

Iraqi EFL Learners' Recognition of the Past Tense Forms Used to Express Future

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Abstract

Tense in verbal phrase is connected with temporal reference; however, the latter is not always identified in terms of the tense form. For instance, though the past tense always imposes a restricted temporal reference represented by past reference. It can also be used to express (future -in the past- meaning), i.e. future in the past time. Quirk et al (1985:218) states that in some of its occurrences a past tense form can be considered as a genuine expression of future – in –the past meaning in that they can be understood to guarantee the fulfillment of the happening of the future event in question:

1. The court was eventually to charge him.

2. I was about to solve the problem.

The construction "was eventually to charge him" in (1) indicates that the happening of the event of charging was guaranteed to be fulfilled at a future time in the past –future when seen from a viewpoint in the past- thus (1) expresses a future in the past time. while (2) indicates unfulfilled intention, and since the intention to solve the problem and the non fulfillment of that intention happened in the past, then (2) denotes a past reference.

This paper tries to present a syntactic, semantic and pragmatic analysis of use of the past tense forms to express future meaning in the past. With the absence of the adequate knowledge of the fact that the past tense form may indicate a verified future -in the past- meaning through compatibility between the verb phrase and the adverbs that accompany that verb phrase, the utterance structure, and contextual features, Iraqi EFL learners are expected to find difficulty in identifying the reference of the past tense correctly. The empirical part of this paper is intended to adopt this task.

The present paper in both its theoretical and practical parts aims at: (1) highlighting the circumstances where the past can be used to indicate a genuine 'true' future in the past, (2) measuring the learners' ability to recognize the exact time reference (past, future in the past) of the past tense in different constructions and, (3) showing the role of the teaching factor in the performance of the learners, and (4) identifying the role of the mother tongue in the learners' performance. To achieve these goals, it is hypothesized that: (1) Iraqi EFL learners appear to restrict the reference of most of the past tense occurrences to the past time, (2) the performance of the learners who have received some instruction, henceforth group A, about the past tense forms used to express verified future is expected

to be better than the performance of the learners who have not, henceforth group B, and (3) the mother tongue is expected to affect the learners' performance positively.

These hypotheses have been verified through adopting a questionnaire of ten exchanges. The one handed second- year students 2006- 2007, Department of English, College of Basic Education are asked to identify the time reference of each utterance. Then their responses are identified and analyzed.

2.Past tense forms for future

Introduction

A good deal of philosophy of time has been discussed by fatalism theory. The typical argument of this theory involves the idea that there exists at the time of speech or evaluation , a set of true premises that, taken together, correctly predict things that will happen in the future. Linguistically speaking, such meaning has been called the meaning of destiny by Quirk Et al (1985) where the past tense form, under certain circumstances , can be used to express verified future in the past. This will be shown through the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic discussion presented below.

Syntactic and Semantic Analysis

Futurity in the past can effectively be expressed through the use of the past tense in a simple sentence construction:

BE TO + INFINITIVE

He was to end in a prison.

Quirk et al (1985: 218) state that such a construction can be regarded as a genuine expression of futurity in that it guarantees the fulfillment of the event in question. Such a construction of the syntactic structure “be to + infinitive” in most of its occurrences has the connotation of destiny; that is why such an utterance imposes a sense of certainty about that future event:

He was eventually to end up in the bankruptcy court. (ibid)

Suppose this utterance tells about a greedy usurer who, despite of his huge debts, usually risk his money . The implication here is that the subject’s foolish behaviour determined his destiny, i.e., the natural consequence of his manner was to be a bankrupt. The event of being a bankrupt has not yet taken place. Thus the reference in (4) is to the future in the past time. The meaning of destiny, which is the intrinsic meaning of such a construction as “be to + infinitive”, imposes a sense that the subject definitely had such an end. However, the connotation conveyed by the syntactic structure is not always enough to determine the meaning and the exact reference of the past tense in an utterance.

