The Arabic Defective Verb كان :Some Syntactic/

Semantic Problems in Translation with

Reference to the Glorious Quran

Ma'an Mamdouh Ahmed[*]

1. Introduction

In translation, there are different kinds of problems which the translators face : linguistic and non-linguistic. When a translator is not a complete master of both the source language and the target language, linguistic difficulties may arise.The defective (substantive, incomplete, relative) verb كان is syntactically and semantically problematic for it is illusionary; in form it indicates past, and in Arabic it is called فعل ماضي ناقص (past defective verb). Consequently, it is often rendered by most translators into the past. But the question is: Does it always indicate past or it can show other syntactic and semantic functions?

(*) Lecturer Department of English Language-College of Arts / University of Mosul

It is the concern of the current study to explore this issue and try to prove that this verb indicates other syntactic and semantic functions. The best authentic Arabic text is the Holy Quran on which this study is based as كان is frequently used in it. The Holy Quran, as a religious text, has the characteristics of sacredness which is based on faith; both the message and the words expressing it are sacred (Aziz and Lataiwishi, 2000: 10). It is not possible to translate such a text for the sacred words of the source text cannot be rendered into the words of the target language without losing their divine value. Moreover, all religions have a long history, which means that the language of the original text has passed through several stages of development resulting in considerable changes in the meanings of words and expressions and in grammar.

1.1 The Perfect Verb in Arabic

The 3rd pers. sing. masc. Perf. فعل , being the simplest form of the verb, is commonly used by the Arab grammarians as paradigm, but for shortness' sake it is always rendered into English by the infinitive; يقتل (to kill), instead of (he has killed) (Wright, 1971, Vol.2: 29). From this paradigm several other forms are derived in different ways which express various modifications of the idea it conveys. As an absolute

verb, it indicates past and is coloured by other tenses when used in a certain context or influenced by certain factors that may change its tense such as the subjunctive, jussive and conditional particles, expanding its circle to imply the present and future (Abdul-Kareem, 1999: 50).

Aziz (1989: 44) states that this tense has the following uses:

1. All types of acts completed before the present moment: long acts, short acts, repeated acts, etc. which indicate past time.

Maughmam lived in Paris when he was a child.

عاش موم في باريس وهو طفل

2. Past actions in the indefinite past,

The plane has arrived.   لقد وصلت الطائرة

3. Wishes, prayers and curses,

' May God have mercy on him.   رحمه الله

God bless you.   بارك الله فيك

God curse him.   لعنه الله

1.2 . The defective verb   كان

Ma'alouf (1975:704) gives the following definition of this verb: كينونة (entity), كيانا (being), كونا (is, to exist, to be), يكون (was), كان الشيء (existence): حدث (happened, occurred, took place), وجد (to be, to exist) and صار (has become). When كان is defective, it precedes a subject (indicative) and a predicate (subjunctive). It indicates that the predicate has happened or existed by the subject: كان زيد قائما (Zaid was standing up). It could be تامة (perfect), ناقصة (substantive or defective), and it may mean ثبت (to be firm, stable), حضر (to be present), وقع (to happen), ينبغي (ought to, should), الاستقبال (futurity), المعنى المنقطع (past), الحال (present), and الدوام والاستقبال (timeless).

It is claimed by some modern researchers that defective verbs imply all the elements of other Arabic verbs; they denote an action accompanied by a certain time reference. It is only that these verbs have developed that their subjects are not enough, as is the case with كان التامة (the perfect), seeking for a subjunctive which may complete the meaning required by the new meaning (Abdul-Kareem, 1999: 204). But it can be claimed that theses verbs are a good general frame in which time is superior and limited. They indicate general actions implying, and accompanied with, time. This explains why such verbs are used in

the Holy Quran with various specific time references prominent to, and more effective than, their dictionary meanings according to the sentence construction, the particles that precede or follow, and the context they are found in.

Badawi (1404 A H.: 74) states that it is agreed upon by all grammarians that كان , as a defective verb, indicates time but not an act indicated by other verbs. He adds that most grammarians have denied كان this action saying that its action is different from the actions of the verbs; general not specific. كان is not confined to the past; actually it indicates other time references which are made possible by the influence of the context and the underlying construction. In كان زيد يقتل (Zaid was killing or used to kill), كان and يقتل are verbs but they are different. كان is just a sign which indicates a relationship not an action or event, while يقتل indicates an action, and together they indicate one event and one time. In this way, كان has an influence on the predicate (present tense verb here) not on the subject.

