



أَبْوَابُ الثُّلَاثِيِّ الْمَجْرَدِ

The Categories of Simple Trilateral Verbs

- Verbs in Arabic belong to a particular category.
- For verbs described as “Simple Trilateral”, there are a total of 6 categories.
- Simple Trilateral verbs are those verbs that have THREE root letters. All the verbs we have looked at so far are Simple Trilateral.
- It is important to determine which category a verb is from, as this allows you to work out many other words such as the imperfect, imperative¹, active and passive particles and much more.
- The Arabic word for category is باب.
- The Arabic for “Simple Trilateral” is:

الثُّلَاثِيُّ الْمَجْرَدُ

¹ We have not looked at this yet. This is a verb that gives a command (order).

Part 1

The six categories of Simple Trilateral Verbs

1. A verb will either have three root letters or four root letters.
2. Most commonly used verbs have three root letters.
3. Four root letter verbs are not very common. As an example, such verbs appear in the Qur'an only 11 times.
4. Some examples are:

2		1	
Four root letters		Three root letters	
رُبَاعِيٌّ		ثَلَاثِيٌّ	
Past tense verb	Root letters	Past tense verb	Root letters
هَرَوَلَ	ه ر و ل	صَبَرَ	ص ب ر
دَحْرَجَ	د ح ر ج	أَرْسَلَ	ر س ل
بَرَّقَعَ	ب ر ق ع	صَدَّقَ	ص د ق
تَدَحْرَجَ	د ح ر ج	بَارَكَ	ب ر ك
تَزُنِّدَقَ	ز ن د ق	تَقَبَّلَ	ق ب ل

By now you will have realised that the pattern of the (simple) past tense verb (which has *only three root letters* and no more) will be on one of the following three scales:

Scale 3	Scale 2	Scale 1
فَعَلَ	فَعِلَ	فَعَلَّ

The middle radical of the past tense of simple trilateral verbs can be either a Dhamma, Fatha or Kasra.

Similarly, the imperfect tense also has three scales:

Scale 3	Scale 2	Scale 1
يَفْعَلُ	يَفْعِلُ	يَفْعَلُّ

If we look at the total number of combinations (i.e. each past tense scale with the three imperfect tense scales), then there are a total of nine combinations (patterns) as follows:

Imperfect Tense Scale	Paste Tense Scale	
يَفْعَلُ	فَعَلَ	1
يَفْعِلُ		2
يَفْعَلُّ		3
يَفْعَلُ	فَعِلَ	4
يَفْعِلُ		5
يَفْعَلُّ		6
يَفْعَلُ	فَعَلَّ	7
يَفْعِلُ		8
يَفْعَلُّ		9

Notes:

1. Not all of the above nine are used in the Arabic language.
2. Only six of the above nine are used.
3. The six used are:

مُضَارِع Imperfect Tense Scale	مَاضِي Paste Tense Scale	
يَفْعُلُ	فَعَلَ	1
يَفْعِلُ		2
يَفْعَلُ		3
✗	فَعِلَ	4
يَفْعِلُ		5
يَفْعَلُ		6
يَفْعُلُ	فَعُلَ	7
✗		8
✗		9

4. This means “Simple Trilateral” verb patterns will fall on one of the above six patterns.
5. The next section looks at which verb falls into which category.

Part 2

Which category?

The question that arises is as follows:

Which one of the above patterns will a verb have?

For example:

Which one?	Imperfect Tense scale	Example of Past Tense	Scale
?	يَكْذِبُ (يَفْعَلُ)	كَذَبَ	فَعَلَ
	يَكْذِبُ (يَفْعَلُ)		
	يَكْذِبُ (يَفْعَلُ)		

Answer:

- There is no fixed (permanent) rule.
- The scale (pattern) of the past tense does not come under any specific principle. Neither does the scale (pattern) of the imperfect tense.
- We use verbs as used by the Arabs. Thus, knowledge of the Arabic language is very important.
- A dictionary will give you the scale by showing you which category the verb is from. The category is usually indicated by a symbol (letter).

Part 3

The first three of the six categories

The imperfect tense of the first past tense scale has a total of three probabilities, and all three are used:

Imperfect Tense scale	Past Tense Scale
يَفْعُلُ	فَعَلَ
يَفْعِلُ	
يَفْعَلُ	

Look at the following and take note of the NAMES and SYMBOLS of the three categories:

Symbol	Name of this category	Category created	Imperfect tense	Past tense scale	
ن	نَصَرَ يَنْصُرُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعُلُ	يَفْعُلُ	1	فَعَلَ
ض	ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعِلُ	يَفْعِلُ	2	
ف	فَتَحَ يَفْتَحُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ	يَفْعَلُ	3	

- Thus, a (simple) past tense verb on the scale of فَعَلَ will belong to one of the above THREE categories.
- There is no fixed rule or principle – as mentioned already, the pattern depends on how the Arabs use that particular verb.

Examples:

- The verb كَذَبَ is from the category ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ , thus the past and imperfect tense will be كَذَبَ يَكْذِبُ – on the SAME pattern as ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ .
- These categories (which total 6) are given their name using a very common verb. This makes it easier for the listener to quickly determine what category someone is referring to.

In other words, if someone asked:

1. Which category is the verb كَذَبَ from?
2. The answer given could be: فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ.
3. The answer could also be: ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ.
4. Which one of these answers makes the category clearer to someone listening? The answer is obviously ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ.

Conclusion:

1. There is NO FIXED rule for the past and imperfect tense patterns (scales).
2. The only way to determine the past and imperfect tense is to learn the language, and / or consult the dictionary to determine the category of a particular verb.
3. Whilst learning Arabic, it is very easy to “pick up” the category of commonly used verbs.