Ogihara (undated: 1-2) referring to the quantification theory of tensed sentences argues that sentences exert an existential quantificational force about time reference of an utterance in one way or another . Time adverbs, for instance, exert quantificational force over the time

reference of an utterance . Applying this view to (4), the existential assertion about the future event is made not only by the entire sentence structure but also by the contribution of the adverb “eventually” which restricts the temporal location of the event in question to the future.

Here is another example: Few could imagine at that time that this brave young officer was to be the first president of the USA. (Quirk et al, 1985: 219)

The implication in (5) is that the young officer did eventually become the president of the USA. Utterance (5) tells a particular event which happened in the past. The construction "Was to be the first president" adds additional component of meaning indicating that the event of being a president was a future event at the time of speech – which is past- ; Again the adverbial phrase “at that time” functions as indices whose semantics interacts with the semantics of the verb phrase giving the impression that the event was certainly fulfilled at some point in the past and that its fulfillment was seen as a future event at that time. However, the situation is different with the following utterance:

The meeting was to be held the following week. (ibid: 218)

The reference here is to the past time. It is arranged to hold the intended meeting at a particular time in the past but that meeting, for some reasons, is made a week earlier. Thus (6) indicates unfulfilled past event .

The difficulty with the past tense forms, as with other tenses, comes not with their forms but with deciding which to use and when. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the verb form and its exact time reference since the process of semantic and pragmatic interpretations play an essential role in determining the time reference of the verb phrase in the particular syntactic structure.

Pragmatic Analysis

Introduction

It is well known that there are many grammatical constructions that can be used to express future in the past . However, the level of certainty about the actual happening of that future event is not one in all forms and constructions used to express that event. Kaufman(2002) who defines certainty condition of the future event as the truth value of that event, argues that the certainty condition arise when the past and present tense forms are used to express future. In other words , he argues that in some circumstances when the present or past tense forms are used to refer to the future event , future in the past they add a sense of verification and truth value to the happening of that event. He proposes that in all cases the certainty about the future event involves either "settledness" of or "belief" in the happenings of that event (relative to the speech time). Hence, the pragmatic analysis in this paper involves the analysis of the past tense construction (was to + infinitive) denoted by

Quirk et al(1985) in terms of the sources of certainty about future highlighted by Kaufman. Though the researchers agree that it is possible to adopt a unified analysis in terms of sources of certainty about the future event, they view that the difference in terms of the tense forms used to express future reflect an individual component of meaning related to each of these forms and thus differentiate their reference connotations(past event in the past time, and future event in the past time).

2.3.2. Future in the past

The past tense form can be used to express the future events when seen from a view point in the past. Adopting Kaufman proposition, the certainty implied in this form involves one of the following meanings: either the settledness, at the speech time, of the happening of the particular future event, or the verification, at time of evaluation, of that event depending on the speakers' belief which is based on the evidence available at speech time. Of course, it is the context of the utterance occurrence which clarifies which of the two meanings of certainty implied in the particular verb form.

Since certainty about future can rarely be attained, the verification that a particular future event will happen requires a number of circumstances which urge the listener to accept the particular assertion about future as felicitous. This is the core of the philosophy of fatalism referred to by Ziemmeran and Weingard (2002: 2):

There exists now a set of true propositions that, taken together, correctly predict everything that will happen in the future, then whatever will happen in the future is already unavoidable.

It is obvious that this philosophy implies the meaning of destiny denoted by Quirk et al (1985: 218). The following instance will be helpful:

a. The moon was to be a crescent within the following days.

The reference here is to past as it is indicated by the tense form, the exact reference which is –future in the past- is highlighted through the adverbial phrase "the following days " which indicates that the moon in (7.a) had not yet been in that state at the time of speech. The event of being a crescent would happen at sometime in future. However, the moon is destined to be in such a position by a set of true proposition represented by the powerful laws of nature which cannot go wrong. Accordingly, the fulfillment of the happening of that event is something which can be affirmed and verified at the time of speech ,which is prior to the happening of that event, since its happening is determined and decided by the accurate system of nature in this instance. In this respect Kaufman (2002:20) states that "the future state of affairs denoted by the verb phrase is actually true, typically in cases in which its truth can be deduced from past and present facts together with natural laws that are considered deterministic" . Accordingly (7.a.) can be paraphrased as

