

Meanings of Near-Synonyms and Their Translation Issues in the Holy Qur'ān

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ABSTRACT

The Holy Qur'ān includes near-synonyms which have seemingly similar meanings but convey different meanings upon deeper analysis of the semantic constituents of these words. Such near-synonyms usually pose a challenge that often presents itself to the translators of the Holy Qur'ān. This study investigates the meanings of near-synonyms and their translation issues in the Qur'ān. It aims to identify the contextual meanings of Qur'ānic near-synonyms based on different exegeses of the Qur'ān. Then, it explains the nuances that exist between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how such nuances are reflected in two English translations of the Qur'ān. The study adopts the Relation by Contrast Approach to Synonyms (RC-S) as a theoretical framework for data analysis. It also employs the qualitative approach for collecting and analyzing the data of the study. Besides, it makes use of different exegeses of the Qur'ān to identify the differences in meaning between each pair of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. The analysis of the data reveals that there exist some nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms in terms of denotative and expressive meaning. The findings also show that the differences in meaning between the pairs of near-synonyms are not reflected in the English translations. Therefore, the study recommends that readers as well as translators should look for nuances between Qur'ānic near-synonyms whenever they find two words with similar meanings in order to perceive the Qur'ānic text appropriately and translators should make an effort to reflect the nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms in their translation.

Keywords: Connotative meaning; contextual meaning; denotative meaning; near-synonyms; and translation

INTRODUCTION

Synonymy is an essential linguistic phenomenon in semantics. It is a universal phenomenon that exists in several languages. This notion has been defined by many linguists and semanticists (Cruse, 2000 & Murphy, 2003); their definitions of synonymy are almost similar in one way or another. It has been viewed as a semantic relation between two words that map to the same meaning or concept (Murphy, 2003). Besides, Cruse (2000) contends that

synonymy is a semantic relation between words whose semantic similarities are more salient than their differences. Moreover, Yule (2006) confirms that synonymy is a semantic relation in which two or more words have very closely related meanings. Within such a semantic relation, there exist different types of synonyms.

Scholars (Cruse, 2000; Murphy, 2003) make a distinction between different types of synonyms. For instance, Murphy identifies two types of synonyms i) logical synonyms ii) context-dependent synonyms; logical synonyms are in turn divided into two types: full synonyms and sense synonyms. According to Murphy, all context-dependent synonyms are near-synonyms. Full synonyms are words which are identical in every sense (Murphy, 2003). This type of synonyms is very rare. Examples of full synonyms include words with relatively limited numbers of conventionalized senses, such as “carbamide” and “urea” (an organic compound), “groundhog” and “woodchuck” (a small North American animal that has thick brown fur), etc. Sense synonyms are also defined as words which share one or more senses, but differ in others (ibid). Examples of sense synonyms include “begin” and “commence”. Of these, near-synonyms will be highlighted here. Other types of synonyms will not be discussed in the current study.

Near-synonyms are items which share some but not all shades of meaning (Cruse, 2000). They are also viewed as words which have similar features in common but cannot be interchangeably used in all contexts (ibid). Moreover, near-synonyms are defined by Murphy (2003) as items which have similar but not identical meaning. This type of synonyms is distinct from other types of synonyms in that it affects the sentential truth-conditions. In this regard, Cruse (2000) applauds that it must be always possible to affirm one near-synonym while simultaneously denying the other. Cruse asserts that the words “foggy” and “misty” are near-synonyms in that it is possible to deny one member of the near-synonyms while affirming the other as in the following sentence: *It wasn't foggy last night, it was just misty*. It is clear that mistiness is a lower degree of fogginess and therefore they are near-synonyms.