كان is called defective only within a construction. It is similar to verbs in form, but in action it is only a time particle. That is why it is, together with its sisters, called التوقيتات (chronometricals) (Ibid; 79). It is mostly used to indicate past where there is no element that may

convert its time reference which is not limited by a certain past period of time (morning or evening).

1.3 The functional meanings of كان *:*

a. annulling (النسخ): giving a special functional meaning to the subject and predicate.

b.   a notion denoting a relative location (الجهة), where the relative location can be extracted from the linguistic form- from the function. كان is characterized by defining tense and explicating the relative location of the action.

c.   it acts as a binder or connector (الربط) which can be described as an alternative to the action or the verb and the tense.

d.   Time (الزمان): giving a certain time reference to a sentence which had none on the basis of its construction and context. (Badawi, 1404 H.: 81).

2. كان *that refers to the past*

It is almost agreed upon by grammarians that كان refers to the past unless there is something that indicates otherwise. Single كان indicates what has happened and what has not, كان عبدالله أخاك

(Abdullah was your brother). The sentence talks about brotherhood, and كان is used to denote that this was in the past.

(أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسَاكِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْباً وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَاناً وَكُفْراً فَأَرَدْنَا أَنْ يُبْدِلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْراً مِنْهُ زَكَاةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْماً وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحاً فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ) (الكهف79-82).

As for the boat,

It belonged to certain

Men in dire want:

They piled in the water;

I but wished to render it

Unserviceable, for there was

After them a certain king

Who seized on every boat

By force.

" As for the youth

His parents were people

Of Faith, and we feared

That he would grieve them

By obstinate rebellion

And ingratitude (to Allah and man).

" So we desired that

Their Lord would give them

In exchange (a son)

Better in purity (of conduct)

And closer in affection.

" As for the wall,

It belonged to two youths,

Orphans, in the Town;

There was, beneath it,

A buried treasure, to which

They were entitled: their father

Had been a righteous man:

So thy Lord desired that

They should attain their age

Of full strength and get out

Their treasure- a mercy

(And favour) from thy Lord.

I did It not of my own

Accord. Such is the interpretation

Of (those things) over which

Thou was unable

To hold patience."   (Ali, 2002: 729-731)

كان in these verses refers to the past:

It belonged to certain men	كانت لمساكين
there was after them a certain king	كان وراءهم ملك
His parents were people of Faith	كان أبواه مؤمنين
It belonged to two youths	كان لغلامين
There was, beneath it, a buried treasure	كان تحته كنز لهما

Their father had been a righteous man   كان أبوهما صالحا

It refers to the past because it comes in a narrative context which begins this way:

(وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِفَتَاهُ لا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُباً) (الكهف:60)

Behold, Moses said,

To his attendant, " I will not

Give up until 1 reach

The junction of the two

Seas or (until) I spend

Years and years in travel.   (Ibid: 725)

1. (أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَبَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ فَذَاقُوا وَبَالَ أَمْرِهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُ كَانَتْ تَأْتِيهِمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَات) (التغابن: من الآية5-6)

Has not the story

Reached you, of those

Who rejected Faith aforetime?

So they tasted the evil

Results of their conduct;

And they had

A grievous Penalty.

That was because there

Came to them messengers

With Clear Signs, (Ibid: 1477)

(وَكَمْ قَصَمْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً وَأَنْشَأْنَا بَعْدَهَا قَوْماً آخَرِينَ) (الأنبياء:11)   2 .

How many were the populations

We utterly destroyed because

Of their iniquities, setting up

In their places other peoples?   (Ibid: 797).

(يَا أُخْتَ هَارُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكِ امْرَأَ سَوْءٍ وَمَا كَانَتْ أُمُّكِ بَغِيّاً) (مريم28)   3 .

"O sister of Aaron'

Thy father was not

A man of evil, -nor thy

Mother a woman unchaste!"   (Ibid: 750)

4 . (أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطَ كَانُوا هُوداً أَوْ نَصَارَى)

(البقرة: من الآية140)

Or do you say that

Abraham, Isma.il, Issac,

Jacob and the descendents were

Jews or Christians?   (Ibid: 56)

5. (ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلاً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأَةَ نُوحٍ وَامْرَأَةَ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحَيْنِ) (التحريم: من الآية10)

Allah sets forth,

For an example

To the Unbelievers,

The wife of Noah

And the wife of Lut:

They were (respectively)

Under two of our righteous

 Servants.........   (Ibid: 1494)

3. كان *that refers to the present*

Though كان mostly indicates past time, as grammarians agree, preceding the subject and the predicate and telling that something happened in the past, we can confirm that it indicates the present as well (Abdul-Kareem,1999: 208). To some grammarians, فعل and كان (was and did) to Allah -mean the same as the present (Ibn Mandour, WD: 247). This is based on غفر الله لفلان (May Allah forgive him). When كان indicates present, it is a sign to future, and the past is used in stead only for easiness.