7.b. *The moon had already been destined by the rule of nature to be a crescent within the following days.*

The past tense form can be used to express the future events whose occurrence can be presumed through the evidence available at the speech time. In such a case the meaning of certainty involves the manifestation and verification of the particular future event at the time of evaluation. This is the attitude that Kaufmann (2002, 10-20) refers to as presumption of decidedness:

The utterance whose truth value depends on facts no later than the time of evaluation is presumed decided in any admissible belief state....The presumption of decidedness need not be a common belief among the interlocutors in order for a sentence to be felicitous. It is sufficient for them to agree that it may already be settled:

The doctor told us that our patient was to die in few days.

Suppose that this utterance conveys a doctor's belief concerning the patient's situation after having a look at a patient's medical reports. Due to the lack of foreknowledge no one can correctly predict when someone will die. The past tense verb form in (9) conveys the doctor's belief about the patient's state in accordance with what occurred in his reports. Of course these assumptions are based on reliable medical laws and are deduced from the general facts concerning human nature. Though these assumptions are entailed by the common context, they may be false for all the interlocutors due to the lack of foreknowledge. According to the medical evidence available at the speech time "time of evaluation", the patient was destined to deteriorate to death. Consequently, (9) expresses the doctor's belief concerning the patient's destiny with respect to his medical reports but not with respect to the real fact as no one can date the death of anyone.

It turns obvious that what highlights the certainty of happening of the future-in the past-event is the existence of an adverb that adds a sense of verification to the meaning of the verb phrase, and the context in which the past tense construction (Was+ to infinitive) is used to express either settledness or belief at the time of evaluation as it has been shown in the discussions above. The point to be mentioned here is that Quirk et al (1985) equals between the use of the past tense of will "would", and the construction of (WAS+ to infinitive) in certain instances (see examples 4 and 5 on page 3) describing them as "genius expressions" of future, i.e. both forms can convey the same level of certainty about the fulfillment of future- in the past-meaning if they are used in the certain context that have been discussed earlier.

This notion falsify the understanding that (will and would) are, generally speaking, connected with lack of certainty which arise from the fact that most of the main uses of

“will, and would” are broadly divided between the meanings of prediction or expectation and the meaning of volition. Of course, none of these meanings necessates the fulfillment of the future event: The police will be at the airport tomorrow. (Yacobs, undated: 235)

It is obvious that (10) makes a genuine prediction under uncertainty, this indicates that “will” necessarily shifts the reference time forward, but it does not necessarily indicates the fulfillment nor the settledness of that event, The volitional range of “will” extends from willingness, to intention and insistence:

I will write as soon as I can. (Quirk et al, 1985: 229)

12. I will do it if you like. (ibid)

13. If you will play the drums all night no wonder the neighbors complain. (Martin and Thomson, 1962: 201)

14. *He promised he would send a postcard from Egypt.*

15. *She said she would make dinner.*

None of the previous utterances guarantees the happening of the event in question. The meaning of intention in (11, and 12) does not guarantee the occurrence of the future event. Many times one intends or even has the will to do something but for some reasons one does not. “Will” in utterance (13) expresses the meaning of insistence and has nothing to do with the certainty about the future. "Would" in (14) expresses promise and intention but does not hint at the fulfillment of that action. In (15) , "would " merely expresses volition in the past.

In this respect, the researchers, on the one hand, agree that “Will” is generally associated with lack of certainty. On the other hand, they would like to remark that this does not mean that “will” is not sufficient to express certainty of the fulfillment of the event in question. The point is that, the meaning of certainty can be available with both “will” and "would" in particular contexts or when they are accompanied by indices which enhance the general meanings of the verb phrase in an utterance.

