

Analysis of Tenses and Aspects in the Short Story *Wajhul Haqiqah* by Taufiq Al-Hakim: A Morphosyntactic Study

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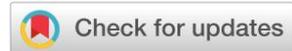
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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the system of tense and aspect in verbs within the Arabic short story Wajhul Haqiqah by Taufiq Al-Hakim. The aim is to demonstrate that Arabic verbs not only function as actions but also serve as markers of temporality and aspectuality through their diverse patterns. These varying patterns convey different meanings of time and aspect. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research examines the object as it is and presents it in the form of an explanation in the report. Data collection techniques include listening and note-taking. The findings indicate that the short story predominantly utilizes verbs in the past tense with a perfective aspect, indicating actions completed in the past. Additionally, there are present tense verbs that show imperfective aspects, especially when preceded by past tense verbs within the same sentence structure. The study confirms that in Arabic, temporality and aspectuality are determined not only by the form of the verb but also by the particles that accompany it. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the tense and aspect system in Arabic literature.

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1. Introduction

Linguistic tools that convey the concept of temporal meaning can be found at the morphosyntactic, lexico-semantic, and discourse levels. In languages that possess tense, the placement of events in time is typically expressed through morphological processes. Meanwhile, in languages that lack grammatical tense, temporal relations are marked through lexical items and the interrelation between clauses or broader discourse structures (Mardiah, 2002; Al-Obaydi & Rahman, 2021; Karubaba et al., 2024).

Fundamentally, there are three grammatical categories that link temporal contours with the speaker's perspective: tense, aspect, and mood (Hopper, 1982; Rahman et al., 2019; Sachiya et al. 2025). The discussion surrounding these categories—tense, aspect, and mood—can be observed through verb forms in sentences. However, the present study will focus solely on the tense and aspect realized through verbs in the short story.

Comrie (1976) defines tense as “the grammaticalized expression of the location in time of a situation relative to the moment of utterance.” Tense organizes time in a linear sequence: events occurring at the time of speech are categorized as present, those occurring prior are considered past, and those occurring afterward are categorized as future. The present moment serves as a reference point that distinguishes the past from the future. This system of temporality, which links events or actions to a reference point, is thus considered deictic in nature (Comrie, 1985; Ko et al., 2025; Jung et al., 2025).

Al-Hasyimi (2009) explains that the *fi' l Madhi* (past tense verb) in Arabic refers to events that occurred before the moment of utterance, as stated in the definition: *“الفاعل الماضى ما دل على حدث وقع فى الزمان الذى قبل زمان التكلم”* “*Fi' l Madhi* is a verb that refers to an event occurring before the time of speech.” On the other hand, the *fi' l muḍāri'* can refer to either the present (*ḥāl*) or the future (*istiqbāl*), as defined in: *“الفاعل المضارع ما يدل على حدث يقع فى زمان التكلم او بعده”* “*Fi' l muḍāri'* is a verb that refers to an event occurring at or after the time of speech.”

Shini (1990) classifies Arabic verbs based on temporal reference into three categories: *fi' l Madhi* (past), *fi' l muḍāri'* (present/future), and *fi' l amr* (imperative). According to Shini, *fi' l Madhi* refers to events that occurred before the speech moment; *fi' l muḍāri'* refers to events happening now or in the future; and *fi' l amr* indicates a request or command for future action.

Comrie (1976) further explains that tense, as part of temporal categories, is a deictic system involving two time points: the time of reference and the event time. This relationship links events to the speaking moment. In his book *Tense*, Comrie clarifies that tense connects the timing of an event to one or more temporal reference points, usually the speech time. In another work Comrie (1985) he defines tense as the grammaticalization of time location.

