




A Componential Analysis of the Equivalents of Qur'ānic Terms

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the intricate art of translating cultural elements and identifying appropriate equivalents for Quranic words. The primary objective is to investigate the strategies employed in the translation of Qur'ānic and religious terms, while also shedding light on the main sources of mistranslation. The study examines four renowned English translations of the Holy Qur'ān, namely those by Muhammad Shakir (1976), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1987), Marmaduke Pickthall (1986) and Arthur Arberry (1955). The dataset comprises terms derived from the original Arabic text of the Holy Qur'ān and their corresponding equivalents in the aforementioned English versions. Consequently, this study identifies and compares the religious and culture-specific terms within these translations, aiming to ascertain the underlying causes of mistranslations. The findings of this research reveal that the process of finding accurate equivalents for Qur'ānic and religious terms is inherently complex. Furthermore, it highlights that the challenge of finding suitable equivalents arises from translators' lack of awareness regarding the culture of the target language as well as the intricacies involved in transferring the source language's essence to the target language.

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1. Introduction

One of the most common and challenging problems in translation is finding equivalents for cultural-religious concepts such as Qur'ānic terms. These concepts often have "special features" that are specific and acceptable in one language, but rarely found in another. The problem becomes more serious when these features carry a religious and ideological meaning. Researchers and experts (e.g., Abdelaal, 2019) in translation have studied the difficulties of finding suitable equivalents for the religious words and cultural concepts of different languages, and have tried to offer appropriate solutions to overcome these difficulties.

Componential analysis (also known as feature analysis or contrast analysis) is a method of structural semantics that analyzes the meaning of words through structured sets of semantic features. These features are marked as "present", "absent" or "indifferent" for each word. The method does not follow the principle of compositionality, which states that the meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its parts. Componential analysis reveals the features that are culturally important for speakers of a language to distinguish different words in a semantic field or domain (Ottenheimer, 2006, p. 20). For example, a componential analysis of human beings could be: man = [+ MALE], [+ MATURE] or woman = [- MALE], [+ MATURE] or boy = [+ MALE], [- MATURE] or girl = [- MALE] [- MATURE] or child = [+/- MALE] [- MATURE]. As a result, the word girl can have basic factors or semantic properties of (+human, young, and female). Therefore, a human being can be distinguished from a non-human. For instance, a tree is (-human and +object). This is an important factor by which plants may be distinguished from other creatures (Ottenheimer, 2006, p. 20). In sum, one word can have basic underlying meanings that are well-established depending on the concepts that are common among the people in the context. It is crucial to understand these underlying meanings to fully understand the translate the terms or find the equivalents in the target languages and cultures.

A translator is usually seen as a mediator between the source and target languages in the translation process. He/she tries to find equivalents for textual elements of the source language in the target language, especially for religious lexical elements and specific cultural concepts (Shanazary, 2019). According to linguistic relativity, cultural features embedded in a language may not exist in other languages. This may be an extreme view, but it is generally true that finding close equivalents for specific identifiers of a language that make languages different from each other, as well as translating cultural and religious terms of two languages with different linguistic features, is a challenging task.

Translating religious texts, especially Qur'ānic text, is more difficult for the translator because of the religious-cultural and ideological features of such texts. Culture-specific items are those that have no equivalents in the target reader's cultural system and this poses a big problem in conveying concepts in the target language. The question that arises here is how the translator views such problems and how they try to solve them. Abdelaal (2019) compared three translations of two surahs in the Holy Qur'ān to examine the loss of meaning in the Holy Qur'ān verses. Six verses from the sections of the Heights and Cattle were selected and analyzed to show common problems and loss in translation. These shortcomings of translation were "found in the translations of Abdel Haleem, Pickthall, Shakir, and Sarwar. This study, based on the Skopos theory with some modifications, proposes a new perspective in the translation of the Holy Qur'ān" (p. 1).