For instance , Edington (1997 : 37) views that certainty about the happening of an event is always available in the words of the Almighty and speakers with foreknowledge. The Almighty’s words are definitely true and manifested whether they are related to the past, present or future time since all these times are equally known to the Almighty. Consequently, The pragmatic context of utterance (16) is the source of truth value of the future event. Since all God's words are manifested, the modal “will” in the following version implies certainty about the future event denoted by the verb phrase:

16. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him, he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will destroy (PSALM: 245)

This version implies that all human deeds will be judged one day, and that God will save all those who obey and fear him. Ordinary inhabitants of the world should base their assertions about future on the evidence available at the speech time. With the assertion mentioned in (16), such evidence is generally too inclusive to support. No one actually witnesses the Day of Judgment. However, a listener who accepts the Almighty's assertion of that future event will end up with admissible belief state. the Almighty's foreknowledge is the evidence from which the assertion of this utterance derives its validity.

By the same token, "would " can also indicate certainty about the fulfillment of the future –in the past- event if the suitable semantic and contextual indices are available :

14. The time was not far off when he would regret this decision. (Quirk et al, 1985: 218)

The implication in (14) is that the event of regret would definitely be the consequence of the subject's decision. Utterance (14) can be understood as follows: (the event of regret had not happened at the time of speech (evaluation) but it would happen sooner than expected). In this sense (14) is a powerful expression which expresses the speaker's belief in the fulfillment of the event in question depending on evidence available at the time of evaluation ; this is why it is considered by Quirk et al (1985) as a genuine expression of future. The semantics of the sub clause “the time was not far off” interacts with the semantics of the future marker represented by the modal “would” comprising a powerful expression which includes certainty about the happening of the event in question. The adverb in such an utterance functions as the primary utterance internal source of temporal restriction on the reference interval.

The existence of the modal in an utterance cannot be regarded as a semantic defect since the verb element and other linguistic and contextual features all interact to comprise the meaning and reference of an utterance.

To sum up, it becomes clear that in light of Quirk et al notion about genuine expressions of the future- in the past- meaning, that the past tense form which expresses certainty about the happening of the event in question has a future -in the past – meaning which involves settledness about the happening of the particular event depending on the general facts and reliable evidence available at the time of evaluation. while the contexts where the past tense forms expresses unfulfilled events has a past time reference.

Test Analysis

To investigate the EFL learners' ability to recognize the exact time reference of the simple past tense forms in different constructions, a list of ten items is adopted. The subjects are asked to identify the time reference of each utterance. Though the verb phrases in all of the ten items are in the past tense forms, they express different references, i.e. a future reference in the past time and a past reference, the connotations conveyed these utterances.

The variation in time reference expressed by the past tense forms , and the variation of connotations conveyed by them are mainly due to variation in the context and the adverbs used with the verb phrase which may highly affect the meaning of the whole utterance. It is intended, through examining the learners' responses, to measure both their ability to recognize the exact references of the past tense forms and their meanings in different constructions. The subjects' knowledge of the influence of the linguistic, particularly pragmatic, environments on the reference of the verb phrase in the particular utterance will also be within the researchers' interest.

The subjects in this study are one hundred second-year students of the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon during the academic year 2006- 2007. Half of them ,i.e. (50) referred to as A, are given lectures about the topic while the other 50, labeled group B, are not given any instructions about the topic. Concerning the form of the questionnaire, It is checked by the members of the jury who suggested that the utterances of the questionnaire should be placed within an exchange to guarantee the clarity of the context in which the verb phrase occurs. On the one hand, this will enable the subjects to analyze the verb form in specific contexts and on the other hand each utterance will accept only the one interpretation determined by its context. Thus item (a) in each exchange is invented by the researchers depending on the opinion of the jury to fulfill the validity of the questionnaire. The pilot test involving ten second year students of the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon was conducted prior to the final test, and the result of the pilot test reflects the clarity of the questionnaire for the testees.