6.   (كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ) (آل عمران: من الآية110)

Ye are the best

Of Peoples, evolved

For mankind,   (Ali,2002: 155)

Most scholars think that كنتم (you were) is used here to mean انتم (you are), thus it refers to the present (Abdul-Kareem, 1999: 208 and Ibn Mandour, WD: 247).

7. (فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضاً وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ)

(البقرة:10)

In their hearts is a disease;

And Allah has increased their disease:

And grievous is the penalty they (incur),

Because they are false (to themselves)   (Ali, 2002: 18)

8(وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَى عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّنْ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ

اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ) (البقرة23)

And if ye are in doubt

As to what We have revealed

From time to time to Our servant,

Then produce a Surah

Like thereunto;

And call your witnesses or helpers

(If there are any) besides Allah,

If your (doubts) are true.   (Tbid: 21)

9.   (وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ) (البقرة: من الآية33)

…….. and I know what ye reveal

And what ye conceal.   (Ibid: 25)

4. كان *that indicates future in the past* (ماضي المستقبل)

The verb كان is used in the Holy Quran to refer to a special time which is not pure future nor is it present or past; it indicates that some events had happened and will happen and which will be talked about in the future. If you say to your son; سيقول لك المعلم كنت مهملاً في العطلة الماضية (The teacher will say to you, "You were careless last holiday"), this means that the teacher has not yet said this; it will be said in the future. The carelessness of the son would have been happened at the time when the teacher would speak to the pupil. So, كنت (you were) refers to future in the past.

Let us examine the following verses from the Quran:

10.   (قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبْلُ فِي أَهْلِنَا مُشْفِقِينَ فَمَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقَانَا عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ) (الطور27)

They will say: " Aforetime,

We were not without fear

For the sake of our people.

141

But Allah has been good

To us, and has delivered us

From the Penalty

Of the Scorching Wind.   (Ibid: 1371)

The whole context of the verse indicates far future; the events that will happen in the day of Judgement which is made clear by the verse at the beginning of the Surah:

(يَوْمَ تَمُورُ السَّمَاءُ مَوْراً وَتَسِيرُ الْجِبَالُ سَيْراً) (الطور: 9-10)

On the Day when

The firmament will be

In dreadful commotion.

And the mountain will fly

Hither and thither. (Ibid; 136S)

The word, يوم (day) is used in the Holy Quran to mean يوم القيامة (the Day of Judgement), but كان is used here to refer to events, compared with this far time in the future (the Day of Judgement), which are in the past. In other words, كان denotes world events which embrace all the world times and they extend

from this deep past into the future that extends to man's life on earth; thus قبل (before) indicates that this state happened in the past of that time.

The real time connotation of the two verbs in this verse is made clear in the following figure (Abdul-Kareem, 1999: 211):

Past	Present	Near Future	Far Future
Pa|st Fut|ure		واقبل بعضهم على بعض يتساءلون
			(يوم القيامة) الطور:25
			They will advance to each other, engaging in mutual enquiry

11.   (قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيراً) (طـه: 125)

He will say: " O my Lord!

Why hast thou raised me

Up blind, while. I had

Sight (before)? (AH, 2002: 790)

This verse refers to the Doomsday (which is a far future), for it follows this verse:

(وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكاً وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى) (طـه:124)

"But whosoever turns away

From My Message, verily

For him is a life narrowed

Down, and We shall raise

Him up blind on the Day

Of Judgement." (Ibid)

The verb. حشرتني (raised me up) is a past tense verb but it indicates future, and كنت (I had) indicates the past of this future. The time reference of كنت is the time of life which is past in the Day of Judgement. The meaning of لم حشرتني أعمى (why hast thou raised me up blind) is I have no excuse, and I was aware of my pretext.

12.   (قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيتَهَا وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنْسَى) (طـه: 126)

(Allah) will say: Thus

Didst thou, when Our Signs

Came unto thee, disregard

Them: so wilt thou.

This day, be disregarded."   (Ibid)

This means that when our signs came to you in life, you did not consider them; rather you neglected them,

The following figure shows the time position of the verb كنت (Abdui-Kareem, 1999:212):

Past	Present	Near Future	Far Future
Pa st	Fut	ure	لم حشرتني أعمى
← ————	كنت بصيرا ————	———— →	Why hast thou raised
	I had sight (before)		me up blind.