Abdelaal (2019) has studied synonymy in the Holy Qur'ān and has argued that finding equivalents is one of the basic linguistic phenomena that affects the structure of the lexicon and it is a challenging issue in translating Qur'ānic terms. In this comparative study, componential analysis of terms is used to assess the semantic aspects of the synonymous words. The contextual meaning of each word is also analyzed in the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. The study focuses on three English translations of the Quran: those by Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Shakir. It identifies the challenges that translators face when translating near-synonyms in the Quran, and suggests ways to improve the accuracy of translations. Pure sciences like mathematics, chemistry, and physics have fixed terms that have simple and similar meanings in everyday usage. The translators are often successful in translating and finding equivalents for specific terms in these fields. Some words such as sun, moon, swim and die are common basic words related to the main experiences of humans and considered as their natural communications, and people would understand their different aspects of meaning regardless of their specific environment and language.

There are many words with cultural features that are called non-basic words. To recreate the communicative and semantic value of the terms used in the original context and to preserve and transfer it to the target language, the translator should recognize the culture, religion, tradition, and generally the ideology and attitude of the text. Contextual factors also play a crucial role in decoding the meaning of source text. In this regard, structuralists believe that each language has a unique system and its components and units get their meaning and existence from the communicative network and also from the other units within the system. So, the meaning of each word is shaped within the framework of the semantic system of the related language. Therefore, considering the above-mentioned points and taking into account the differences between languages in terms of lexical structure, one can say that translation and the process of encoding and recreating the words in the target language require macro and micro-linguistic factors. Al-Abbas1 and Al-Khanji (2019) did a study and found that the Islamic text translators were inconsistent in their choices of the English equivalents for the words under study. "The study concludes that some Qur'ānic words are untranslatable, and cannot be expressed in another language, and therefore, translators are advised to include explanatory notes between brackets or as footnotes to inform the non-Arab readers that repetition of the words was not random but intended for specific purposes" (p. 125).

To illustrate the given points, there is an unquestioning fact about the Holy Qur'ān that no text can replace and stand for it. In what follows one relevant verse of the Holy Qur'ān is given as evidence.

Surah Al-Isra [17:88]

قُلْ لَئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

Say: If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support

The Holy Qur'ān contains many verses that challenge mankind to find even one error. People have failed to refute the literary perfection and scientific truths in this holy book. This study aims to explore the most serious problems that translators encounter when translating cultural terms in religious texts, namely, the Holy Qur'ān. The present study also examines the strategies used by translators in translating the selected Quranic terms.

Recently, many studies have been done in the field of religious texts and attention has focused on translation as cultural transfer and the connection of translation as cultural transfer with other emerging disciplines within cultural studies” (Munday, 2001, p. 138). Nida (1964) explaining the problematic issue of non-equivalence in translation states that differences between cultures may cause more severe difficulties for the translator.

Addressing the intricate technical challenge of handling culture-specific elements emerges as a prominent aspect in cultural translation. Distinguished translators of the Holy Qur’ān into English, such as Piktahall (1986) and Arberrry (1955), have openly acknowledged their limitations in identifying precise and appropriate counterparts for the culturally significant terms found within the Holy Qur’ān. In their respective translations, they expressly communicated that their endeavors represented personal interpretations of the Qur’ān’s meaning, capturing only a superficial understanding of its profound textual depths.

2. Literature Review

The Holy Qur’ān is the divine book of Allah revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in the early days of the Islamic Revolution. The Holy Qur’ān has 114 chapters (Surahs), 6,218 verses (Ayas), 77,437 words, and 321,000 letters. It is divided into 30 sections (parts). It is also the core of the message of Islam and is highly revered by all Muslims in the world. Moreover, it is a source of Islamic values, facts, ethics, and laws. The Quran is a guide that helps Muslims distinguish between right and wrong. Today, as the Muslim world faces universal challenges such as globalization, the environment, terrorism, drugs, medical ethics, and feminism, Muslims look to the Quran for guidance on how to address these issues (Alduhaim, 2021, p. 76). Pickhtall (1986) thinks that the style of the Holy Qur’ān has not received much attention in its translation and terms. He also said that the Qur’ān is an inimitable symphony”. He also said that “translating and conveying the meaning of the Qur’ānic words is like moving a flower from its garden that may lose its beauty and grace in the process.