3.1 Data Analysis

Below is a discussion of each of the ten items given to the testees. first, the item is presented, then the subjects' responses are discussed.

a. Have you known that Mr. Robinson left the country on Monday..

b. *Oh, yes, I was going to meet him in Bordeaux the next day but the secretary told me that the date was cancelled.*

The underlined utterance expresses a unfulfilled intention, the act of meaning did not take place and the reference here is to the past time. the context of the utterance indicates that the meaning of arrangement in the past. However, the students are misled by the adverbial phrase "the next day" and future- in the past- reference occupies half of the subjects' response in group (A), i.e. 50% , and the other (50%) of the responses is given to the past time reference. In group B, most of the subjects, i.e. (70%) wrongly identify the reference as future in the past, while only (20%)of them give the correct response which is past time reference. (10%)of the learners identify the verb form not its reference.

a. I think that that man is blind.

b. I think so. he was about to hit me.

The sentence again expresses unfulfilled past event, the percentage of the learners who give the correct response and identify the reference as past in group A is (70%), the remaining percentage of the responses (30%) identifies the form of the verb form not its reference. In group (B), (55%) of the subjects give the correct response, i.e. past reference, (1%) of the subjects view that the utterance has a future reference, and the rest of the subjects (54%) fail to distinguish between the verb tense and its reference in that they identify the verb form as simple past.

a. I could not it that Tony was convinced to live in a foreign country.

b. I always thought that he was eventually to accept this fact.

This utterance expresses the meaning of destiny, the act of acceptance is something that was guaranteed, or believed to be happened and the reference is to future- in the past time. However, only (50%) of the subjects in (A) respond correctly, (30%) of the subjects wrongly identify the time reference as past, and (20%) of them identify the form of the verb rather than its reference. In group (B), only (25%) of the subjects give the correct response. (70%) of them identify the time reference of the past tense as past, while (5%) of them identify the verb form rather than its reference.

a. Sarah and Alex seemed very busy with their new project.

As they do their best, I was sure that they would eventually end it in time..

This utterance expresses the speaker belief in the future fulfillment of the act of ending the project in time. In (A), Most of the subjects (70%) give the correct response i.e. future- in the past - reference. (30%) of the subjects wrongly identify the time reference as past. In (B), the correct responses occupy (59%) of the total percentage, while the past time reference occupies (41%). It is thought that the future adverb "next week" is the reason behind the large percentage of the correct responses in (A) and (B).

a. I was surprised to know that Lara did not realize that he had been deceiving her .

I knew Lara well and I was sure that the time was not far off when she would discover the truth.

The reference here is to future in the past . (80%) of the subjects in A give the correct response, (16%) wrongly identify the time reference as past, (4%) of them identify the verb form as simple past. In B, (80%) of the subjects view that the time reference of this utterance is past, while (10%) of them identify the verb form rather than reference. Only (10%) of the subjects give the correct response which is future in the past time.

Though that usurer had left the country to be out of the legal responsibility, I had the belief that this man was to end in a jail.

This utterance expresses the meaning of destiny the reference is to the future in the past. (64%) of the subjects in A give the correct response, and (28%) of them identify the time reference as past, (8%) of the subjects identify the form of the verb. The responses to this utterance in B are divided between past time reference (58%), and future reference (32%). The rest of the subjects (10%) identify the verb form rather than its reference.

a. Tom, after a deep thinking I guess that we have to break up.

What! You were about to give me your address.

This utterance expresses unfulfilled intention, and all of the subjects in A and B give the correct response which is "past time reference".

a. What about Suzan's case.

The police were to charge her, but at last she persuaded them she was innocent.

The percentage of correct responses in A and B is similar to that of the previous utterance.

The past time adverb "at last" hints at the correct response which is past time reference.

a. *Do you remember the handicapped guy of the primary school.*

Yes, I do. But I hadn't seen him since we are off the primary school.

He is now one of the best teachers of the sign language in the greatest institute in London.

Really! no one imagined at that time that he would succeed in skipping over his disability. Ah, that is really inspiring !