In addition to tense, Comrie (1976) also discusses aspect, defining it as a non-deictic category. Aspect can be distinguished into perfective and imperfective. The perfective aspect views events as complete wholes from an external perspective, without focusing on their internal structure or development stages (beginning, middle, end). It reflects an entire, bounded timeframe. In contrast, the imperfective aspect views events from within, emphasizing the internal phases of an event. Thus, aspect is concerned with how an event unfolds and is perceived in time. In Arabic, there are two main aspects—perfective and imperfective—expressed through *fiʿl Madhi* and *fiʿl muḍāriʿ*, respectively. *Fiʿl Madhi* is associated with the perfect tense and completed actions, while *fiʿl muḍāriʿ* indicates actions that are ongoing or yet to occur (Haywood dan Nahmad, 1962).

Holes (1995) asserts that in Arabic, temporal meaning is not primarily expressed through morphology but rather through lexical elements. He emphasizes that verb inflection in Arabic relates more to aspectuality than temporality. He clarifies this by stating that *fiʿl Madhi* represents a completed action, while *fiʿl muḍāriʿ* represents an ongoing or unfolding action. Holes also argues that the verb *kāna* can function as either a copula (to be) or an auxiliary verb, depending on context, and plays a role in marking both aspect and temporality. According to Holes, *fiʿl muḍāriʿ* does not inherently carry temporal meaning, while *fiʿl Madhi* semantically contains temporal reference, especially in dynamic verbs.

Beyond verb morphology, there are also particles that influence the temporal interpretation of events. Wright (2002) discusses the particle *qad* preceding a perfect verb. When *qad* appears before a perfect verb, it typically indicates that the action has recently been completed—“just occurred”—and serves to assert the certainty or definitiveness of the event. He notes that *qad* usually precedes *fiʿl Madhi*, but it can also be separated from the verb by expressions of oath.

It can be concluded that in Arabic, linguistic time, consisting of tense and aspect, is expressed through verbs, verbs with certain added particles, as well as lexical expressions that refer to time. Verb forms such as *fiʿil māḍī* (past tense verb) and *fiʿil muḍāriʿ* (present/future tense verb) morphologically reflect specific tenses and aspects, while particles such as *كان* (was), *ما زال*, *لم*, *قد*, *لم*, *ما زال*, *كان*, and others can modify the temporal and aspectual meaning of the verb. In addition, time expressions like *أمس* (yesterday), *ذات مساء* (one evening), or *منذ يومين* (two days ago) serve as lexical markers that clarify time references in both narration and dialogue. Although tense and aspect both function as temporal indicators in language, they differ in nature. Tense falls under the category of deictic elements, as it refers to time in relation to the moment of utterance. Aspect, on the other hand, is considered non-deictic, as it is not directly tied to the time of speech, but rather focuses on the internal structure or progression of an event.

Although numerous studies have discussed tense and aspect in Arabic in general, few have examined their realization within literary texts. Therefore, this study focuses on the short story *Wajhul Haqiqah* by Taufiq Al-Hakim to analyze how verbs in the text represent the systems of tense and aspect in Arabic. The short story, comprising 13 pages, is part of the author's anthology titled *Arinillah*. In this Arabic literary text, *Wajhul Haqiqah*, verb usage in both narrative and dialogue reveals varied patterns, which drew the researchers' interest in selecting it as the study's subject.

This study aims to explore the use of tense and aspect in *Wajhul Haqiqah*, the role of particles in modifying tense and aspect, and the patterns of *fiʿl Madhi* and *fiʿl muḍāriʿ* in representing time and action within the story. The study seeks to demonstrate that verbs in Arabic function not merely as indicators of action but also as temporal markers with diverse structural patterns. This approach also facilitates understanding the time setting of the story through the analysis of verb forms.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative method aimed at explaining the linguistic phenomena present in Arabic texts, specifically in the short story titled *Wajhul Haqiqah*. Qualitative research involves analyzing words and information gathered from subjects in natural settings and is presented in the form of narrative reports. These reports describe the data as they are, after verification of their validity and credibility in accordance with established standards.

According to Sugiyono (1967), the descriptive method is a research approach that provides an overview of an existing issue by collecting data in accordance with actual conditions. The data are then organized, processed, and analyzed to present a depiction of the problem under study. (Yusuf, 2017) adds that qualitative research focuses on efforts

to understand the meaning, concepts, characteristics, phenomena, symbols, or descriptions of naturally occurring events, which are subsequently presented in narrative form.