This study mainly focuses on analyzing the meanings of near-synonyms and their English translation in the Holy Qur'ān. The concept of Qur'ānic synonymy has been discussed and researchers (Bint Al-Shati, 1971; Omar, 2001; Abdellah, 2003; Al-Sowaidi, 2011 & Issa, 2011) suggest the term “near-synonyms” to be used for the linguistic analysis of the Qur'ānic synonymy. According to them, the synonyms of the Holy Qur'ān are all near-synonyms where there are preferences for using a certain item in a certain context. Although such near-synonymous pairs are sometimes employed in Modern Standard Arabic (i.e. the standardized variety of Arabic used in writing and in most formal speech throughout the Arab world to facilitate communication) to refer to the same semantic reference or identity, they have slightly different meanings in the Qur'ān. Every word of the near-synonyms in the Holy Qur'ān has a particular function at various levels of meaning or usage in a certain context (Al-Sowaidi, 2011).

Similarly, Al-Sha'rawi (1993) argues that every synonym in the Holy Qur'ān has its special meaning that cannot be conveyed by another one in the same context. For instance, the near-synonymous pair العبيد *al'abīd* and العباد *al'ibad* “the slaves” in English. However, each one of such near-synonyms has its specific meaning in the Holy Qur'ān and most importantly they cannot be used interchangeably. Issa (2011) illustrates that Al-Sha'rawi differentiates between such near-synonyms by saying that العبيد *al'abīd* (the slaves) refers to “all creatures of Allah, as all of them are created by Him and unwilling to act against His Laws, while the second item العباد *al'ibad* (the slaves) is specifically used when the context is referring to the believers in Allah who obey all His orders with will and choice” (p. 32). Furthermore, Abu Uadah (1985) distinguishes between اقسام *'aqsama* and حلف *halafa* (swore) claiming that اقسام (*'aqsama*) means swore truthfully and implicates a true oath while

حلف (*halafa*) means swore untruthfully and is employed to imply a false oath in the Holy Qur'ān. However, such near-synonyms are used interchangeably in Modern Standard Arabic and most importantly these Qur'ānic words have one general equivalent in English (swore). In fact, the failure to understand such differences in meaning between the two items distorts the Qur'ānic message. Such nuances are difficult to capture in Modern Standard Arabic even for the native speakers of Arabic due to the fact that the synonymous pairs are used interchangeably and such an issue would be more complicated and hardly bridgeable when it comes to their translation into another language. Such subtle and delicate nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms usually confuse both the reader as well as translator. If a translator fails to realize such nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms and misunderstands their original meanings, the near-synonyms will be misinterpreted.

Newmark (1988) and Abdellah (2003) argue that the differences in meaning between near-synonyms are context-dependent. Therefore, translators should conduct an analysis of the context in which the near-synonyms are used so as to provide an appropriate translation for such near-synonyms. In addition, the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān play a key role in explaining the nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms and thus facilitate their translation. In the current study, the Qur'ānic near-synonyms will be analyzed in their Qur'ānic contexts and the exegeses of the Qur'ān will be consulted to account for the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how such differences in meaning are reflected in translation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Qur'ānic near-synonyms have special features which make the reflection of their meanings in another language highly problematic. Ali (1938) contends that the vocabulary of the Holy Qur'ān gives special words for ideas and things of the same kind for which there is only a general word in English. Moreover, it is asserted that although some words can be interchangeably used in Modern Standard Arabic, they are differently used in the Holy Qur'ān (Al-Sowaidi, 2011). For instance, the words غيث *ghāith* and مطر *matar* (rain) have only one common English equivalent "rain" and are interchangeably used in Modern Standard Arabic. Al-Sowaidi (2011) argues that although both words share the core meaning "rain", غيث *ghāith* (rain) is always associated with compassion, mercy and welfare whereas مطر *matar* (rain) is associated with destruction, punishment, and Godly wrath and torment. She adds that the differences in meaning between these Qur'ānic words are not reflected in the English translation. Al-Sowaidi points out that if the nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms are not reflected in translation, the reader will not get access to the meaning communicated by the original words and thus the Qur'ānic message will not be adequately conveyed or more seriously distorted.