All of the subjects in the two groups can correctly identify the reference in this utterance as future in the past . There is

a. *It was embarrassing for me when the executives of the company thought of submitting their case to the court. As You know both of them were close friends of mine and it would be really difficult to offend any of them.*

	FUTURE IN THE PAST		PAST REFER ENCE		FORM	
	A	B	A	B	A	B
	5	70	5	2		1
	0	%	0	0		0
	%		%	%		%
		1	7	5	3	5
		%	0	5	0	4
			%	%	%	%

Iraqi EFL Learners' Recognition of

	5 0 %	25 %	3 0 %	7 0 %	2 0 %	5 %
	7 0 %	59 %	3 0 %	4 1 %		
	8 0 %	10 %	1 6 %	8 0 %	4 %	1 0 %
	6 4 %	32 %	2 8 %	5 8 %	8 %	1 0 %
			1 0 0 %	1 0 0 %		
			1 0 0 %	1 0 0 %		
			1 0 0 %	1 0 0 %		
	9 2 %	80 %	8 %	5 %		1 5 %

I was not worry at all , the executives were also friends and I thought that sooner or later they would agree to settle out of court.

In A , most of the subjects (92%) correctly identify the reference as future in the past; (8%) of them view that this utterance expresses a past time reference. (80%) of the subjects in B identify the reference as future in the past, (5%) identify the reference as past, while the remaining (15%) of the subjects identify the form of the verb.

Table(1): Percentages of the subjects' recognition of the reference of the past tense forms

3.2.Discussion of the Subjects' Errors

Most of the learners' wrong responses can be attributed to their unawareness of the various meanings that the past tense may imply in different constructions. This can be clearly touched through the learners' responses to the underlined utterance in (1):

I was going to meet him in Bordeaux the next day

The subject of this utterance arranged to meet someone at a particular date, but for some reasons he did not. The learners ((50%) in A and (70%) in B) fail to get such meaning and they are misled by the future adverb "next day". Thus they wrongly identify the exact time reference of the underlined utterance in (1) as future in the past .

It seems that the learners try to get out of their confusion about the time reference of each utterance by relying heavily on the meanings of adverbs which accompany the verb phrase of an utterance. This is apparent in the high percentage of the correct responses for the underlined utterances in (3), (4), (8),(9)and (10):

He was eventually to accept this fact.

4. They were opening their shop next week.

8. The police were to charge her, but at last she persuaded them she was innocent.

9. No one imagined at that time that he would succeed.

Sooner or later, the company would agree to settle out of court

Concerning the learners' responses to (3), it seems to the researchers, through their dealing with their students, that they confused the meaning of the future adverb "eventually" with the meaning of the past adverb "at last". Consequently (70%) of the subjects in B view that (3) has a past time reference, while this percentage decreases in A to (30%). Most of the subjects ((70%) in A and (59%) in B for item (4), and (92%) in A, and (80%) in B for item (10)) identify the reference of (4) and (10) as future depending on "next week" and "sooner or later", while the adverbs "at last" in (8) and "at that time" in (9) urge all of the subjects in the two groups to give the response represented by past time reference. The reader of this paper may notice the researchers' focus on the subjects' comprehension of the adverbs and the way they employ these adverbs to identify the reference of the verb phrase in an utterance. In fact, the subjects' responses themselves urge the researchers to such kind of analysis, simply because their responses –especially those of group B- do not give hint that they interpret the utterances pragmatically before giving their responses. This can be proved through examining the learners' responses to the utterances where no adverbs are used:

2. He was about to hit me.

7. You were going to give me your address.

Utterance (2) and (7) have past time references, and they express unfulfilled intention. In spite of the difference in meaning and reference between these utterances, the highest percentage of the subjects' responses for each of the two utterances above ((70%), (100%) in A, and (55%), (100%) in B) is taken up by the past time reference. In other words they appear to generalize the past reference to all utterances where no adverbs occur. However, the responses to the underlined utterances in exchanges number (5) and (6) indicate that the ability of students in A to analyze the context of an utterance is better than that of the students in group B:

5. The time was not far off when she would discover the truth.

6. He was to end in a jail.

Utterance (5) means that "she" would not need much time to discover the truth, i.e. she would discover the truth sooner than expected. In (6) the message of the utterance is that the subject "he" is destined to end in prison. Examining the given exchanges clarifies that

the reference is to future in the past, and most of the subjects in A(80%, 64%) respond correctly, while in B only (10%, 32) of the subjects give the correct response.

