

The Semantic Acquisition Of Infinitive Within The Framework Of Context

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ABSTRACT

In the Arabic language, the signification of a word (lafz) is not derived solely from the lexicon. Signification is categorized into six dimensions: lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic, contextual, and social. Accurate semantic determination requires the consideration of all these distinct types, as speakers employ language not only based on dictionary definitions but also through intonation, grammatical structure, and situational context. Neglecting any of these dimensions inevitably leads to incomplete or erroneous comprehension.

This study demonstrates the insufficiency of relying exclusively on lexical definitions and highlights the pivotal role of contextual signification (siyāq) in shaping meaning, using the verbal noun (maṣdar) as a case study. Although classically defined merely as a word denoting an event, this research reveals that the maṣdar possesses semantic layers extending beyond this basic definition. Through an analysis of evidence from the Qur’ān, Arabic poetry, and various syntactic structures, twenty distinct meanings of the maṣdar were identified, each emerging from specific contextual elements. The findings underscore that context is a determinant factor in comprehending Arabic texts. Reducing meaning to dictionary equivalents significantly diminishes the text’s expressive power and depth. Consequently, this study contributes to the fields of Arabic linguistics, exegesis (tafsīr), and rhetoric (balāghah) by proving that even fundamental elements like the maṣdar carry rich semantic nuances when analyzed through a context-based approach.

KEYWORDS: Arabic Language, Indication, Meaning, Context, Infinitive.

How to Cite: Ahmet Ensar Kahraman, Ramazan EGE, (2025) The Semantic Acquisition Of Infinitive Within The Framework Of Context, Vascular and Endovascular Review, Vol.8, No.16s, 393-399.

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic research on the Arabic language offers a broad field of study in terms of semantic richness and diversity of expression. In Arabic, the meaning of words is not confined solely to the basic senses recorded in dictionaries; rather, it is shaped by the functions acquired throughout the language’s historical development, the contexts of usage, and various linguistic factors. Within this framework, the concept of maṣdar holds particular significance. In classical Arabic linguistics, it is defined as the original form from which the verb is derived, abstracted from temporal reference, and capable of performing diverse functions across different linguistic contexts. The maṣdar, which constitutes the focus of this study, has historically been described by scholars as “the primary word from which the verb originates” and as “an utterance that denotes an event abstracted from time.” Accordingly, it has traditionally been regarded as a lexical unit whose principal role is to denote action.

A review of the existing literature reveals that studies on the maṣdar have predominantly focused on its lexical (luḡawī) and terminological (iṣṭilāḥī) meanings, while comprehensive and systematic research on its contextual (siyāqī) significations remains lacking. In this regard, the present study aims to go beyond the classical definitions of the maṣdar by examining it within its contextual framework, with the objective of identifying its multifaceted semantic functions—such as command, prohibition, supplication, imprecation, and temporal reference.

The methodology adopted in this study is structured to first present the lexical (luḡawī) and terminological (iṣṭilāḥī) definitions of the maṣdar, and then to analyze its contextual significations through examples drawn from a range of linguistic sources. By incorporating evidence from the Qur’ān as well as selections from classical Arabic poetry, the research examines in detail the contextual diversity of meanings associated with the maṣdar. This study seeks to provide a new perspective on the use of the maṣdar in Arabic linguistics and, by highlighting the richness of its contextual applications, aims to make an original contribution to the field.

MAṢDAR/INFINITIVE

Lexical Meaning

The term maṣdar derives from the trilateral root (ص د ر) and follows the morphological pattern of (اسم المكان). Fundamentally, it denotes two primary meanings. The first is “to depart from a place.” The Arabs, for instance, would say sadara (صدر عن البلاد) to mean that someone visited a location and then departed from it. The second meaning is “chest” or “the foremost and uppermost

part of anything.” Thus, the Arabs used (صَدْرٌ) to refer to the human chest; (صِدْرٌ) for a garment covering the head and chest or for a sign placed on the front of a camel; (تَسْتِبِيرٌ) for the rope fastened to the front of a camel to prevent its load from slipping backward; (مُصْنَدِرٌ) for a lion, by virtue of the strength of its chest; and (مُصْنَوْرٌ) for a person suffering from pain in the chest. (Ibn Fâris, 1979, p. 3/337.)