Some commonly used verbs from the above three categories are given below. Work out the past and imperfect using the SYMBOLS.

Imperfect tense	Past tense	Category بَاب	Meaning	Root letters	
		ن	<i>To enter</i>	د خ ل	1
		ن	<i>To prostrate</i>	س ج د	2
		ض	<i>To break</i>	ك س ر	3
		ض	<i>To wash</i>	غ س ل	4
		ف	<i>To cook</i>	ط ب خ	5
		ف	<i>To make</i>	ج ع ل	6
		ن	<i>To run</i>	ه ر ب	7
		ض	<i>To overpower</i>	غ ل ب	8
		ف	<i>To farm</i>	ز ر ع	9
		ض	<i>To forgive</i>	غ ف ر	10
		ن	<i>To touch</i>	ل م س	11
		ف	<i>To push</i>	د ف ع	12
		ن	<i>To order / command</i>	أ م ر	13
		ض	<i>To be just / fair</i>	ع د ل	14
		ف	<i>To prevent</i>	م ن ع	15

Part 3

The fourth and fifth categories

Let us now look at the imperfect tense of the past tense scale of: فَعَلَ.

The imperfect tense of the second scale will be as follows:

Imperfect Tense scale	Past Tense Scale
يَفْعَلُ	فَعَلَ
يَفْعِلُ	
No third scale	

This now creates a further TWO categories:

Symbol	Name of this category	Category created	Imperfect tense	Past tense scale	
س	سَمِعَ يَسْمَعُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ	يَفْعَلُ	1	فَعَلَ
ح	حَسِبَ يَحْسِبُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعِلُ	يَفْعِلُ	2	

Notes:

1. The category of حَسِبَ يَحْسِبُ is not frequently used.
2. The category of سَمِعَ يَسْمَعُ is used frequently, just like the first three.

Some commonly used verbs from these FOUR frequently used categories are given below. Work out the past and imperfect using the SYMBOLS.

Imperfect tense	Past tense	Category بَاب	Meaning	Root letters	
		س	<i>To wear</i>	ل ب س	1
		س	<i>To lick</i>	ل ع ق	2
		ن	<i>To leave / depart</i>	ت ر ك	3
		ض	<i>To descend</i>	ن ز ل	4
		ف	<i>To praise</i>	ح م د	5
		س	<i>To know</i>	ع ل م	6
		س	<i>To laugh</i>	ض ح ك	7
		ض	<i>To carry</i>	ح م ل	8
		ن	<i>To sleep</i>	ر ا ق د	9
		ف	<i>To prevent</i>	م ن ع	10
		ح	<i>To be soft / tender</i>	ن ع م	11
		ض	<i>To tear</i>	خ ر ق	12
		س	<i>To be thirsty</i>	ع ط ش	13
		ن	<i>To reach</i>	ب ل غ	14
		ف	<i>To chew</i>	م ض غ	15

Part 4 – Some practical steps in determining the category

1. If the (simple) past tense verb with *just three root letters* is on the scale of **فَعَلَ**, it can NEVER be from the following three categories:

This will never be from these three categories:	Example
نَصَرَ يَنْصُرُ	حَمِدَ
ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ	
فَتَحَ يَفْتَحُ	

2. The reason is obvious, as the past tense scale for the above three categories is NOT **فَعَلَ**, rather it is **فَعَلَّ**. The example above is from the scale of **فَعَلَ**.
3. Verbs on the past tense scale of **فَعَلَ** will also MOST LIKELY not be from the category **حَسِبَ يَحْسِبُ** as it is not frequently used.
4. Thus, a verb on the pattern of **فَعَلَ** (like the verb **حَمِدَ**) can only be from ONE category: **سَمِعَ يَسْمَعُ**.
5. Similarly, if the (simple) past tense verb (with just three root letters) is on the scale of **فَعَلَ**, it can ONLY be from these categories:

This can ONLY be from one of these three categories:	Example
نَصَرَ يَنْصُرُ	سَجَدَ
ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ	
فَتَحَ يَفْتَحُ	

Again, the reason is obvious.

Part 5 – The sixth category

Let us now look at the imperfect tense of the past tense scale of: فَعَلَ.

The imperfect tense of the third scale will be as follows:

Imperfect tense scale	Scale 3
يَفْعَلُ	فَعَلَ
No second scale	
No third scale	

This creates ONE category as follows:

Symbol	Name of this category	Category created	Imperfect tense	Past tense scale
ك	كَرَمَ يَكْرُمُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ	يَفْعَلُ	فَعَلَ

Note:

After the category of حَسِبَ يَحْسِبُ, this is the second least used category.

Part 6 – Conclusion

The six categories at a glance are:

Symbol	Commonly known as:	Scale of the category	
ن	نَصَرَ يَنْصُرُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعُلُ	1
ض	ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعِلُ	2
ف	فَتَحَ يَفْتَحُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ	3
س	سَمِعَ يَسْمَعُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ	4
ك	كَرَّمَ يَكْرُمُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعُلُ	5
ح	حَسِبَ يَحْسِبُ	فَعَلَ يَفْعِلُ	6

Learn the symbols and what they represent.

Now work out the past and imperfect of the following using the SYMBOLS.

Imperfect tense	Past tense	Category بَاب	Meaning	Root letters	
		ك		ب ص ر	1
		ك		ك ث ر	2
		س		ط ع م	3
		ف		ج ح د	4
		ن		ه ز ق	5
		ض		ق ب ض	6
		ك		ش ه ف	7
		س		أ م ن	8
		ف		م ض غ	9
		ن		ك ف ر	10
		ض		ف ر ض	11
		ح		و ه ث	12
		ك		ص ل ح	13
		ف		ق ط ع	14
		س		ت ب ع	15

Notes

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