. Earlier that day I had run into Michelle backstage at an event and she was appreciative of everything we **were doing** to help Barack. (p. 9)  
 وقابلت ميشيل في وقت سابق من ذلك اليوم ، على هامش هذا الحدث، وقد قدرت أيضاً ما نقوم به لمساعدة باراك.  
 (p. 26)

[met(I) Michelle in time before from that day on margin of this the-event and appreciated(he) also what do(we) to-help Barack]

44. ABC’s *this week* mentioned rumors that President-elect Obama **was considering** me for the position of Secretary of State. (p. 13)  
 تحدث برنامج "هذا الأسبوع" في "إيه. بي. سي." عن شائعات تفيد أن الرئيس المنتخب أوباما **يفكر** جدياً في إيلاني منصب وزارة الخارجية، ... (p. 29)

[talked program “this week” in “A.B.C.” about rumors indicate that the-President the-elect Obama think seriously in assigning-me post ministry the-exterior]

45. ...., it might not have been convenient or appropriate to have a pregnant and then a breastfeeding peasant woman living in the crowded DaVinci family home, especially as Sir Piero was negotiating a dowry from the prominent family whose daughter he **was planning** to marry. (p. 13)  
 ...، على الرغم من أسباب تشير إلى أنه قد لا يكون ملائماً أن تعيش فلاحاً حامل ثم مرضعة في منزل عائلة دافنشي، ولا سيما أن السير بييرو كان يتفاوض على مهر مع العائلة الشهيرة التي **يخطط** للزواج من ابنتها. (p. 25)

[on despite from reasons indicate to that-it may not appropriate that live farmer pregnant then breast-feeder in home family DaVinci especially that Sir Piero was

negotiate on dowry with the-family the-reputed which plan(he) to-marrying from daughter-its]

In 43 - 45, the Arabic renditions use present simple forms 'do', يفكر 'consider' and يخطط 'plan' in the embedded clauses, respectively. By contrast, English has maintained tense concord in 43 - 45, viz. 'were doing', 'was considering' and 'was planning', respectively. From a translational perspective, the replacement of the English past progressive with the Arabic present simple has seriously distorted the intended meaning. In the English ST's above, the past progressive refers to past activities, while the Arabic present simple in the TT's refers to ongoing activities. Note that in both cases, the ST's report on past events in both main and embedded clauses, whereas the TT's report on past events in main clauses but, inappropriately, on ongoing events in embedded clauses, which is a serious distortion of the intended meaning. In fact, the use of the Arabic present simple here is contextually equivalent to the present progressive rather than the past progressive in English. Thus, while approximating the past progressive to the past simple in 34 and 35 will only jeopardize the progressive aspect (Section 4.2 above), the present simple compromises time reference (tense), which is a more serious problem. To capture both tense and aspect, the Arabic renditions above need to be rewritten as 46 - 48:

46. وقابلت ميشيل في وقت سابق من ذلك اليوم ، على هامش هذا الحدث، وقد قدرت أيضاً ما كنا نقوم به لمساعدة باراك

[met(I) Michelle in time before from that day on margin of this the-event and appreciated also what were(we) do(we) to-help Barack]

47. تحدث برنامج "هذا الأسبوع" في "إيه. بي. سي." عن شائعات تفيد أن الرئيس المنتخب أوباما كان يفكر جدياً في إيلائي منصب وزارة الخارجية، ...

[talked program "this week" in "A.B.C." about rumors indicate that the-President the-elect Obama was(he) think(he) seriously in assigning-me post ministry the-exterior]

48. ...، على الرغم من أسباب تشير إلى أنه قد لا يكون ملائماً أن تعيش فلاحاً حامل ثم مرضعة ولا سيما أن السير بييرو كان يتفاوض على مهر مع العائلة الشهيرة التي كان يخطط للزواج من ابنته.