Shanazary (2019) did a study on the difficulties of Qur’ānic translation and showed that the challenges of Islamic law texts could be divided into two groups: lexical challenges and structural challenges including Islamic words, culture-specific items, units of measurement, common words with uncommon meanings, fixed expressions, and modal verbs. Translators have used six methods including transliteration, literal translation, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, and accepted translation. But mostly, they used transliteration and literal translation to deal with the lexical gap. Thus, knowing Arabic and the target language is not enough and the translators need to “have enough knowledge of pragmatic aspects of Arabic language and also be familiar with its cultural background” (p. 105).

Rshaid and Abuisaac (2021) explored the rhetorical speech acts interface at the lexicosemantic and pragma-emotive levels in the Qur’ān verses and studied how these acts are interpreted and translated into English. These instances include irony, exaggeration, understatement, and satire. Findings reveal a large number of translation problems in functions and dissociative thoughts due to the lack of interface in the Qur’ānic discourse. In addition, they argue that translating interrelated rhetorical speech acts is a very difficult task because of the fundamental differences between the Arabic and English linguistic systems. These differences include differences in syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics. Many terms in religious texts such as those in the Holy Qur’ān, the Hadith, and the Bible

have unique linguistic and semantic features that are culture-specific items, and conveying them is a difficult task.

Toshihiko Izutsu (1991) examined the semantic structure of the religious meaning of the Qur'ānic terms by adopting the viewpoint of Whorf in the field of the worldview of different ethnic groups and the impact of this worldview on finding suitable equivalents in target languages. For example, he rejected the word “disbeliever” as the correct equivalent for “ظالم” or the words “ستمگر” or “ستمکار” in Persian and said: translating “ظالم” into “ستمگر” or “ستمکار” may be an easy way to convey the meaning of it but if one wants to access the semantic features of the terms, he/she should explore the culture of the ancient Arabic language. It seems that not much research has been done in this area and this research may be a useful clue for those who are interested in such topics. Finally, this study may fill a gap in the literature.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the difficulties and problems that translators face when translating Qur'ānic terms into English. Four translations of the Holy Qur'ān, mentioned in the introduction section, were intentionally selected as the main focus of our analysis in this research. Accordingly, the present study has tried to answer the following question:

- What challenges do translators face in finding close and appropriate equivalents for the terms in the Holy Qur'ān within the componential analysis framework?

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of componential analysis (Rshaid & Abuisaac, 2021), which has been recognized for its effectiveness in addressing lexical and semantic uncertainties that arise during the translation process from the source language to the target language. The research endeavors undertaken for this study have focused on a carefully selected sample of 500 terms extracted from the text of the Holy Qur'ān. By employing a purposive sampling strategy encompassing specific chapters of the Holy Qur'ān, the aim of this study is to identify the challenges encountered by translators when rendering the Arabic terms of the Holy Qur'ān into English, utilizing componential analysis as the fundamental methodological approach.

3.1. The Framework of the Study

Componential analysis (feature analysis or contrast analysis) is the analysis of words through structured sets of semantic features, which are given as “present”, “absent” or “indifferent to feature”. The method thus follows the principle of. Componential analysis is a method typical of structural semantics which analyzes the structure of a word's meaning. Thus, it shows the culturally important features by which speakers of the language differentiate different words in the domain. This is a highly useful approach to learning another language and understanding a specific semantic domain of Ethnography. The componential analysis focuses on the analysis of a set of related linguistic items, especially word meaning, into combinations of features in terms of which each item may be compared with every other, as in the analysis of man into the semantic features “male”, “mature” and “human”. This theoretical notion can be a suitable tool for systematic analysis of decoding the meaning of Quranic terms. The following framework is used to analyze data. These slight differences between words in any language indicate the existence of synonyms in both

languages in three types of equivalents including near, exact, or lack of synonyms. But two types of synonymy are suggested by Alduhaim (2021, p. 79).