Terminological Meaning

Al-Khalîl b. Ahmâd (d. 175/791) defines the maṣdar as “the original word from which verbs emanate.” Elsewhere, he describes it as “a noun that signifies an event in abstraction from time, containing the letters of its corresponding verb either explicitly—as in (علم عَلَمَ), or implicitly through estimation—as in (فَاتَّلَ قَتَالًا), or by substituting one letter in place of another for an elided root letter—as in (وَعَدَ عَدَةً).” However, if a noun contains the letters of its verb yet does not denote an action, it cannot be regarded as a maṣdar. Such a noun is merely a remnant derived from the verb. For example, in the case of (جَرَحٌ, “to wound”), the word (جَرْحٌ) cannot serve as its maṣdar, since—despite preserving the letters of the verb—it does not signify an act but rather constitutes a residue of the verb (جَرَحٌ). (el-Ğalâyînî, 1993, p. 1/161.)

The Contextual Signification of The Maṣdar

Although the maṣdar is classically defined as “an utterance that denotes merely the event, abstracted from time,” (Cürcânî, 1987, p. 52) its status as the origin of derived forms (el-Enbârî, 2003, p. 1/190) (مُشَقَّاتٌ) grants it a broader range of semantic functions within contextual (سِيَاقِي) usage. It has been widely employed in the Qur’ân, hadîth, and Arabic poetry, where—beyond denoting the event itself—it conveys various additional meanings shaped by context. In this section, we aim to demonstrate that the maṣdar is not confined to indicating the event alone, but rather is capable of expressing multiple meanings in different contexts. To this end, we identify these meanings and substantiate them through textual evidence.

The Imperative Signification of The Maṣdar

The imperative meaning expressed by the verb may also be conveyed through the omission of the verb and the substitution of its maṣdar. For example:

(فَإِذَا لَقِيْتُمُ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوا فَصَرِّبُ الرَّقَابَ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَخْتَنُمُوهُمْ فَشَدُّوا الْوَثَاقَ فَإِمَّا مَنْ بَعْدُ وَإِمَّا فِدَاءٌ حَتَّىٰ تَضَعَ الْأَرْبَابُ أُوْزَارَهَا)

“Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens.” (Muhammed 47/4)

In the Qur’ânic verse, the maṣdar conveys the imperative meaning of ضَرِّبُ الرَّقَابَ (“strike their necks”). Although the imperative verb could have been employed directly to express the command, the verb is omitted and replaced by the maṣdar, thereby expressing the imperative through the nominal form. The effect of conveying the imperative by means of the maṣdar rather than the verb lies in its rhetorical impact: it both intensifies the force of the command and achieves conciseness (ihtişâr) in expression. Thus, in the context of battle, the directive to strike the necks of the disbelievers is conveyed with heightened emphasis and rhetorical force. (Beyzâvî, 2002, p. 5/120)

The Prohibitive Signification of The Maṣdar

Unlike the imperative signification, the prohibitive function of the maṣdar may be expressed by introducing the conjunction (لَا) before it, thereby coordinating it with another maṣdar that conveys an imperative meaning. For example, in the sentence (لَا مَذَاكِرَةً دُرُسَكَ لَا إِهْمَالًا) (“Study your lessons and do not neglect them” the maṣdar مَذَاكِرَةً stands in place of the imperative verb (ذَاكِرَنَّ) and thus conveys the imperative meaning. The phrase لَا إِهْمَالًا is coordinated with مَذَاكِرَةً by means of the particle لَا, whereby the maṣdar لَا إِهْمَالًا functions in the sense of the prohibitive verb (لَا, لَا تَهْمَلُهَا), “do not neglect them”). In this construction, the maṣdar expressing prohibition governs the pronominal suffix (هَا) as its object (مُفْتَوِّل), which is in turn syntactically assigned accusative position (نَصْبٌ). (Berekât, 2007, p. 3/454; es-Sabbân, 1997, p. 2/430)

The Supplicative Signification of The Maṣdar

When the maṣdar substitutes for an omitted verb of supplication, it may convey a supplicative signification. For example, in the expression (رَحْمَكَ اللَّهُ رَحْمَةً) (“May Allah have mercy on you” the perfect verb رَحِمَ is explicitly mentioned and expresses a prayer, namely, “May Allah have mercy on you.” When the verb of supplication is omitted and replaced by its maṣdar, as in (رَحْمَةً لَكَ, “May Allah grant you mercy”), the maṣdar assumes the role of the omitted verb and thereby conveys the meaning of supplication. Functioning as a verb substitute, the maṣdar acts as the syntactic governor (عَالِمٌ), with (لَكَ) serving as its direct object (مُفْعَوْلٌ بِهِ), and الله as its subject (فَاعِلٌ). (Sâmerrâî, 2020, p. 2/204)