[on despite from reasons indicate to that-it may not appropriate that live farmer pregnant then breast-feeder in home family DaVinci especially that Sir Piero was negotiate on dowry with the-family the-reputed which was(he) plan(he) to-marrying from daughter-his]

One should note how both tense and aspect are captured in 46 - 48, whereas both of them are missed in the renditions of 43 - 45. All the actions referred to in the former are realized/unrealized past events, while all those mentioned in the latter are understood as ongoing events. This clearly shows how distorted the meaning in the Arabic translations is in terms of tense and aspect.

#### 4.4 Lexicalizing

Lexicalizing aspect accounts for 7.14% in the corpus. It is appropriately employed to capture the progressiveness when Arabic blocks the progressive aspect in some verbs like 'become' and 'leave' (see Section 2 above). Following are two examples from Isaacs (2017) and Bani Saeed (2020) in which lexicalizing succeeds in capturing the English past progressive aspect:

49. So just as Leonardo **was reaching** the age when he needed to prepare his trade, his father living alone and probably lonely, brought him to Florence. (p. 24)  
وهكذا، مع اقتراب ليوناردو من عمر يحتاج فيه إلى صنعة، جاء به أبوه إلى فلورنسا حيث كان الأب يعيش وربما شعر بالوحدة. (p. 35)

[and-so with approaching Leonardo from age need(he) in-it to trade came with-him father-his to Florence where was the-father live and-perhaps felt(he) lonely]

50. He had been moderately successful as a painter in Florence, but he had trouble finishing his commissions and **was searching** for new horizons. (p. 11)  
كان قد لاقى نجاحاً لا بأس به بصفته رساماً في فلورنسا، لكنه واجه مشاكل في إتمام عقود، فبدأ يبحث عن آفاق جديدة. (p. 11)

[was(he) received success not bad as painter in Florence but(he) faced troubles in completing contracts-his so started(he) search(he) for horizons new]

In 49, the successful lexicalizing procedure is motivated by the fact that the Arabic verb *وصل* 'reach' does not accept the progressive aspect, hence the translator has resorted to lexicalizing it in the prepositional phrase 'مع اقتراب of'. By contrast, lexicalizing the progressive aspect successfully in 50 is motivated by semantics rather than grammar. To explain, there exist a cause-result relation between the embedded clauses 'he had trouble finishing his commissions' and '(he) was searching for new horizons'. This semantic relation will be mystified if the Arabic formal correspondence procedure is adopted, viz. [was(he) received success not bad as painter in Florence but(he) faced troubles in completing contracts-his and-was(he) search(he) for horizons new]. Consequently, the translator has lexicalized the auxiliary verb *كان* 'was' into the 'change-of-state' verb *بدأ* 'began' prefixed by the cause-result marker 'ف', i.e. 'فبدأ' 'so he began', in order to attend to this semantic relation. One should note that 'change-of-state' verbs are what we call *أفعال الشروع* in Arabic such *أخذ* and *جعل* 'begin', which can both appropriately replace the verb *بدأ* 'begin' in 50. Also, it should be mentioned that the conjunction *و* 'and' could have been maintained in the Arabic translation while carrying the cause-result semantic relation just like the conjunction *ف* 'so'.

#### 4.5 Other procedures

The textual data shows two more procedures: past perfect and deletion, occurring only once each, as can be observed in (51 and 52) from Isaacs (2017) and Bani Saeed (2020) below:

51. Italy **was beginning** a rare forty-year period during which it was not wracked by wars among its city-states. (p. 18)

كانت إيطاليا قد بدأت فترة فريدة من أربعين سنة لم تؤلمها فيها الحروب بين الدول والمدن. (p. 30)

[was Italy had started period unique from forty year not pained in-it the-wars between the-countries and the-cities]

52. "In arithmetic, during the few months that he studied it, he made so much progress, that, by continually suggesting doubts and difficulties to the master who **was teaching** him, he would very often bewilder him". (p. 31)

"أحرز في الحساب في الأشهر القليلة التي درسه فيها تقدماً كبيراً جداً إلى حد أنه غالباً ما أربك الأستاذ للغاية، لأنه أوحى على نحو متواصل بالشك والصعوبات". (p. 43)