First, *full synonymy*, where words are almost the same in their meaning. It illustrates this with an example from the Holy Qur'an, where the words فضل / أثر have the same meaning:

Surat Yusuf [12:91]

تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ عَلَّمْتُمْ مَا جِئْنَا لِنُفْسِدَ فِي الْأَرْضِ

They said: By Allah! Indeed, Allah has favored you over us, and we certainly have been (deliberate) sinners

Surat Al-Baqarah [2:253]

تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ

Those are the messengers some of whom We have given superiority over some others.

Second, *near synonymy*, where words may have similar meanings in the language but definitely have different meanings in the Quranic discourse, such as

Surat Yusuf [12:44]

قَالُوا أَضْغَاثٌ أَحْلَامٍ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَأْوِيلِ الْأَحْلَامِ بِعَالَمِينَ

They replied, These are jumbled visions and we do not know the interpretation of such dreams.

Surat Yusuf [12:43]

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي رُؤْيَايَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لِلرُّؤْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ

O chiefs! Tell me the meaning of my dream if you can interpret dreams

4. Results and Discussion

The research question investigates the problems that translators face in finding close and appropriate equivalents for the terms in the Holy Qur'an. Results showed that there are several criteria for what is acceptable or unacceptable in the theory of componential analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to produce an acceptable translation that creates similar effects on the TL readers as those created by the original work on its readers.

Lotfipour Saedi (1998) thinks that the conditions governing the equivalents of religious terms are: referential meaning, meaning components, and discourse factors and conditions that govern the text, as well as the linguistic environment. Choosing lexical equivalents for Qur'anic terms in the target language requires us to consider the condition that affects the meaning of the terms and also select a word as an equivalent that reflects the same circumstances in the target language. Of course, some religious texts may have words or use words that have no equivalent in the target language. The problem of finding equivalents in the target language can be handled in different ways. One of these ways is approximation.

The approximation is the word in the text with close conceptual aspects and by replacing it in the translated text one can convey the concept to the reader. Of course, due to the lack of common universal semantic features between the words of source and target languages, the approximation factor will not be effective. For example, in translating the word “شهيد” the Qur’ān translators such as Arberry, Pickthall, and Yusuf Ali, selected an English equivalent “martyr” which means death and nonexistence. The word “شهيد” the vocabulary of Islamic culture in its semantic layers contain features such as life, faith, migration, and combat.

Surat Al-Baqarah [1:218]

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

Those who believe, and have emigrated and fought in the cause of Allah and killed

The mentioned concepts in this verse are parts of semantic features of “شهيد” and there is another part in the following verse:

Surat Ali ‘Imran [3:169]

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

Do not think who died in the way of Allah dead, but alive and have sustentation from their lord

So being alive is another feature of the mentioned word. One way to analyze the semantic features of the word “شهيد” in the verses above is to compare it with its English equivalent. However, since there is no exact match for this term in English, we need to use a phonetic transcription of the original word, such as “shahid”. When “شهيد” a loanword in English, it introduces a new lexical category and specific semantic features that may not be familiar to the speakers of that language. These features, along with other factors such as the context, the structure and the semantic relations of the sentence, affect the final meaning of the expression. Therefore, the translator should try to find a suitable equivalent in the target language that can convey the meaning of “shahid” without losing its cultural nuances. We can argue that if a word or a phrase from a foreign language reflects the unique cultural aspects of its society, it should be preserved in its original form without literal translation.