أَسْأَلُهُمَا أَنَا مِنْهُمَا مُشْفِقٌ وَجِلٌ يَا قَابِلَ التَّوْبَ يُغْفِرَ أَنَا مَاتِمٌ فَذٌ

“O Acceptor of repentance, forgive me my sins which I have committed, feared, and regretted.” (Ibn Mâlik, 1982, p. 2/1025)

In the verse, the phrase (غَفَرَ أَنَا مَاتِمٌ), meaning “forgive the sins,” is to be understood in the sense of (أَغْفَرَ مَاتِمٌ). Here, the imperative verb of supplication (أَغْفَرَ) is omitted and replaced by the maṣdar غَفَرَ أَنَا, which thereby conveys the meaning of supplication. (Berekât, 2007, p. 3/455)

In the two aforementioned examples, the maṣdar is employed in place of the verb to express supplication. The verb, however, inherently denotes both time and the event, whereas the maṣdar signifies solely the event, abstracted from temporal reference. Consequently, a supplication articulated through a form that is not bound by time carries broader scope and greater emphasis than one expressed through a temporally constrained verbal form. (Radî el-Esterâbâdî, 1978, p. 1/306; Sâmerrâî, 2020, p. 2/205) It should also be noted that there is a difference in signification between the maṣdar being written in the nominative (مَرْفُوعٌ) and in the accusative (مَصْصُوبٌ). If the event to which the maṣdar refers has already occurred, it appears in the nominative case; whereas if it denotes an event that has not yet occurred -such as in the context of supplication or command- it is expressed in the accusative. This is because the nominative indicates an action that has been realized, while the accusative refers to an action that has not yet been realized. For example;

(لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ)

“The curse of Allah is on those who do wrong!” (Hûd 11/18)

In the Qur’anic verse, the *maṣdar* (لَعْنَةٌ) appears in the nominative form, and thus signifies an event that has already taken place. (el-Müberred, ts., p. 3/221)

However, if the *masdar* (لَعْنَةٌ) in the verse were to be read in the accusative (مُتَصُوبٌ), the meaning would be rendered as: “May Allah’s curse be upon the wrongdoers.” In such a case, the *maṣdar* would refer to an event not yet realized and would therefore function as a supplication.

The İmprecatory Signification of The Maṣdar (اللَّعْنَةُ)

Just as the *maṣdar* conveys a supplicative meaning when it substitutes for an omitted verb of supplication, it likewise conveys an imprecatory meaning when it takes the place of an omitted verb of malediction. For example;

بِجَارِيَةِ بَهْرَاءِ لَهُمْ بَعْدَهَا بَهْرَاءِ تَفَاقَّدَ قَوْمِي إِذْ بَيْتُعُونَ مُهْتَبِي

“My people prevented me from being united with a concubine I loved; may destruction befall them.” (Ibn Meyyâde, 1982, p. 37)

In the verse, the *masdar* (بَهْرَاءٌ) stands in place of the verb (بَهْرَاءُ), which conveys an imprecatory sense, and through its use in the accusative (مُتَصُوبٌ) form it expresses malediction. The meaning thus conveyed is rendered more emphatic by the substitution of the *maṣdar* for the verb.

The Va‘d(el-Va‘dü/ Promissory) Signification of The Maṣdar (الوَعْدُ)

A *maṣdar* that substitutes for an omitted verb may, through the aid of a contextual indicator, be employed with a *va‘d* signification. For example;

فَالصَّابِقُ الْحَبُّ مَبْدُولٌ لَهُ الْأَمْلَ قَالَتْ وَبِلُوْغًا يُغْيِيَ وَمُؤْتَيٌ

“He said: “You shall attain what you seek; indeed, whoever truly seeks strives for the realization of his hope.”” (Ibn Akîl, 1982, p. 2/243)

In the verse, the *maṣdar* (بَلُوْغٌ) stands in place of the verb (يُتَبَّغِ). By the general purport of the sentence, the speaker assures the addressee that he will attain his desire; thus, the *maṣdar* بَلُوْغًا conveys the meaning of promise or glad tidings. Acting as a syntactic governor (غَامِلٌ), the *maṣdar* governs the word (يُغْيِي) as its direct object (مَفْعُولٌ بِهِ), thereby assigning it the accusative case (نَحْبٌ). (Berekât, 2007, p. 3/455)

In the verse, the meaning of “you shall attain” is expressed by the *maṣdar* (بَلُوْغٌ) in place of the verb. Through the use of the *maṣdar* rather than the verb, the expression is not restricted to past, present, or future tense. As a nominal form, the *maṣdar* denotes that the act of attainment is not merely a possibility bound to a specific time, but rather a certainty, entirely unrestricted by temporal limitation.