13.   (قالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ) (لأعراف:من الآية37)

They will reply, 'They

Have left us in the lurch,"

And they will bear witness

Against themselves, that they

Had rejected Allah.   (Ali, 2002: 353)

5.   كان *that refers to future*

In certain contexts, فعل is used to indicate future, and as كان is a verb that has the same time references فعل has, we have found out, while studying the uses of كان in the Holy Quran, that it indicates, in certain linguistic environments, a future time reference the same as فعل does:

14.   يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتِ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيباً مَهِيلاً (المزمل:14)

One Day the earth

And the mountains

Will be in violent commotion

And the mountains will be

As a heap of sand

Poured out and flowing down.   (Ibid: 1553)

كان here indicates future due to the context, and يوم denotes يوم القيامة) the Day of Judgement) mentioned in the two previous verses:

(إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالاً وَجَحِيماً وَطَعَاماً ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَاباً أَلِيماً) (المزمل12-13)

With Us are Fetters

146

(To bind them), and a Fire

(To burn them),

And a Food that chokes.

And a Penalty Grievous.   (Ibid: 1552)

To scholars, the meaning of these two verses is that there is in the hereafter every thing opposite to all the bliss they had in life.

15.   (وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَاباً وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَاباً) (النبأ19-20)

And the heavens

Shall be opened

As if there were doors

And the mountains

Shall vanish, as if

They were a mirage.   (Ibid: 1587)

Though كان is past in form, it refers to the future in function as shown in the previous verses:

(عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ عَنِ النَّبَأِ الْعَظِيمِ الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ) (النبأ: 1-3)

Concerning what

147

Are they disputing?

Concerning the Great News,

About which they

Cannot agree. (Ibid: 1585)

And the following verses:

(إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتاً يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجاً) (النبأ: 18)

Verily the Day

Of Sorting Out

Is a thing appointed-

The Day that the Trumpet

Shall be sounded, and ye

Shall come forth in crowds;   (Ibid: 1586)

The Great News which the people of Mecca were wondering about is the Day of Resurrection which is in the future. يوم الفصل (the Day of Sorting Out) and   يوم ينفخ في الصور (The Day that the Trumpet) both refer to the day when life stops, thus كان refers to the future-the Day of Judgement.

148

16.　　　(وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرَا) (الإنسان:15)

And amongst them will be

Passed round vessels of silver

And goblets of crystals.　(Ibid: 1537)

17.　　　(يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْماً كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيراً) (الإنسان:7)

They perform (their) vows,

And they fear a Day

Whose evil flies far and wide.　(Ibid: 1572)

18.　　　(فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ رَبِّي جَعَلَهُ دَكَّاءَ وَكَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّي حَقّاً)(الكهف: من الآية98)

But when the promise

Of my Lord comes to pass,

He will make it into dust,

And the promise of

My Lord is true.　(Ibid: 735)

6. Timeless كان **(الزمن العام)**

Grammarians have indicated this meaning of كان in the Holy Quran. For them, كان is used to refer to the existence of something in the past ambiguously, that is, there is no sign if it did not exist earlier nor did it stop existing. Often, then, كان indicates continuity and eternity. كان الله غفورا رحيما (Allah is oft. Forgiving, most merciful), وكان الله عزيزا حكيما (and Allah is exalted in Power, full of Wisdom). In this way, كان is stripped from time and it shifts the context of the verse off the desired meaning because it is كان which has the competence of limiting out the time connotation of the verse and making the characteristics of Allah eternal extending from the past to the future (Abduk-Kareem, 1999: 216). If we say: الله غفور رحيم it would be just indicative.

19.   (سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَراً مَقْدُوراً)(الأحزاب: من الآية 38)

كان here does not indicate only past or only future, but it covers all the times: past, present and future, because Allah's command was and remains inevitable,

.........: It was

The practice (approved) of Allah

Amongst those of old

That have passed away,

And the command of Allah

Is a decree determined.   (Ali, 2002: 1069)

20.   (إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيّاً كَبِيراً) (النساء: من الآية34)

Certainly, these are among the eternal characteristics of Allah, and كان can but imply eternal and everlasting time reference that is appropriate to the high prestige and greatness of Allah and nobody else's:

For Allah is Most High,

Great (above you all). (Ibid: 196)

21. (وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالارْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيباً)(النساء: من الآية1)