The terms “messenger”, “emissary” and “apostle” was introduced for the equivalent of the word “رسول”. In the following verse the religious meaning of the word “رسول” in the vocabulary of Islamic culture is mentioned:

Surat al Jumu'ah [62:2]

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

This verse shows that the word “رسول” has semantic features such as “messenger of divine revelation”, “interpreter of God’s will” and “teacher of the Qur’ān”. The English word “apostle” means one of the twelve disciples who spread the Christian message and has a religious connotation of being a missionary. Therefore, using a phonetic transcription of the original word, such as “rasul”, may be a better solution. However, we should also consider that borrowing a term from the source language may result in its adoption and frequent use in the target language. Sometimes, the loanword may coexist with the translation, or it may

lose some of its original semantic features over time. This semantic shift is often related to the cultural and linguistic differences between the source and target languages. The following table shows the frequency of different equivalents for the term “الرحمن” in English translations of the Holy Qur’ān:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The compassionate, the beneficent, the merciful, the gracious, Rahman, the kind, the affectionate.

The most common equivalents for the term “الرحمن” among the given options are “the kind” and “the affectionate”, but they mainly convey the sense of kindness and not beneficence or blessing. Another equivalent for the term “الرحيم” is suggested by Pickthall (1986) as “the beneficent”. This term is taken from the Oxford dictionary and means the endless grace and mercy of God. This meaning is close to the word “الرحمن” in terms of cultural and semantic scope and can also be used as an exclamation instead of the name of God. Yusuf Ali (1087) also chooses the equivalent “gracious” for the term “الرحمن”.

As mentioned earlier, when there is no exact equivalent for a word, the original word should be retained. Therefore, some translators have used different methods of finding equivalents, which will be explained in the following sections. The word “الرحمن” implies magnificence and abundance, and there is no single word in English that combines the concept of mercy and abundance. In Arabic, the patterns “فعليل”, “فعال”, and “فعلول” indicate abundance, and the words that are formed in these patterns have a sense of emphasis and intensification. Some translators, such as Pickthall, use modifiers such as “most”, “all” and “entirely” before the given equivalents to create a closer equivalent for the terms “الرحمن” and “الرحيم”. According to lexical morphologists, the pattern of words in Arabic can add extra meaning to the words. Therefore, these modifiers are the translation of the patterns “فعليل”, “فعال” and “فعلول” in the given terms. However, the problem is that the word “most” implies superiority and implicitly involves a comparison. But according to monotheism, God cannot be compared with any other being. The words “all” and “entire” do not imply abundance. As for the word “الرحيم”, which is an adjective and implies permanent blessings and mercy, modifiers such as “most”, “ever”, “all” and “extremely” are used in English.

These words occur before the word “merciful” as modifiers and convey only part of the meaning of this word. The meaning of the word “compassion” according to the Oxford Dictionary is a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering from some problems. Therefore, the explicit and implicit meaning of the term “الرحمن” does not match “compassionate”. The word “beneficent” according to the Oxford Dictionary means generous or doing good. These concepts cover only part of the semantic and cultural domain of words “الرحمن” and “الرحيم”. Considering the cultural features and semantic levels of these words, no absolute and close equivalent can be found for them in English and the proposed equivalents are approximate. Therefore, considering these problems, it is better to use the original form of these words as they appear in the text of the Holy Qur’ān. Regarding the semantic features in two languages or cultures, Nida (1964) argues that religious messages cannot be transferred in terms of cultural contexts and other social aspects. Therefore, he thinks that adapting the concepts is the only way to find appropriate equivalents. Thus, for terms that have no equivalents in the target language, the original form should be used. Some translators neglect these points in their work. This problem can be seen in the translations of Pickthall and Arberry. Since “compassionate” is not a suitable equivalent for the term

“الرحمن”, they adjust it by adding modifiers such as “most”, “entirely” and “all” to meet this requirement that the terms “الرحمن” and “الرحيم” have two morphemes like “mercy” and Arabic patterns “فعلال” and “فعلول” in their lexical structure. Finally, they use compounds such as “the most compassionate” and “entirely merciful”.