Tevbîh/ Reproachful (الْتَّوْبِيهُ)

The *maṣdar* may, in certain contextual settings, convey a reproachful signification. This meaning can be expressed either with the use of an interrogative particle or without it.

Interrogative particles, in addition to serving their primary function of inquiring about an unknown matter, may also convey a variety of other meanings. One of which is reproach. (Kazvînî, ts., p. 3/79) For example;

وَذَلِّ وَخَرْقًا مِنْ يُجَاهِرُهُمْ حَرْبًا أَبْعَيْ وَظَلَمَا مِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ مُسَالِمًا

“Do you wrong the one whom you know to be peaceable, while fearing those who have declared war against you?” (Ibn Mâlik, 1990, p. 3/126)

In the verse, the *maṣdar* (بَعْيِ) is used, together with the interrogative particle, in the sense of “Do you commit injustice?” Yet the purpose of the interrogative here is not to pose a question. Rather, within the contextual framework, the *maṣdar* بَعْيٌ, in conjunction with the preceding interrogative particle, conveys the meaning of reproach.

وَعَزْرُكَ مَعْنَى بَعْيٌ كُلُّ جَمِيلٍ وَفَاقِبَتِي الْأَهْوَاءِ وَالْأَعْيَ وَالْوَائِي

“O people of caprice, injustice, and negligence! While others occupy themselves with righteous deeds, I wish you success too.” (Berekât, 2007, p. 3/456; Ibn Mâlik, 1990, p. 3/126)

In the verse, the *maṣdar* (وَفَاقِبٌ) is employed without an interrogative particle. By virtue of the contextual framework, the *maṣdar* conveys the meaning of reproach.

Ta‘accub/ Exclamatory (الْتَّعْجُبُ)

Through the use of an interrogative particle preceding it, the *maṣdar* may, within its contextual framework, convey an exclamatory signification. (el-Ğalâyînî, 1993, p. 3/40)

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا سَارَ الْمُطَهِّرِ بِنَا عَشْرًا أَشْوَقًا! وَأَمَّا يَمْضِ لِي غَيْرُ لِيَنِي

“Longing already? When not even a single night has yet passed for me! Then what would it be, if the mounts were to carry us for ten days?” (Sehîm, 1950, p. 56)

In the verse, the *maṣdar* (شُوْقٌ), derived from the root (شُوْقٌ) meaning “longing arising from love,” conveys an exclamatory signification (ta‘ajjub/Exclamation) by virtue of the interrogative particle preceding it, which indicates astonishment at such longing.

Teveccu‘/Compassion (الْتَّوْجُحُ)

When the *maṣdar* occurs after an interrogative particle, it may, within its contextual framework, convey a signification of compassion or pity. (el-Ğalâyînî, 1993, p. 3/40)

وَنَأَيْ حَسِيبٌ! إِنْ ذَا لَعْظِيمٌ أَسْجَنَا وَقَلَّا وَاشْتَيَّا وَغَزَّةٌ

“Imprisonment, death, longing, exile, and separation from the beloved? Indeed, this is exceedingly burdensome.” (Tebrîzî, ts.,

In the verse, the poet voices his compassion for those who are imprisoned, slain, afflicted by longing, estranged in exile, and separated from the beloved. To convey this, he employs the maṣdars of the verbs سجن (‘to imprison’), قتل (‘to kill’), أشْفَقَ (‘to long for’), غَرَبَ (‘to be in exile’), and (أَنْيَ (‘to be distant’)), placing the interrogative ِ before them. Through this interrogative mode, the maṣdars—which literally denote “imprisonment, killing, longing, estrangement, and separation”—are contextually construed as conveying a sense of pity and compassion.