Moreover, Abdul-Raof (2001) discusses the translation of the near-synonyms مرضعة (*murdhe^{ah}*) and مرضع (*murdhe^c*) which seem to be synonymous to the reader. Abdul-Raof (2001) explains that although the word مرضعة (*murdhe^{ah}*) denotes an on-going action of breastfeeding a baby, its translation by Irving "signifies a different word مرضع (*murdhe^c*), meaning a mother who breastfeeds her baby i.e. signifying a habit" (p.43). He points out that these two near-synonyms bring some confusion to the translators of the Holy Qur'ān and thus the Qur'ānic word مرضعة (*murdhe^{ah}*) is rendered inaccurate in the target language. In addition, Issa (2011) maintains that translators face obstacles while translating the Qur'ānic near-synonyms into English. Among the near-synonyms investigated in her study is the pair نجى *najja* and أنجى *anja* (rescued). Issa confirms that نجى (*najja*) is used in the Holy Qur'ān

to describe how God rescued the believers at the time they were under torture while أنجى (*anjā*) is used to say that God saved them from torture even before it occurred; the difference is preserved in the result of each action” (p. 35). However, such nuances are not reflected in the English translation. In the same vein, Hassan (2014) claims that the translators of the Holy Qur'ān encounter some challenges while translating the Qur'ānic near-synonyms into English. An example of the near-synonyms studied by Hassan (2014) is the pair شك *shak* and ريب *raīb* (doubt). Although it is thought that these words are full synonyms, Hassan asserts that they are near-synonyms and further explains that ريب (*raīb*) signifies doubt, conjecture, apprehension and restlessness. It also entails a feeling of unease, self-anxiety, bewilderment and disturbance (ibid). On the contrary, شك (*shak*) is regarded as the opposite of certainty. According to Hassan (2014), if شك (*shak*) denotes doubt, ريب (*raīb*) most likely implies extreme or intense doubt.

This study is mainly concerned with the semantics of Qur'ānic near-synonyms and the extent regarding the reflection of the nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms in the English translation. It adopts the Relation by Contrast Approach to Synonym (RC-S) by Murphy (2003) as a theoretical framework for data analysis. By using this approach, the researcher will identify the denotative and expressive meanings of three pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms, how these pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are different from each other in terms of denotative and expressive meanings and how the nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms are reflected in the English translation. The definitions of the denotative and expressive meanings will be provided in the theoretical framework and the reasons why three pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are particularly selected will be explained in the methodology. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the differences in meaning between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms should be taken into account especially in translation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- 1- To identify the contextual meanings of three pairs of near-synonyms in the Holy Qur'ān.
- 2- To compare the meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms in terms of denotative and expressive meanings.
- 3- To explain how the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected in two English translations.

QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

- 1- What are the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms?
- 2- How are the Qur'ānic near-synonyms different from each other in terms of denotative and expressive meanings?
- 3- How are the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms reflected in two English translations?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the Relation by Contrast Approach to Synonyms (RC-S) by Murphy (2003) as a theoretical framework for data analysis. Murphy maintains that synonymy relation could be explained in terms of the minimal differences which exist between synonyms. Based on

this approach, Murphy (2003) acknowledges that in any set of different forms of words which has similar denotations, there would be a slight difference in denotative and/or expressive meaning. Thus, the differences between synonyms could be discussed with regard to the proposed parameters:

DENOTATIVE MEANING

Denotation refers to “the relationship between sense and reference, and the sense of a word is the set of conditions on the word's reference” (Murphy, 2003, p. 148).

EXPRESSIVE ELEMENTS OF MEANING

Expressive meaning includes affective meaning, connotative meaning, and other social information that gives denotatively similar words different significance without affecting their contributions to sentential truth-conditions (Murphy, 2003).

a) Connotation is defined as “the additional meanings that a word or phrase has beyond its central meaning” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 108). It involves associations which do not directly affect the conditions on reference, but which may give some slant to the description (Murphy, 2003).

b) Affect is a non-denotative meaning which is related to the attitude of the speaker toward the subject at hand (Murphy, 2003).

c) Social information: Other aspects of social meaning include register, dialect, jargon, and other sub-varieties of a language or vocabulary (Murphy, 2003).