Fear Allah through Whom Ye damand
your mutual (rights), And (reverence) the
wombs (That bore you): for Allah Ever
watches over you.   (Ibid: 183)

22.   (وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولاً)(الأحزاب: من الآية37)

And Allah's co.mmand must

Be fulfilled.   (Ibid: 1069)

23.   (فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضاً أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ)(البقرة: من الآية184)

But if any of you is ill,

Or on a journey,

The prescribed number

(Should be made up)

From days later.   (Ibid: 73)

7. كان *which means* صار *(has become)*:

Scholars have taken notice of this specific meaning of كان shifting from its original meaning to mean صار (has become) and converting from one condition to another according to the time of the context it is used in. If you say: صرت عالما (You have become a scholar), it is correct if you say أنت عالم (You are a scholar [now]) because you are describing what he really is now(Abdul-Kareem, 1999: 219)

24. (وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ)

(البقرة:34)

And behold, We said to the Angels:

"Bow down to Adam," and they bowed down,

Not so Iblis. He refused and was haughty, and he

Was of those who reject faith.   (Ali, 2002: 25)

 Some scholars give preponderance to that كان in this verse means صار or close to it, because there is no dispute that Iblis was aware of Allah before he denied Him. The meaning of this verse is that it was the act of Allah that Iblis would be one of the unbelievers or infidels; in other words, he became one of those who agreed with him (in rejecting faith) later on. He, at first, believed in Allah and he only rejected faith for his haughtiness thinking that he was right.

25. (إِنَّ كَيْدَ الشَّيْطَانِ كَانَ ضَعِيفاً) (النساء: من الآية76)

………: feeble indeed

Is the cunning of Satan.   (Ibid: 208)

26. (فَلَوْلا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ) (البقرة: من الآية64)

Had it not been for the Grace

And Mercy of Allah to you,

Ye had surely been

Among the lost.   (Ibid: 34)

153

27.   (إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَكَانُوا كَهَشِيمِ الْمُحْتَظِرِ) (القمر:31)

For We sent against them

A single Mighty Blast,

And they became

Like the dry stubble used

By one who

pens cattle. Ibid: 1391)

28.   (فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ) (لأعراف:83)

But We saved him

And his family, except

His wife: she was

Of those who lagged behind.   (Ibid: 367)

8. Summary and Conclusions:

1. The perfect verb in Arabic indicates past, and it is coloured by other tenses when used in a certain context or influenced by certain factors that may change its tense into the present and future.

2. The defective verb كان indicates time but not an action that is indicated by other verbs. It is just a sign which indicates a relationship not an action or event.

3. كان is not confined to the past; it indicates other time references which are made possible by the influence of the context and the underlying construction.

4. In addition to the past, كان may refer to the present, future in the past, future, contiguity and eternity (timeless), and the meaning of صار (has become).

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ملخص

الفعل الماضي الناقص (كان): بعض المشكلات النحوية والدلالية

بالإشارة إلى ترجمتها في القرآن الكريم

معن ممدوح أحمد(*)

"فَعَلَ" تدل في صيغتها الافرادية على المضي وتتلون بألوان زمنية عندما تتدرج في السياق أو تعتريها عوامل التبديل من زمن إلى زمن آخر كأدوات النصب والجزم والشرط وغيرها، فهي تتصرف عن الزمن الماضي إلى الحال أو الاستقبال. والفعل الماضي الناقص كان، شأنه شأن بقية الأفعال الناقصة، يفتقر إلى الحدث ويتمتع بطاقة زمنية. ان هذه الأفعال تصلح إطارا عاما يترجح عليه الزمن ويتحدد فيه، فهي أحداث عامة تحمل الزمان وتقترن به ولذلك جاءت في القرآن الكريم ذات دلالة زمنية خاصة بحيث يطغى المعنى الزمني فيها على المعنى المعجمي وتتنوع الدلالة الزمنية لهذه الصيغ في القرآن الكريم حسب تركيب الجملة التي ترد فيها وحسب الأدوات

(*) قسم اللغة الإنكليزية ـ كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل.

التي تسبقها أو تلحقها، كما تتوقف الدلالة الزمنية على السياق الذي ترد فيه. انطلاقا من هذا المفهوم وجدنا ان كان، فضلا عن دلالتها على الماضي، تدل على الحاضر والمستقبل وماضي المستقبل والزمن العام وتأتي أيضا بمعنى صار. وهذا يستوجب على المترجمين العرب إدراكه لئلا تترجم كان في جميع الأحوال كفعل يقتصر في معناه على الزمن الماضي فقط.