Quantitative Denotation/الكمية

The verb denotes both the event and its temporal reference; however, it requires additional elements in the sentence to specify the quantity of the action. For example, in the sentence ضربَ خالدَ زَيْدَ (‘Khālid struck Zayd’), the verb ضربَ indicates the act of striking and its occurrence in the past tense, yet the number of times the action was performed remains indeterminate. In order to clarify the quantity, the verbal noun (maṣdar) may be added in the “the masdar that denotes a single occurrence of the action” form. Thus, in the sentence ضربَ خالدَ زَيْدَ ضربَةً (‘Khālid struck Zayd once’), the maṣdar is introduced as a cognate accusative مُفْعُولٌ مُطلَقٌ (‘muf‘ūl mutlaq’), thereby removing the ambiguity regarding the quantity of the action. (Ibn Ya‘īsh, 2001, p. 1/273)

When the maṣdar is used as the مُفْعُولٌ مُطلَقٌ in order to indicate number, it may appear in the dual and plural forms. For example, in the sentences ضربَ خالدَ زَيْدَ ضربَتْ / ضربَاتْ (‘Khālid struck Zayd twice / several times’), the maṣdar functions as the مُفْعُولٌ مُطلَقٌ and can be employed in the dual or plural inflections to denote repetition or multiplicity of the action. (Üşmûnî, 1955, p. 1/211)

The Qualitative Signification of The Maṣdar/الكيفية

In indicating the manner in which an event occurs, a masdar (verbal noun) can be utilized in addition to particles of similitude. In this context, the maṣdar must either be qualified by an adjective, be the first term of a genitive construction (iḍāfah), or be defined with the definite article “الـ”. For example; in the sentence ضربَ خالدَ زَيْدَ طَوِيلًا, meaning “Khālid struck Zayd a prolonged strike,” the maṣdar is qualified by an adjective. In the sentence ضربَ خالدَ زَيْدَ ضربَ الأَسَدِ فَرِيَسَتْهُ, meaning “Khālid struck Zayd with the strike of a lion on its prey,” the maṣdar is the first term of a genitive construction (muḍāf). In the sentence ضربَ خالدَ زَيْدَ الضَّرَبَ, meaning “Khālid gave Zayd the strike” (a specific strike known to the addressee), the maṣdar is defined with the article “الـ”. (es-Suyūtî, 1998, p. 2/76; Ibn Ya‘īsh, 2001, p. 1/272)

Tekîd/ Emphasis/التأكيد

The maṣdar (verbal noun) can be employed as a muf‘ūl mutlaq (absolute object) within a sentence to emphasize the meaning of its governing verb (عامل) or the general meaning of the sentence. In this capacity, an indefinite maṣdar is used, which can be referred to as the “maṣdar for emphasis” (المصادر المؤكدة). This maṣdar is either derived from the same root as the verb in the sentence or is synonymous with it. Because it functions as a reiteration of the verb, it cannot be made dual (ثنائيّ) or plural (جُمْعٌ). Furthermore, the omission (حذفٌ) of the governing verb is not permissible, as the purpose of the maṣdar in this case is emphasis. To omit that which is being emphasized is impermissible (المؤكدة), while retaining the element of emphasis (التأكيد) is impermissible, as this would contradict the very principle of affirmation. (el-Ğalâyînî, 1993, p. 1/171; MehmetAli, 2020, p. 303; Üşmûnî, 1955, p. 1/211)

For example; the sentence نَامَ الرَّجُلَ translates to “the man slept.” When the maṣdar شَفَقَ is added, forming the sentence نَامَ الرَّجُلَ شَفَقًا, the meaning of the verb is emphasized (التأكيد). (Ibn Ya‘īsh, 2001, p. 1/273) Likewise, in the Qur’anic verse لَمْ شَفَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَفَقًا (‘Then split the earth in clefts’ (Abese 80/26.) the term شَفَقًا expresses the meaning of emphasis.

A distinction must be made between emphasizing the meaning of a verb and emphasizing the verb itself. To the sentence رَكَضَ خالدٌ, meaning “Khālid ran,” we can add the maṣdar رَكْضًا to form رَكَضَ رَكْضًا, which conveys the meaning “Khālid indeed ran.” In this construction, the maṣdar does not emphasize the verb per se, but rather the abstract concept of ‘running’ contained within the verb. We can analyze the underlying structure (تَعْلِيمٌ) of this sentence as أَحْدَثَ خالدَ رَكْضًا رَكْضًا, where the second maṣdar serves to emphasize the first. However, if the intention is to emphasize the verb itself, then the verb must be repeated. For example, رَكَضَ رَكَضَ خالدٌ means “Khālid ran, he ran.” The crucial difference is that in the first type of emphasis (with the maṣdar), only the event is affirmed. In the second type of emphasis (with the repeated verb), both the event and its tense (the time of its occurrence) are emphasized.