Although many translation scholars have contributed to the literature on denotation and connotation, such as Newmark (1988), Larson (1984) and Hatim and Mason (1997), this study adopts the RC-S approach for some reasons. For instance, the RC-S approach, as its name suggests, is specific to synonyms and most importantly it provides a framework for analyzing the data of the study. It is useful in explaining the nuances between the pairs of synonyms and the topic investigated in the current study. The denotative and expressive meanings of Qur'ānic near-synonyms will be identified and analyzed, as mentioned, based on the RC-S approach. Subsequently, the study will explain how the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected in the English translations.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the meanings of three pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms, namely, *سِنَةٌ* *senah* (slumber) / *نوم* *nawm* (sleep), *السَّعِير* *as-sa'ir* (the Blaze) / *النَّار* *an-nār* (the Fire), and *العفو* *al'afwa* / *المغفرة* *al-maghferah* (forgiveness). These pairs are particularly selected for several reasons. For example, the first pair *سِنَةٌ* *senah* (slumber) and *نوم* *nawm* (sleep) is selected because it occurs in the mightiest verse of the Holy Qur'ān (Al-Qurtubī, 2006). This verse is called *آية الكرسي* (the verse of Throne) which exists in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 255. This verse is known for its profound meaning and sublime language in Arabic and its comforting and inspiring message. However, the other two pairs of near-synonyms *السَّعِير* *as-sa'ir* (the Blaze) / *النَّار* *an-nār* (the Fire) and *العفو* *al'afwa* / *المغفرة* *al-maghferah* (forgiveness) are selected in this study for two reasons. First, these two pairs are used frequently in the Holy Qur'ān. The words *السَّعِير* *as-sa'ir* (the Blaze) and *النَّار* *an-nār* (the Fire) occur 66 times in many verses and Surahs of the Holy Qur'ān. Likewise, the other words *العفو* *al'afwa* and *المغفرة* *al-maghferah* (forgiveness) are used 32 times in the Holy Qur'ān. Second, the

differences in meaning between these two pairs السعير *as-sa'ir* (the Blaze)/ النار *an-nār* (the Fire) and العفو *al'afwa*/ المغفرة *al-maghferah* (forgiveness) are subtle and bring confusion even for the native speakers of Arabic as these two pairs are interchangeably used in Modern Standard Arabic.

This study also adopts the English translations of the Holy Qur'ān by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). Such translations are particularly selected based on several reasons. First, both translators belong to different religious backgrounds since Arberry is a non-Muslim whereas Irving is a Muslim. Therefore, the study will examine how the two translators with different religious backgrounds perceive the meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Second, the translators adopt different translation approaches in their translation of the Holy Qur'ān. Arberry employs a literal approach (i.e. a approach to translation that allows the source language to have dominance over the target language) while Irving (2002) employs a communicative approach (i.e. a translation approach which introduces the Holy Qur'ān in a communicative contemporary English) in his translation. Thus, the study will examine how translators using two different translation approaches consider the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Moreover, Arberry's translation of the Holy Qur'ān is regarded as the most reliable translation undertaken by a non-Muslim native speaker of English because of the fact that his translation was addressed to the English readers living and born in the west (Al-Azzam, 2005). Irving's translation of the Holy Qur'ān is also written in modern English. In his translation, Irving used the simplest word available so that its message can be straight forwardly perceived by the Muslim child as well as the interested non-Muslim. Irving defended his approach by saying that other translations do not evoke beauty or reverence in the minds of recipients.