Some other translators, such as Yusuf Ali, use the terms “Alrahman” and “Alrahim” from the source language and explain them in footnotes. Nida (1964) also suggests that when finding equivalents for religious and cultural words such as “الرحمن”, “شهيدي”, “رسول” and “الرحيم”, the translator should first decode the cultural features of the source language and then find suitable equivalents and reconstruct and encode the concepts within the terms and phrases in the target language, so that the message of the translated text has a semantic equivalence to the original text. In other words, when the translator analyzes the source language, he should consider all aspects of meaning, such as literal and figurative meaning. For the term “فلاح” in the verse “قد افلح المؤمنون”, the equivalents “saved” and “delivered” are proposed (Pickthall, 1986). This word in the Qur’ān semantically implies the ultimate happiness on the Day of Judgment, while the word “save” in English means rescue from a natural disaster. Therefore, due to the different semantic features of these two terms and considering the real concept of “فلاح”, the meaning cannot be encoded in the word “save”. Thus, it is better to use the original form of the word “falah”. Let’s take another example; Oxford dictionary defines the word “رمضان” as “the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar”. This definition only provides one aspect of time, but ignores the ideological and religious aspects. In Islamic culture, “رمضان” is not only a calendrical month, but also a term that contains such components as purification, fasting, the martyrdom of Imam Ali, and the revelation of the Qur’ān.

According to one of the common word formation processes, that is extension of meaning, the terms “عاشورا”, “رمضان” and “كربلا” do not refer to only specific concepts of time, place, and calendar, but also reflect the culture of purification, sacrifice and self-devotion in the path of God and His noble cause. Each of these terms has specific cultural concepts that are language-specific. These words are used in their original form “Ramadan”, “Ashura” and “Karbala” in today’s native English texts. Therefore, factors influencing lexical adaptation require translators to consider the referential meaning of the source language. Hence, they should check if the words of the source language and their equivalents have the same reference in the external and physical world. Otherwise, words of the source language should be preserved in their original form in the target language. In the process of finding an equivalent, the translator should be faithful to the original text and any kind of added comments should be given in footnotes.

Another term that appears frequently in the Holy Qur’ān is “بلى”. This term is found 22 times in the text of the Holy Qur’ān. Understanding the usage and meaning of the word “بلى” is one of the factors that is essential for comprehending the verses.

Yosef Ali (1987) considers a superficial semantic feature in translating the related term. Word “بلى” is either for rejection of negation as in

Surat Al-Baqarah [1:80-81]

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نَمَسَّنَا النَّارَ... بَلَى مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً

or for negative question as in

Surat Al-A'raf [7:172]

أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا

Some translators use “Nay” (Pickthall, 1986) or “Yes, indeed” (Yusuf Ali, 1987 and Palmer, 1986) for this term.

Surat Al-Baqarah [1:80-81]

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ... بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً

- ✓ Pickthall: And they say: the fire of punishment will not touch us.... Nay, but whosoever hath done evil...

Surat Az-Zukhruf [43:80]

أَمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلْنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

- ✓ Pickthall: dream they that we cannot hear their secret thoughts and private confidence? Nay, but our envoys, present with them, do record

In this verse, the word “بلى” follows the negative interrogative sentence “ام يحسبون انا لا” and its tone is reproachful. The term “فتنه” has been translated differently by Shaker, Arberry, and Yusuf Ali. The following table shows the proposed equivalents. We can also examine the verse and the various cultural concepts related to the term “فتنه”.

Surat Al-Anfal [8:28]

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ

- ✓ Shaker: and know that your property and your children are a temptation.
- ✓ Arberry: and know that your wealth and your children are a trial.
- ✓ Yusuf Ali: and know ye that your possession and your progeny are but a trail.