A semantic distinction (دلالة) exists between these two forms of emphasis. The emphasis made with the maṣdar is directed at an addressee who is not entirely certain whether Khālid ran or not. It is an affirmation specifically on the action of ‘running’ to prevent any misinterpretation that he was merely walking or walking briskly. In the second case, however, the emphasis is employed when the addressee may not have heard the action being stated, or heard it but did not fully comprehend it. The verb is therefore repeated in order to remove the ambiguity and ensure the statement is understood. (Radî el-Esterâbâdî, 1993, p. 1/347; Sâmerrâî, 2020, p. 2/185,186)

Although the concurrent use of omission (حذفٌ) and emphasis (تأكيد) may seem antithetical to the purpose, there are nevertheless examples where the verb is elided and emphasis is achieved through its maṣdar.

قَسَمَ إِلَيْكَ مَعَ الصُّدُودِ لَأَمِيلٍ إِنِّي لَأَهْنَكَ الصُّدُودَ وَإِنِّي

“O, House of Atîke! I present myself to the people as one who has turned his back upon you, yet I swear that I belong to you.” (Ahvas, 1969, p. 153)

In the verse, the maṣdar فَقَسَمَ (‘muf‘ūl mutlaq’) that signifies emphasis (تأكيد), and whose governing verb has been omitted (حذفٌ) (el-Müberred, ts., p. 3/233)

As has been stated previously, the governing verb (عامل) of a maṣdar may be elided (حذفٌ), provided that a contextual clue (قرينة)

سياقية (سياقية) remains to indicate the omitted verb.

الدلالة الرّمانية/ صرفي (The Temporal Signification of the Maṣdar)

From a morphological perspective, the maṣdar does not inherently signify time. However, within its contextual framework, it may acquire a structure that conveys a temporal signification. (Berekât, 2007, p. 3/457) The Types of Temporal Signification Expressed by the Maṣdar in Context;

دلالة على الماضي/ Maṣdar

The maṣdar may, within its contextual framework, convey a past temporal signification. For example;

فَإِمَّا تَعْصِمُهُمْ بِمِثْقَلٍ لَعْنَاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا فُؤُلُوْهُمْ قَاسِيَةً (Qur'an 5:13)

“And because of their breaking their covenant, We have cursed them and made hard their hearts.” (Mâide 5/13)

In the verse, the maṣdar (نَصْ) functions as an active element (عامل), governing the pronoun hum (هُمْ) as its subject (فَاعِلُ), which is nominative by position, and assigning the word mīthāq (مِيثَاق) the accusative case as its direct object (maf'ūl bihi). Within the contextual (siyāqî) framework, the maṣdar signifies “the act of breaking the covenant.” Subsequently, the act of “cursing” is mentioned in the perfect (past) verbal form. Logically, since the “breaking of the covenant” precedes the act of “cursing,” the maṣdar naqd must also, by contextual implication, denote a past temporal signification. Thus, the maṣdar naqd, within its contextual usage, conveys the meaning of a past action. (Âyiş, 2012, p. 12; Kocabiyik, 2024)

الماضي المضارع / The Perfect–Imperfect (Past–Present) Temporal Signification

The event begins in the past and continues to have an effect up to the present. In such contexts, the maṣdar may convey both past and present temporal signification, particularly when accompanied by expressions such as (مُدْ) or (مُدْنَدْ), or when the general meaning of the sentence implies continuity. For example, in the sentence — إِسْتِمَارِي فِي تَقْوِيَةِ الْأَنْ (My continual engagement in study since childhood is the reason for my current success”), the maṣdar (استمرار) “continuation” denotes persistence. The phrase (مُدْنَدْ الصِّغَرْ) (“since childhood”) indicates that the act of studying began in the past and still continues, thereby granting the maṣdar (past–present) temporal signification within its contextual framework. (Âyiş, 2012, p. 13)

المضارع / The Present Temporal Signification of the Maṣdar

Through a contextual indicator (قرينة سياقية), the maṣdar may convey a present temporal signification. For example, in the sentence — يُسْرُنِي عَمَلُ الْوَاجِبِ الْأَنْ (Your doing the homework now makes me happy”), the maṣdar (عمل, “doing”) appears. Within the sentence, two contextual indicators denote the present tense: the adverb of time (الآن, “now”) and the imperfect verb (يسريني, “makes me happy”). Accordingly, the maṣdar also conveys a present temporal reference by virtue of its contextual association.