The current study mainly relies on several exegeses of the Qur'ān and commentary books. The exegeses of Ibn 'Ashur (1984) and Al-Sha'rawī (1991) are chosen because the exegetes worked on explaining the near-synonyms of the Qur'ān. These particular exegeses of the Qur'ān explain the nuances between pairs of near-synonyms and consequently facilitate the analysis of the data of the study. Other exegeses like Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), Al-Qurṭubī (2006), Al-Mahalī and Al-Sayuṭī (2003), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Alusī (1995) are also consulted because they are prominent exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān as claimed by (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Since such exegeses are prominent, they are dependable as they can provide the precise meanings of the Qur'ānic verses and are also useful in explaining the context of these verses which need a considerable attention as sacred texts.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data of the study was collected and analyzed based on the following steps: First of all, the two English translations of the Holy Qur'ān by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003) were collected from the Internet. Then, some Qur'ānic verses where the three pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are used were selected. In terms of the first pair of synonyms سِنَّة *senah* (slumber) and نوم *nawm* (sleep), only one verse آية الكرسي (the verse of Throne) was selected for analysis since both words exist in the same verse. As stated before, it is the mightiest verse of the Holy Qur'ān.

In terms of the other twopairs, it is noticed that selecting any verse where a Qur'ānic word is used will provide the same meaning of that word in all Qur'ānic verses. For example, selecting any verse where the Qur'ānic word السعير *as-sa'ir* (the Blaze) is used will provide its meaning in all verses of the Holy Qur'ān. Therefore, two verses for each pair of synonyms (i.e. one verse for each word) were selected. After that, the translations of these verses by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003) were presented and the near-synonyms and their English

translations were highlighted (i.e. written in bold). Next, the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms were explained based on various accurate authentic modern and classical exegeses, commentary books, different linguists' views, English dictionaries, classical Arabic dictionaries, Arabic-English lexicons, encyclopedias, etc. Then, the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms were analyzed based on the RC-S approach. In other words, the nuances between the pairs of near-synonyms in terms of denotative and expressive meanings were identified. Finally, the study discussed how such nuances are reflected in the two English translations of the Holy Qur'ān and consequently appropriate recommendations were drawn.

RESULTS

This section highlights the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms.

1- **سِنَةٌ (Slumber) and نوم (Sleep)**

1 - قال تعالى: "الله لا إله إلا هو الحي القيوم لا تأخذه سنة ولا نوم" (سورة البقرة 255)
"God there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. **Slumber** seizes Him not, neither **sleep**" (Al-Baqarah: 255; Arberry, 2003).

"God! There is no deity except Him, the Living, the Eternal! **Slumber** does not overtake Him, nor does **sleep**" (Al-Baqarah: 255; Irving, 2002).

This verse is called آية الكرسي (the verse of the Throne). As claimed by Al-Qurṭubī (2006), it is the mightiest verse in the Holy Qur'ān. Here is the interpretation of this verse: الله لا إله إلا هو (God there is no god but He) is interpreted by Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Mahālī and Al-Sayūṭī (2003) as there is none worthy of being worshipped except Allah in all existence. The Qur'ānic word الحي *Al-haī* (The Living) is interpreted by Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) as the Living who does not die. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) also acknowledges that الحي *Al-haī* (The Living) is the One Who has eternal life and whose life has neither beginning nor end.

Ibn 'Āshur (1984) also claims that the name of God (the Living) is mentioned in this verse to convey a message to those who worship idols and images that unlike the inanimate bodies they worship, Allah is the Living and the Eternal Sustainer Who oversees everything related to His Creation. Moreover, القيوم *Al-qayyum* (the Eternal/the Everlasting) is another name of God. Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Mahālī and Al-Sayūṭī (2003) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) contend that القيوم *Al-qayyum* (Eternal/the Everlasting) means the One Who provides sustenance and protection for His Creation and is the One Who is constantly engaged in the management of His Creation including their provision, actions and life spans. Finally, the verse لا تأخذه سنة ولا نوم (*la ta'khudhahu senatun wa la nawm*) means that slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep such that He is not distracted from commanding and running it. Ibn 'Āshur (1984) maintains that لا تأخذه سنة ولا نوم (slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep) is an indication of the perfection of God and His awareness, which is necessary for managing His Creation.