The suitable equivalent for the term “فتنه” in this sense may be “trial” or “enticement”, which are derived from “temptation” (chosen by Shaker).

The second meaning of “فتنه” is atheism; for example in

Surat Al-Baqara [1:193]

وَاقْتُلُوهُمْ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ

- ✓ Shaker: and fight with them until there is no persecution.
- ✓ Arberry: fight them, till there is no persecution.
- ✓ Yusuf Ali: and fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression.

The word persecution, which means “torture”, “tumult”, “uproar” and “oppression”, does not seem to be suitable in this context. I think the word infidelity, which is commonly used in Islam and Christianity, can be used in this situation.

Another meaning of “فتنه” is “excuse”; for example in:

Surat Al-An’am [6:23]

ثُمَّ لَمْ تَكُنْ فِتْنَتُهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا وَاللَّهِ رَبَّنَا مَا كُنَّا مُشْرِكِينَ

- ✓ Shakir: then their excuse would be nothing but that they would say, by Allah, our lord, we were not polytheists.
- ✓ Arberry: then they shall have no providing, but to say, by God or Lord we never associate other gods with thee.
- ✓ Yusuf Ali: there will then be (left) no subterfuge for them but to say: “By Allah our lord, we were no those who joined gods with Allah”.

Arberry selected “providing”, which implies consent. Yusuf Ali also picked the term “subterfuge”, which implies deception. Shaker’s proposed equivalent is more culturally relevant for the term “فتنه”. Translators should provide close equivalents that reflect the exact meaning of the main context. Therefore, exploring the cultural aspects of the semantic features of the terms can be very helpful for translating religious texts. In this regard, there are some factors that play an important role in finding close equivalents for words such as “بلى” and “فتنه”.

To assess the balance in translation, one should consider all the factors that work together. Thus, the term, cultural features, context, linguistic and paralinguistic aspects are the main components of achieving balance in translation. However, in religious and Qur’anic contexts, different meanings may emerge in the process of transferring the concepts, depending on the purpose of the context and the transparency of the source text. For example,

Surat An-Nisa [4:176]

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَوْفَ نُصَلِّيهِمْ نَارًا كَلَّمًا تَصْحَتُ جُلُودُهُمْ...

- ✓ Arberry: we shall certainly roast them at the fire, as often as they are wholly burned...
- ✓ Palmer: we will broil them with fire, whenever their skins are well done....

The translators’ presupposition and comprehension of fire and the manner of burning have influenced their choice of equivalents based on their attitudinal perspectives. In these two samples of translation, the verb “roast” can have different meanings in English, such as fry, parch, or barbecue, while the verb “broil” can imply seethe or bubble. Choosing different verbs in English can alter the intended meaning of the source language. Therefore, to find the closest equivalent, one should be aware of the facts, beliefs, and hidden thoughts behind the source text. Selecting an inappropriate equivalent for a word can create further problems. As mentioned before, encoding the semantic features of Islamic terms into English poses

various challenges. Each religion, culture, society, and language has its own set of concepts that differ from others. Thus, the translations may be insufficient for anyone who aims to transfer a concept from one culture to another, and sometimes the exact meaning of the term is lost.

For example, the term “دين” in Persian, when translated as “religion” in English, can create a significant barrier to understanding its exact meaning, since religion from their cultural point of view is confined to the personal life of individuals and has no relation to the social, political, and judicial aspects of people’s lives. Thus, the meaning that the word religion conveys is merely a connection between “creator and creature”. Therefore, they cannot comprehend why a religion like Islam has comprehensive plans such as economic ones, Khums and Zakat (legal tax), and how they affect social life. Consequently, Islam is erroneously interpreted as a mixture of religion and politics. Such misunderstandings are due to the absence of a close equivalent for the term “دين” in English. To illustrate other aspects of problems related to finding close equivalents for the specific terms in the Holy Qur’ān, let us consider another example. The term “ذاکر” has been translated as “narrator”, “Karbala”, or “orator” by different translators (Pickthall, 1986).