In fact, noticing the subjects' responses of group A to this utterance and all the other utterances highlights the better level of performance of the subjects in this group. This in turn proves that teaching factor positively affects the subjects ability in group A to analyze the text in which a particular verbal element occurs which lead to less percentage of errors in their performance. Table(2) below shows the percentages of errors in the subjects responses in both A and B:

	Identifying wrong reference		Identifying verb form	
	A	B	A	B
	50%	70%		10%
		1%	30%	54%
	30%	70%	20%	5%
	30%	41%		
	16%	80%	4%	10%
	28%	58%	8%	10%
	8%	5%		15%

Table (2): The Subjects' Errors

As the table shows that the errors committed by the subjects in A are less than those committed by the subjects in B. The table also indicates that the percentage of the subjects who fail to differentiate between the verb form and the verb reference is larger in group B, and this again indicates the positive role of the teaching factor in the performance of the subjects in group A.

3.3. The Overall Discussion

The results of the test analysis support the hypothesis which involves the learners' appeal to generalize the past tense reference to most of the past tense forms without taking into consideration the contexts of their occurrences. It is obvious from the percentages showed in table(1) that the past tense reference occupies most of the learners' responses i.e.(53.2) in group A, and (62.9) in group B. Such a result indicates that the learners give their responses arbitrarily focusing on the verb form rather than the compatibility between the verb and other linguistic and pragmatic contexts which highly affect the verb reference in an utterance.

Here comes the role of the teachers in directing their students' minds and thinking towards the flexibility of any language system. It is necessary for the students to realize that studying language is not limited to memorizing its words and rules. The speakers sometimes may deviate from rules in a way that makes the whole language more expressive and effective.

The learners' responses do not hint at a positive or even negative interference of the mother tongue. This contrasts the second hypothesis that the mother tongue may affect the learners'

performance. The researchers would like to discuss this point. The Arabic perfect form (صيغة الماضي) is used to tell about future time event, not future in the past, whose happening is an inevitable matter:

{ إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ } (الكوثر: 1)

"We have given you abundance" (Zayid, 1980:642)

This verse indicates that (محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم) will give his prophet (الله عز وجل) the heavenly fountain of unbounded grace. Such a device of using the perfect tense (صيغة الماضي) to refer to futurity is used in the Glorious Quran to indicate the inevitable occurrence of such event in future (Arafa,1984:204).

It is well known that most people read the holy verses without being aware to the rhetoric touches and meanings implied within those verses. Most people read the Glorious Quran just to be blessed; our learners are not exception from this fact. As the learners may not be aware of such use of the past tense in their own language, they cannot make use of it while giving their responses. Differences between the two languages in some aspects may be another reason for the absence of the mother tongue in the learners' responses. The past tense forms can be used to express future event from a view point in the past, and only those forms which indicate the verification of the happening of the event in question can be used to indicate the meaning of destiny. However the situation in Arabic language is different.

For instance, instead of the past tense form the passive participle (اسم المفعول) which includes the meaning of past tense, is used in Arabic to express the meaning of destiny in future time (Aljazri,1998: 419):

{ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَةً لِمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ الْآخِرَةِ ذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَجْمُوعٌ لَهُ النَّاسُ وَذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَشْهُودٌ } (هود: 103)

"In that is a Sign for those who fear the chastisement of the hereafter, that is a Day for which mankind will be gathered together: that will be a Day of Testimony"

The passive participle "مجموع ، مشهود" describe the Day of Judgment in the holy verse above. Things are described by particular properties when these properties are in fact present in these things and exist from the early time those things are found. Accordingly, the passive participle "مجموع ، مشهود" attribute to the described noun (the Day of Judgment) the meaning of being (معنى الكينونة) and existence. In such a case the passive participle "مجموع ، مشهود" include the meaning of past in giving the sense that the event did exist and happen before the time of speaking (Al- jwebari, 1985: 421). Thus the way of using the past to express destiny in Arabic is completely different from that used in English.