NUANCES BETWEEN **سِنَةٌ (SLUMBER) and نوم (SLEEP)**

It seems that there is a consensus among exegetes that there is a difference in meaning between *senah* (slumber) and *nawm* (sleep) in terms of denotation. For instance, it is applauded that *senah* means نعاس *ne'ās* (sleepiness) while *nawm* means the natural state of being asleep (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Al-Qurṭubī, 2006 & Al-Mahālī and Al-Sayūṭī, 2003). Al-Sha'rawī (1991) also confirms that unlike *nawm* (sleep), *senah* (slumber) is

the languor that precedes نوم *nawm* (sleep) which is commonly known in Arabic as نَعَاس *ne^c ās* (sleepiness).

In addition, Al-Alusī (1995) points out that سِنَةٌ *senah* (slumber) is mentioned before نوم *nawm* (sleep) to be in harmony with the logical order of occurrence. In fact, exegetes provide different justifications for the use of both words. For instance, Al-Alusī (1995) maintains that although لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ (slumber seizes Him not) implicates that نوم *nawm* (sleep) does not occur, نوم *nawm* (sleep) is mentioned for emphasis. However, Ibn ʿAshur (1984) provides a different justification claiming that although سِنَةٌ *senah* (slumber) occurs before نوم *nawm* (sleep), there is a possibility that نوم *nawm* (sleep) occurs without سِنَةٌ *senah* (slumber). Therefore, both words are mentioned in the verse to assure that slumber does not seize Allah, nor does sleep.

TRANSLATION ISSUES

As illustrated in the previous section, سِنَةٌ *senah* (slumber) means نَعَاس *ne^c ās* (sleepiness) in Arabic and occurs before نوم *nawm* (sleep) whereas نوم *nawm* (sleep) is the natural state of being asleep and occurs after سِنَةٌ (slumber). It is viewed that both translators inappropriately rendered the word سِنَةٌ (*senah*) as “slumber” in that this lexical item, slumber, also means “sleep” in English (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2007). It is viewed that the nuances between these words are not reflected in both translations. Thus, it would have been better had the translators rendered the word سِنَةٌ (*senah*) as “somnolence”. Such translation could be more faithful and reflects the nuances between the Qurʾānic words.

Moreover, it appears that the renditions of two other words in this verse, namely, الْحَيُّ *Al-haī* (the Living) and الْقَيُّومُ *Al-qayyum* (the Eternal) do not reflect the denotative meaning of these words. As revealed in the contextual analysis of this verse, the meaning of الْحَيُّ *Al-haī* (the Living) is the One Who has eternal life and Whose life has neither beginning nor end based on different exegeses. However, both translators rendered this word as “the Living”. In English, this word means “alive now” and is the opposite of dead (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2007). Although this word conveys part of the denotative meaning of the Qurʾānic word “alive now”, it does not reflect the other part of the meaning of the same word “having eternal life”. In fact, this Qurʾānic word, الْحَيُّ *Al-haī* (the Living), is more appropriately translated by Khan as “the Ever Living” where the eternity of God's life is preserved in the translation.

In a similar vein, the contextual analysis of the verse reveals that the Qurʾānic word الْقَيُّومُ *Al-qayyum* (the Everlasting/ Eternal) refers to the One Who provides sustenance and protection for His Creation and is the One Who is constantly engaged in the management of His Creation including their provision, their actions and their life spans. However, both renderings of this word by the translators “Everlasting” and “Eternal” do not reflect this meaning. It is crucial to indicate that this Qurʾānic word, الْقَيُّومُ *Al-qayyum* (the Eternal), is more appropriately translated by other translators like Khan (the One Who sustains and protects all that exists), Shaker (the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist) and Asad (the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being). Therefore, it would have been better had the translators rendered this Qurʾānic word as “the Eternal Sustainer”.