The dictionary meaning of the word “orator” is spokesman and that of the word “narrator” is storyteller. None of these equivalents seem to be appropriate for the term “ذاکر”. Thus, the semantic features of this term are ignored by the translators. The word “ذاکر” occurs in different contexts of the text of the Holy Qur’ān and the word “suppliant” seems to be a closer and more suitable equivalent for it in English. The same result can be seen in the equivalent of “Voudhu”, “وضو” given by Alduhaim (2021) as one of the Qur’ānic terms in the Holy Qur’ān. The near synonym is the word “ablution” in English that is used for it. The term “وضو” is a basic concept in Islam and it is a mandatory performance before prayer five times a day. Salat or prayer is a mandatory act of worshiping Allah that every Muslim must do and is legally obliged to do. The semantic and cultural features of Salat are very different from the prayer that Christians do in the church every Sunday. While it is optional in Christianity, it is obligatory in Islam. Thus, prayer cannot be a good equivalent of Salat and ablution cannot be a good equivalent for Voudhu, “وضو” since this term cannot be encoded within a word in English. As a result, in many cases, if the words are unique terms that are religiously or culturally based, the original form or transliteration may be suggested like Salat or Voudhu as equivalents for “وضو” and “صلاة”, which is Salat. In Arabic language, there are unique words that are culturally and contextually specific and this affects the problem of translatability of the Holy Qur’ān.

In the Arabic language, there are unique words that are culturally and contextually specific and this affects the problem of translatability of the Holy Qur’ān. Some scholars (e.g., Alduhaim, 2021) believe that synonyms can be regarded as near synonyms rather than exact equivalents. Finding equivalents for religious concepts has a significant effect on transferring the religious message to people. Therefore, the translator acts as a mediator between two cultures and languages so that it naturally and effectively is transferred to the target language and keeps the same effect on the reader.

5. Conclusion

If there is an Islamic and Qur’ānic term in English, we should investigate which word can be a suitable equivalent for it to use. For example, “Christianity” is not an Islamic term, but it exists in Western culture along with “Islam” and “Judaism”. Therefore, we should use this word in translating Islamic words. On the other hand, the Islamic and Qur’ānic words

that have no equivalent and common cultural features with the target language (English) should be used exactly in their original and Arabic forms. The words “نماز”, “شهيد”, “هجرت”, “جهاد”, “دين”, “توحيد” and “تقوى” are recommended to be used in this way. Of course, when these words enter the lexical territory of English, they would take the phonetic and syllable template. Thus, these words should be used in these forms to promulgate and become high-frequency borrowed words in the target language.

Students in the Islamic translation courses can practice some activities to enhance their ability to translate the Holy Qur’ān. These activities include comparing and contrasting English translations of the same Holy Qur’ān by Muslim and non-Muslim translators to identify strengths and weaknesses of their rendering of Surahs and Verses. They also may focus on lexical, syntactic, and semantic translation errors. The verb tenses, meanings, pronouns, questions, negations, prepositions, or other components of the language can be compared in two or three translated works and discussed in the classrooms. The students can also write their opinions about the quality of the English translation using specific examples. They need to address difficulties encountered in translating the Holy Qur’ān by Western translators and indicate their cultural effects on the translation quality. Cultural and linguistic differences between English and non-English translators may affect the translation quality of the Holy Qur’ān. Thus, the role of the translator as an invisible medium can be an outstanding phenomenon and a line of investigation by the students majoring in Translation. In other words, standards of translation quality through the following componential analysis should be observed by the students. Finally, considering the problems of finding equivalents for Islamic and Qur’ānic texts and being familiar with them can be effective in solving some of the translation problems and help the translator to evaluate and judge the amount of meaning transferred through the translation and to understand the weaknesses and deficiencies before the translation and to remove them.

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