فَالْآنَ لَا تَشْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمْ الْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ (Qur'an 2:177)

“He said: Have no fear this day! May Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.” (Yûsuf 12/92) In the verse, the maṣdar (شريب) occurs, which—due to the contextual presence of the word (اليوم, “today”)—conveys a present temporal signification within its contextual framework. (Âyiş, 2012, p. 13; Kocabiyik, 2025)

الاستقبل / The Future Temporal Signification of the Maṣdar

When a contextual indicator denoting the future is present in the sentence, the maṣdar may convey a future temporal signification. For example, in the sentence — بِنَادِيَةِ الْبَرَاسَةِ فِي الْأَسْبُوْعِ الْأَلَيِّ (The beginning of the school term is next week”), the maṣdar (بداية, “beginning”) is used. The phrase (الاسبوع الالامي, “next week”) serves as a contextual indicator of future time. Therefore, the overall meaning of the sentence is “The school will begin next week,” and the maṣdar (بداية), by virtue of its contextual association, conveys a future temporal reference.

Furthermore, when the verbal noun (مَصْنُورٌ) can be replaced by the construction (أَنْ+ فعل), it may convey either future or past temporal signification, depending on the contextual framework that clarifies the intended time reference. For example, in the sentence — يُدْهَشِنِي إِرْسَالُ رِسَالَةٍ غَدِّ (Your sending me a message tomorrow surprises me”), the maṣdar (إرسال, “sending”) occurs. The adverbial phrase (غداً, “tomorrow”) serves as a contextual indicator of futurity, and the sentence allows for the substitution of the maṣdar with the finite clause (أنْ تُرسل, “that you will send”). Therefore, the maṣdar (إرسال) conveys a future temporal signification within its contextual framework.

فَالَّذِي مَا جَرَأَهُمْ مِنْ أَرَادُوا بِأَهْلِكُمْ شُوَءًا إِلَّا أَنْ يُسْجِنُوا أَوْ عَذَابَ الْيَوْمِ (Qur'an 12:25)

“She said: What shall be his reward, who wisheth evil to thy folk, save prison or a painful doom?” (Yûsuf 12/25) By virtue of its contextual meaning (المعنى السياقى), the infinitive construction (أنْ يُسْجِنَ), “to be imprisoned” conveys a future temporal signification. The explicit maṣdar (عذاب, “punishment”), which is conjoined (مُعْطَوف) to this infinitive, also carries a future temporal reference, since coordination (عُطْف) requires temporal agreement between the conjunct (مُعْطَوف) and the conjoined (مُعْطَوفٌ عليه). (Âyiş, 2012, p. 13)

ال絶対的時制 / The Absolute Temporal Signification of the Maṣdar

If there is no contextual indicator (قرينة سياقية) that assigns the maṣdar to a specific time, the maṣdar conveys an absolute temporal signification. For example, in the sentence — النَّجَاحُ أَمْرٌ صَعُبٌ (Success is a difficult matter”), the maṣdar (النَّجَاحُ, “success”) functions as a verbal noun without any contextual element specifying a temporal reference. Therefore, it denotes the concept of success in an abstract sense, independent of any particular time, and thus expresses an absolute temporal reference. (Âyiş, 2012, p. 14; Kocabiyik, 2025)

The Temporal Signification of the Maşdar as an Adverb of Time

Within its contextual framework, the maşdar may function as an adverb of time, indicating a specific temporal reference. For example, the verb (شرق) means “to shine” or “to rise (of the sun)” and denotes a past action. Its corresponding maşdar, (شُرُوقُ), morphologically refers only to the event of rising. However, within a given context, it may also acquire a temporal signification. For instance, in response to the question — متى ذهبت إلى الجامعة؟ (When did you go to the university?), the answer (شُرُوقَ النَّسْمِينَ) would be understood as — ذهبت وفْتُ شُرُوقَ الشُّرُقِ (I went at sunrise). In this case, the maşdar functions as an adverb of time, referring specifically to the time of sunrise. (Sîbeveyhi, 1988, p. 1/222,223)

İkhtişas الاختصاص

When the maşdar is used with the definite article (الـ), it may convey a signification of specification (ikhtişas). For example, in the sentence — “I struck [the blow]”, the governed maşdar (الصَّرْبُ) appears in the accusative form (مُتَصْبُوب) and is prefixed with the definite article. The presence of الـ indicates that the action of striking refers to a specific instance known to the interlocutor. Thus, the definiteness of the maşdar marks it as referring to a particular, contextually recognized act.