Data collection in this study was conducted through documentary study—a technique that involves listening (observation) and note-taking. The observation technique refers to examining the use of language that forms the object of study. This is followed by the note-taking technique, where important data observed are recorded for further analysis (Sudaryanto, 2015). The data analysis technique was carried out in several steps. First, narratives and dialogues containing verbal elements were inventoried. Second, the collected data were classified and organized based on types of verbs. The data were categorized according to the type of verb (*fi'il madhi* and *fi'il mudhari*), as well as the usage patterns of particles that affect tense and aspect. The analysis was conducted by comparing these patterns with the theories proposed by Comrie (1976) and Holes (1995). Third, a re-evaluation was carried out to determine whether the collected sentences contained other elements functioning as temporal markers, including auxiliary verbs, particles, or prefixes indicating tense and aspect. Fourth, the verb patterns in the narratives and dialogues were analyzed. Fifth, the forms and meanings of the various verb forms used in the short story manuscript were described.

This research was carried out through several stages. The first stage was preparation, in which the researcher determined the research object, developed an analytical framework, and collected data relevant to the study. The second stage involved data collection from the short story titled "*Wajhul Haqiqah*." The third stage was data analysis, where each verb found in the narrative and dialogue was examined based on its pattern. The final stage was the preparation of the research report, which included the background, analysis, research findings, and conclusion.

3. Result and Discussion

The following section presents data derived from the analysis of the short story *Wajhul Haqiqah*, focusing on various patterns of expressing tense and aspect using two primary verb forms: *fi'il Madhi* and *fi'il Mudhari*.

Table 1. Tense and Aspect Patterns

Verb Form	Tense	Aspect	Pattern
<i>Madhi</i>	Past	Perfective	فعل ماضى
	Recent Past	Perfective	قد + فعل ماضى / كان قد + فعل ماضى
<i>Mudhari</i>	Past	Imperfective	لم + فعل مضارع
	Past	Imperfective	قد + فعل مضارع / كان قد + فعل مضارع
	Distant Past	Imperfective	ما زال + فعل مضارع
	Present	Imperfective	فعل مضارع
	Near Past	Imperfective	كاد + فعل مضارع
	Future	Imperfective	عوامل نواصب + فعل مضارع
	Past Ending in Present	Perfective	لم + فعل مضارع + اليوم
Leksikal	Past	-	ذات ليلة
	Past	-	ذات مساء
	Past	-	أمس
	Past	-	منذ يومين

As shown in the table, three forms of expressing tense and aspect in Arabic are used in *Wajhul Haqiqah*: verb forms (*fi'il Madhi* and *fi'il Mudhari*) and lexical indicators. Below is a detailed explanation of these data:

3.1 Madhi Verb

Madhi verbs are typically associated with past tense and perfective aspect. However, as demonstrated in the data below, different patterns can yield various nuances.

Data 1

نعم عرفتها وجالستها ورأيتها ر (p.114)

The tense and aspect in this sentence are conveyed solely through the basic *fi'il Madhi* forms without additional particles. Such use indicates an unspecified past event and a perfective aspect, showing that the actions were completed sequentially (e.g., جالستها followed by عرفتها).

Data 2, 3, 4

كنت قد ذهبت إلى المطبخ من أجلها (p.109)

وقد سمعت صوته بالباب (p.109)

كان قد وضع الحائناً لرواية لي (p.103)

In the three sentences above, tense and aspect are indicated through the use of the verbal form *fi'il madhi* combined with the particle قد / كان قد. The verbal pattern +فعل ماضٍ / كان قد denotes a recent past tense, meaning the action was just completed before the moment of utterance. This pattern also reflects the perfective aspect, marked by the presence of the particle قد preceding the verb, indicating that the action was fully completed.