The fact that such a special use of the past tense form for future reference often occurs in the most rhetoric and standard samples of language such as the language of the Glorious

Quran, beside the existence of some difference between the Arabic and the English languages in some aspects of such use makes the absence of the interference of the mother tongue seem logical. As such this falsify the second hypothesis which reads: (the mother tongue is expected to affect the learners' performance).

Conclusions

It is possible to sum up the conclusions of this paper as the follows:

The tense of the verb does not always function as the primary determining factor of the reference of the particular utterance. Rather, it may function as a harmonizing factor which serves in relating the verb phrase to the linguistic and contextual environments of that utterance. Accordingly, the past tense can be used to refer to true or verified future events in the past time in two situations: the first one involves the settledness of that event. The second situation involves the verification of that event which demands it to be entailed by the common context or proved by a powerful evidence available at time of evaluation

The percentage of past time reference identified in the learners' responses occupies (53.2) in group A, and (62.9) in group B . Such a percentage reflects the learners' appeal to limit the meaning or reference of the past tense to its literal name. On the one hand , (0.5) in A, and (0.7) wrongly identify the time reference of some utterances as future depending on the existence of the future adverbs. On the other hand, (19.8) of the learners in A, and (21.3) of the learners in B restrict the reference of all utterances where no adverbs are used to the past time reference . This concludes that the EFL learners are unaware of the compatibility and harmonizing relation between the verb tense and both structural and contextual environment of an utterance.

3. The percentage of incorrectness in group A is (16.2), while this percentage rises up to(32.5) in the performance of group B. the percentage of those who identify the form of the verb not its reference is (6.2) in group A, and (10.4) in group B. This result indicates that though both of A and B commit mistakes in identifying the time reference of the past tense form , the overall achievement of group A is absolutely better than that of group B. this fact comes in accordance with the hypothesis which reads((the performance of the learners who have received some instruction, henceforth group A, about the past tense forms used to express verified future is expected to be better than the performance of the learners who have not, henceforth group B)).

Though the simple past forms can be used for future reference in both English and Arabic, the two languages exhibit some syntactic ,semantic and pragmatic differences which justify the absence of the interference of the mother tongue in the learners' responses. This

falsifies the second hypothesis which assumes the interference of the mother tongue in the learners' performance.

Appendix

The Questionnaire

Identify the time reference (past, future in the past) of verb phrase in the underlined utterance in each of the following exchanges ((you are required to pay attention to the whole context – exchange- when you try to identify the time reference of the underlined verb phrase).

a. Have you known that Mr. Robinson left the country on Monday..

Oh, yes, I was going to meet him in Bordeaux the next day but the secretary told me that the date was cancelled.

a. I think that that man is blind.

b. I think so. he was about to hit me.

a. I could not it that Tony was convinced to live in a foreign country.

b. I always thought that he was eventually to accept this fact.

a. Sarah and Alex seemed very busy with their new project.

As they do their best, I was sure that they would eventually end it in time..

a. I was surprised to know that Lara did not realize that he had been deceiving her .

I knew Lara well and I was sure that the time was not far off when she would discover the truth.

Though that usurer had left the country to be out of the legal responsibility, I had the belief that this man was to end in a jail.

7.a. Tom, after a deep thinking I guess that we have to break up.

What! You were going to give me your address.

a. What about Suzan's case.

The police were to charge her, but at last she persuaded them she was innocent.

a. Do you remember the handicapped guy of the primary school.

Yes, I do. But I hadn't seen him since we were off the primary school.

He is now one of the best teachers of the sign language in the greatest institute in London.

Really! no one imagined at that time that he would succeed in skipping over his disability. Ah, that is really inspiring !

a. It was embarrassing for me when the executives of the company thought of submitting their case to the court. As You know both of them were close friends of mine and it would be really difficult to offend any of them.

I was not worry at all , the executives were also friends and I thought that sooner or later, they would agree to settle out of court.

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