The Maşdar as a Clarifier of a Preceding Ambiguity

The maşdar may serve to clarify an ambiguity within the sentence. For example:

(فَإِذَا لَقِيْتُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَصَرَبُ الرَّقَابُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَخْتَمُوهُمْ فَسُرُورُ الْوَثَاقِ فَإِمَّا فَدَاءٌ حَتَّىٰ تَضَعَّ الْخَرْبُ أَوْ زَارَهَا)

“Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens.” (Muhammed 47/4)

In the verse, the maşdars (فَدَاءٌ, مُتَّكِّلاً, “release without ransom”) and (فَدَاءٌ, مُتَّكِّلاً, “release for ransom”) function as the cognate accusatives (مُفْعُولٌ) of the elided verbs (تَقْتَلُونَ, “you set free”) and (تَقْتَلُونَ, “you ransom”). These maşdars serve to clarify the ambiguity inherent in the word (وثاق), “bond, captivity”). The phrase describing the disbelievers being bound implies their capture, yet it remains indeterminate as to what would happen to them afterward. The subsequent maşdars, (فَدَاءٌ) and (مُتَّكِّلاً), resolve this ambiguity by specifying that the captives would either be released gratuitously or in exchange for ransom. (Fehreddin er-Râzî, 1999, p. 28/38; MehmetAli, 2020, p. 304; Zemahşerî, ts., p. 4/319)

The Passive Participle Signification of the Maşdar

In some instances, the maşdar is used in place of the passive participle (اسم المفعول) within a sentence, thereby conveying its meaning. For example:

(جَنَّاتٌ عَذْنٌ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ عِبَادَةً بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مُتَبِّعٌ)

“Gardens of Eden, which the Beneficent hath, promised to His slaves in the Unseen. Lo! His promise is ever sure of fulfilment.” (Meryem 19/61)

In the verse, the maşdar (وَعْدَهُ, “His promise”) is used in place of the passive participle (مُؤْعُودٌ, “that which He has promised,” i.e., Paradise). Thus, the maşdar conveys the meaning of the passive participle, referring not to the act of promising itself but to the promised object. (Taberî, 2001, p. 15/575)

The Active Participle Signification of the Maşdar

The maşdar is sometimes used in place of the active participle (اسم الفاعل).

Masdar bazen ismi fail yerine kullanılabilmektedir. (el-Müberred, ts., p. 3/234,235) For example, in the sentence — “فَلَمَّا هَبَطَ صَبَرًا (I executed him patiently,” lit. “I killed him with patience”), the maşdar (صَبَرًا, “patience”) is used in place of the active participle (صَابِرًا, “being patient”). It functions syntactically as an adverbial accusative of state (حال), describing the manner in which the action was performed. (el-Müberred, ts., p. 3/234,235)

(لَمْ ادْعُنْ يَأْتِيَنِكَ سَعْيًا)

“Then call them, they will come to thee in haste.” (Bakara 2/260)

In the verse, the maşdar (سعِيًّا, “striving”) is used in place of the active participle (سعِيًّا, “striving, exerting effort”) and functions syntactically as a circumstantial accusative (حال). However, since it shares the same verbal root as its governing verb, it may also be analyzed grammatically as a cognate accusative (مُفْعُولٌ مُتَّكِّلاً). (Sâfiî, 1997, p. 3/41)

The Oath Signification of the Maşdar

The maşdar may also be used to convey the meaning of an oath. For example, in the expressions (عَمَرَكَ اللَّهُ) and (عَمَرَكَ اللَّهُ), the maşdars (قَعْدَ) and (قَعْدَ, “sitting”) and (عَمَرَ, “life”) are employed to express an oath, meaning “By the existence or presence of God.” In such usages, the maşdar functions independently, serving as an emphatic performative expression equivalent to an oath formula. (MehmetAli, 2020, p. 304; Radî el-Esterâbâdî, 1978, p. 1/312)

عَمَرَكَ اللَّهُ كَيْفَ يَأْتِيَنِي
أَبِيَّ الْمَنْجُوكِ التَّرِيَا سَهِيْلًا
وَسَهِيْلٌ إِذَا إِسْتَقْلَلَ يَمَانٌ
هِيَ شَاهِيْهَ إِذَا مَا إِسْتَقْلَلَ

“O Suhayh, who seeks to marry Thurayyâ! By the life and presence of God, how could you ever come together? One of you is in Yemen, and the other is in al-Shâm — you are by no means compatible with each other.” (Ebî Rabî‘a, 1996, p. 397)

In the verse, the word (عَمَرَ يَعْمَرُ) derives from the verb (عَمَرَ يَعْمَرُ) and functions as a maşdar. Within its contextual framework, it conveys the meaning of an oath, serving as an emphatic expression equivalent to “By your life, O God.”

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