Setiawan & Sanusi (2020) in their study, state that the verbal pattern (كان +فعل، كان قد +فعل، قد +كان +فعل) indicates a remote past. However, in a study by Daelami (2023), the pattern (كان قد فعل) is said to express a recent past. In contrast, in this short story, the same pattern expresses both recent and remote past. For example, in sentences (2) and (3), the verb denotes a recent past, whereas in sentence (4), the same *fi'il madhi* form indicates a remote past.

3.2 Mudhari Verb

Mudhari verbs are typically associated with present tense and imperfective aspect. However, various patterns yield broader temporal meanings.

Data 5

كيف أنني لم أسمع مرة واحدة صوت كلام (p.105)

The markers of tense and aspect in the sentence above are indicated by the use of the verb form *fi'il mudhari'* with the addition of the particle لم. The verbal pattern +فعل مضارع لم expresses past tense, meaning the action is situated prior to the moment of utterance. This pattern carries an imperfective aspect, as it focuses on the nature or status of the action itself rather than the chronological flow of speech. The action is considered incomplete or not yet realized, as indicated by the presence of the particle لم preceding the verb.

Data 6

وقد كنت أقوم أحياناً نصف قيام في فراشي (p.105)

In the sentence above, tense and aspect are marked by the use of the verb form *fi'il mudhari'* combined with the particles قد / كان قد. The verbal pattern +فعل مضارع / كان قد indicates a past tense, meaning the action occurred prior to the moment of utterance. This pattern reflects the imperfective aspect, suggesting that the action was not yet fully completed because it refers to an ongoing or repeated activity.

Data 7

إني ما زلت أحتفظ بأسطوانتها (p.107)

The markers of tense and aspect in the sentence above are indicated by the use of the verb form *fi'il mudhari'* with the addition of the particle ما زال. The verbal pattern +فعل مضارع ما زال expresses a past tense that extends from the distant past up to the present moment, meaning the action began in the past and is still ongoing. This pattern reflects the imperfective aspect, indicating that the action is not yet fully completed.

Data 8

(p.104) إني أشمّ هنا رائحة قصة تُكتب

In the sentence above, tense and aspect are marked by the use of the verb form *fi'il mudhari'* without any additional particle. A *fi'il mudhari'* without a preceding particle indicates present tense, which does not refer specifically to a particular moment in time. It carries the imperfective aspect, as signaled by the *mudhari'* form itself, meaning the action is not yet fully completed.

Data 9

(p.109) اكتب الرسالة بالفرنسيّة، وأنا أنقلها إلى الإيطالية

With the same pattern, a *fi'il mudhari'* without the aforementioned structure or without any added particle can also express a future tense. It still carries the imperfective aspect, indicating that the action is not yet fully completed. This is marked by the presence of a preceding imperfective verb, which helps convey the sense of an action that will occur in the future.

Data 10

(p.115) وكاد الليل ينتصف

The markers of tense and aspect in the sentence above are indicated by the use of the verb form *fi'il mudhari'* with the addition of the particle *كاد*. The verbal pattern *كاد + فعل مضارع* expresses a past tense that is close to the present, meaning the action occurred just before the moment of utterance and leads up to it. This pattern reflects the imperfective aspect, indicating that the action is not yet fully completed, as marked by the presence of the particle *كاد*.

Data 11, 12

(p.107) غير أني أحب أن أديرها

(p.104) لن يحدث ذلك أبدا

In the sentence above, tense and aspect are marked by the use of the verb form *fi'il mudhari'* combined with the particle *'awamil nasb* (عوامل نواصب). The verbal pattern *'awamil nasb + fi'il mudhari'* (عوامل نواصب + فعل مضارع) indicates a future tense, meaning the action will take place after the moment of utterance. This pattern carries the imperfective aspect, as the action is not yet completed, which is signaled by the presence of *'awamil nasb*.

Data 13

(p.104) إني لم أتبنيّ ذلك إلا اليوم

The markers of tense and aspect in the sentence above are indicated by the *fi'il mudhari'* form itself, without the addition of any particle. However, the presence of the word "اليوم" (today) provides emphasis. In this pattern, the *fi'il mudhari'* denotes a past tense that ends in the present, meaning the action was just completed prior to the moment of utterance. This verb carries a perfective aspect, as the event is not described as an ongoing process but rather as a completed and whole action.