2- النار (the Fire) and السعير (The Burning/Blaze)

1. قال تعالى: "ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَنْ نَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَعْدُودَاتٍ" (٢٤ آل عمران)

"That, because they said, **The Fire** shall not touch us, except for a number of days" (Al-ʿEmaran: 24; Arberry, 2003).

"That is because they say: **The Fire** will never touch us except for several days" (Al-ʿEmaran: 24; Irving, 2002).

This verse is interpreted by Al-Mahalī and Al-Sayuṭī (2003) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) as follows: That rejection, denial and turning away were due to their belief that the Fire shall not touch them in the Hereafter except for a limited number of days which equals the number of days in which their forefathers worshiped the calf. This limited number of days is interpreted differently by the exegetes of the Holy Qur'ān. For instance, Al-Mahalī and Al-Sayuṭī (2003) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) claim that the number of days was forty days while Ibn Kathīr (1999) contends that it was seven days; and the calumnies they invented in their saying this (their belief of not being punished save a few days) deluded them in their religion. This delusion was due to such calumnies that they had invented. Al-Qurṭubī (2006) and Ibn Al-Jawzī (2002) applaud that these calumnies are concerned with their wrong belief that they are the sons of God *نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ* *nahnu 'abnā'u Allāhi wa'hebā'uḥ* "We are the sons of God and His beloved" (Al-Maedah: 18) and thus they will not be punished in the Hereafter save for a limited number of days. Al-Qurṭubī (2006) maintains that this false belief *لَنْ تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ* *lan tamassana an-nāru* (The Fire shall not touch us) is an indication of their arrogance and this is behind such a kind of belief. Furthermore, Ibn ʿAshur (1984) acknowledges that their calumnies are concerned with the false allegation that God promised the Prophet Jacob that He will not punish his folk in the Hereafter.

It is also noteworthy that Al-Shaʿrawī (1991) makes a distinction between two Arabic words *يلمس* *almas* and *يمس* *yamas* (touch) for which English has one word. According to Al-Shaʿrawī (1991), *yamas* implicates light touch and does not involve sensation or it implicates just a close approaching of two things. Unlike *yamas*, *yalmas* means touch and involves sensation (ibid). In this verse, *yamas* is carefully selected to express how Jews are arrogant due to their wrong belief that they are God's sons, that Allah has promised their Prophet Jacob that He will not punish his folk and that the Fire will only lightly touch them for a limited number of days. In addition, Al-Shaʿrawī (1991) explains that *معدودات* *maʿdodat* (literally as countable) is the opposite of *لا يحصى* *la yuhsa* (literally as countless). He applauds that *معدودات* *maʿdodāt* (literally as countable) denotes a limited number (of something) in Arabic.

2. قال تعالى: "وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْ لَوْ كَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ يَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ" (٢١ لقمان)

"And when it is said to them, Follow what God has sent down,' they say, 'No; but we will follow such things as we found our fathers doing. What? Even though Satan were calling them to the chastisement of **the burning**?" (Luqman: 21; Arberry, 2003).

"Whenever they are told: Follow whatever God has sent down," they say: "Rather we follow what we found our forefathers doing. Even though Satan has been inviting them to the torment of **the Blaze**?" (Luqman: 21; Irving, 2002).

This verse is interpreted by Al-Mahalī and Al-Sayuṭī (2003), Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Shaʿrawī (1991) as follows: If it is said to them (i.e. Mecca disbelievers): Follow what is revealed upon your Prophet Mohammed (the Holy Qur'ān) from God; they say: Nay, we will rather follow that wherein we found our fathers following in terms of religion and wont.

What! Would they follow these things even though Devil were inviting their fathers to disbelief, idolatry and that which lead them to the Blaze chastisement, and still they follow them?. What is noteworthy is that Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Sha^crawī (1991) interpret السعير (*as-sa^cīr*) in this verse as the Blaze which has strong and bright flames and is impossible to put out.