[“earned(he) in arithmetic in the-months the-few which studied(he)-it in-them development much very to extent that-he often confused the-teacher largely because(he) implied continuously with-doubts and-difficulties]

In 51, the replacement of the English past progressive with the past perfect inappropriately pushes the relevant act into distant past instead of past progressive. The translator may have resorted to this option due to the fact that the Arabic verb

بدأ 'begin' does not lend itself to the progressive aspect formally. The solution in cases like this is to call up lexicalization as a translation procedure (Section 4.4 above). Here, the Arabic past simple supported by an adverbial can appropriately capture the progressive aspect in 51, as can be seen in 53 below:

53. وقد بدأت إيطاليا للتو فترة فريدة من أربعين سنة لم تؤلمها فيها الحروب بين الدول والمدن.  
54. [waqad started Italy just period unique from forty year not pained  
in-it the-wars between the-countries and the-cities]

In this way, the past progressive in 'was beginning' is captured by firstly approximating it to the past simple بدأت 'began' and secondly by adding the adverbial للتو 'just' in Arabic.

Finally, the translator in 52 has, given his wording, appropriately deleted the past progressive 'was teaching' because it is semantically included in his choice الأستاذ 'the teacher', whose job is to teach. Had the translator followed the wording of the ST, viz. '... the master who was teaching him', he would have offered السيد الذي كان يدرسه 'the master who was teaching him', as can be illustrated in the rewriting of the Arabic rendition in 52 in 54 below:

55. "أحرز في الحساب في الأشهر القليلة التي درسه فيها تقدماً كبيراً جداً إلى حد أنه غالباً ما أربك السيد الذي كان يدرسه للغاية، لأنه أوحى على نحو متواصل بالشك والصعوبات."  
[“earned(he) in arithmetic in the-months the-few which studied(he)-it in-them development much very to extent that-he often confused the-master who was teach-him largely because(he) implied continuously with-doubts and-difficulties]

## 5. Conclusions

Having analyzed a corpus from two important translations, it seems that professional translators have only little awareness of aspect as a grammatical category which seriously affects propositions in translation activity. By examining the rendering of the English past progressive in Arabic translation, the findings show that only 18.57% of the textual data show formal correspondence in which this aspect is properly relayed within the relevant grammatical boundaries of Arabic grammar. It has been shown that English past progressive aspect formally and functionally corresponds to two options: the SP and AP. The choice between them, which is in favor of the SP in frequency, is subject to several constraints, including [+/- transitive], [+/- telic], [+/- completed], and [+/- manner of motion].

The lion's share in rendering the past progressive aspect (48.57%) goes for inappropriately approximating it to the Arabic past simple. This approximation procedure jeopardizes several features of the past progressive aspect, including grammaticality, meaning, dramatization, and progressiveness. However, there are a few Arabic verbs that lack the feature of progressiveness, in which case approximation to the past simple may become necessary, thus compromising progressiveness only. To avoid this loss, however, the competent translator may resort to lexicalizing this feature.

More seriously, the approximation of the past progressive to the Arabic present simple in embedded clauses, which accounts for 22.85% in the corpus, compromises both aspect and tense because what is meant to be a realized/unrealized past action is presented as an ongoing action, which largely distorts the meaning of the ST.

To conclude, translators, whether they be students or practitioners, need to be sensitized to the importance of aspect in translation practice. This study has clearly indicated a serious lack of awareness in this area. To overcome problems in this area, it is important for translators to be familiar with the symmetries and asymmetries between the tense and aspect systems in any given pair of languages, as well as the relevant textual options available when a mismatch occurs. It is shocking that the bulk of the data in this case study shows that the most frequent translation procedures employed to render the English past progressive aspect into Arabic are inappropriate.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jihad Hamdan and Ali Almana for their meticulous reading of the first draft of this paper. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive remarks.

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