3.3 Lexically

In addition to being expressed morphologically, temporality in the short story *Wajhul Haqiqah* is also conveyed lexically. The following are several examples in which temporality is expressed lexically, both in the narrative and in the dialogue.

Data 14

(p.104) تتبع خطاك ذات ليلة

In the sentence above, past tense is indicated not only by the verb form, but also lexically reinforced by the phrase *ذات ليلة* (one night).

Data 15

(p.107) ولقد جاءتني صاحبة النزل ذات مساء

The past tense in this sentence is marked by the verb and lexically emphasized by the phrase ذات مساء (one evening).

Data 16

لقد كذبت عليك أمس (p.109)

In this sentence, past tense is not only shown through the verb form, but also explicitly stated lexically with the word أمس (yesterday).

Data 17

منذ يومين دخلت المطبخ (p.109)

The past time reference is conveyed both morphologically through the verb and lexically through the word منذ يومين (two days ago). This word marking the passage of time from the point of utterance, it is deictic in nature, referring to the past.

This study reveals that the tense and aspect system in Arabic—particularly within literary texts such as the short story *Wajhul Haqiqah* by Taufiq Al-Hakim—demonstrates a diverse range of patterns involving both verb forms and accompanying particles. The analysis of narrative and dialogue in the short story shows that verbs not only serve to indicate actions but also function as markers of temporality and aspectuality.

The *madhi* verb form consistently denotes past tense and perfective aspect, indicating actions that have been fully completed. When preceded by particles such as *qad* or *kana qad*, these verbs express more specific temporal nuances—either recent or distant past—depending on the context of the sentence. This finding highlights the significant role of particles in shaping the temporal and aspectual interpretation of verbs, suggesting that meaning in Arabic is not determined solely by verb morphology.

In contrast, *mudhari* verbs typically convey an imperfective aspect, referring to ongoing, incomplete, or repeated actions. With the addition of certain particles such as *lam*, *qad*, *ma zal*, or *kāda*, *mudhari* verbs can refer to past, present, or future events. These patterns illustrate the flexibility and context-dependent nature of temporal expression in Arabic, where tense is not rigidly fixed but is instead shaped by syntactic and discourse-level cues.

Beyond morphological markers, temporality is also expressed lexically through time expressions such as *dhāta laylah* (one night), *amsi* (yesterday), and *mundhu yawmain* (two days ago). These lexical indicators reinforce temporal meaning and contribute to the temporal setting of the narrative. This lexical dimension enriches the temporal framework of the story, showing that time in Arabic texts can be constructed through multiple linguistic levels.

Overall, this research affirms that the system of tense and aspect in Arabic is dynamic and cannot be exclusively determined by verb forms. The role of particles and syntactic context is critical in interpreting the temporal and aspectual dimensions of events. As such, this study contributes significantly to Arabic linguistic studies, particularly in enhancing our understanding of temporality and aspectuality within literary texts. Furthermore, the study opens avenues for future research to compare the use of tense and aspect across various genres of Arabic texts, both literary and non-literary.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that in the short story *Wajhul Haqiqah*, various verb patterns reflect distinct meanings of tense and aspect. Past tense verbs predominantly express past time with a perfective aspect, whereas present tense verbs preceded by particles such as *qad* denote past time with an imperfective aspect. These observations suggest that in Arabic, tense and aspect are determined not only by the verb forms but also by the accompanying particles.

This research demonstrates that verbs in Arabic literary texts, encompassing both narration and dialogue, play a pivotal role in marking temporality and aspectuality. The short story employs numerous verbs with past time and imperfective aspect, indicating actions that are not yet completed. This study contributes significantly to Arabic linguistic studies by emphasizing that the tense and aspect system is dynamic and contextual, thereby paving the way for further research across various genres of Arabic texts, both literary and non-literary.

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