NUANCES BETWEEN النّار (THE FIRE) AND السعير (THE BURNING /BLAZE)

Based on the analysis of the verses in which the two words are used, it appears that there exists a semantic difference between النّار *an-nār* (the Fire) and السعير *as-sa^cīr* (the Burning/Blaze) in terms of denotation. In other words, the contextual analysis reveals that although النّار *an-nāru* (the Fire) and السعير *as-sa^cīr* (the Burning/Blaze) have some denotative meanings in common, السعير *as-sa^cīr* (the Burning/Blaze) is more intense and dangerous (i.e. it has stronger flames) than النّار *an-nār* (the Fire) as illustrated in the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān.

TRANSLATION ISSUES

As demonstrated in the analysis, there are some nuances between النّار *an-nār* (the Fire) and السعير *as-sa^cīr* (the Burning/Blaze) in terms of denotation. It is viewed that Arberry (2003) makes an attempt to reflect the nuances between the two words but his rendering of the word السعير (*as-sa^cīr*) as “the Burning” is not congruent with the original word meaning. Although there is an equivalent of this Qur'ānic word in English, Arberry uses the adjective “burning” as a noun thinking that this would best reflect such a difference in meaning. The translation of the Qur'ānic word السعير (*as-sa^cīr*) by Irving (2002) as “the Blaze” is more appropriate.

In addition, it is noticed that both translators misunderstood the meaning of the word معدودات *ma^cdodāt* (a limited number of). Because both translators are non-Arabs, they confused the meaning of the word معدودات *ma^cdodāt* (a limited number of) with the meaning of the Arabic word عدة *edat* (many or several). These lexical items have similar sounds and both are derived from the Arabic verb عد *dda* (count). However, they have almost opposite meanings. Therefore, both translators inappropriately translated the word معدودات *ma^cdodāt* as “several /a number of” which have the opposite meaning of the original Qur'ānic word. It seems that their translations of this word do not convey the meaning of this Qur'ānic word in the verse and as a result the Qur'ānic message is distorted. Therefore, it would have been better had the translators rendered the Qur'ānic word معدودات *ma^cdodāt* as “a limited number or few”. Such translation would be more faithful and accurate.

Furthermore, it is disclosed that Arabic language differentiates between يمس (*yamas*) and يلمس (*yalmas*) for which English has only a general word (touch). As claimed by Al-Sha^crawī (1991), the Qur'ānic word يمس (*yamas*) is purposefully selected to convey a certain message regarding the Jews's wrong beliefs and how arrogant they are due to such beliefs. However, it seems that both translators failed to reflect the meaning of يمس (*yamas*) in this verse. Translating يمس (*yamas*) as “touch” is not that congruent with the original word and thus the Qur'ānic message is not appropriately conveyed.

3- مغفرة (Forgiveness) and العفو (Abundance/Forgiveness)

1. قال تعالى: "خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ" (١٩٩ الأعراف)
"Take the **abundance**, and bid to what is honourable, and turn away from the ignorant"
(Arberry, 2003).
"Practise **forgiveness**, command decency; and avoid ignorant people" (Irving, 2002).

The exegetes of the Holy Qur'ān have provided different interpretations of this verse. The reason why this verse is interpreted differently by the exegetes lies in the fact that the Qur'ānic word العَفْوُ *al-ʿafwa* (forgiveness/abundance) is a polysemous word having different meanings. For instance, Ibn ʿĀshur (1984) claims that العَفْوُ (*al-ʿafwa*) in this verse means "forgiveness" and based on the interpretation of this word, this verse is interpreted as follows: O Mohammed! Indulge people with forgiveness, command decency and turn away from the ignorant people. Ibn ʿĀshur (1984) points out that this verse was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed as instructions from His God to forgive the infidels who transgresses against him, to enjoin kindness as well as benevolence, to avoid the ignorant people (like Abu Jahl) who mock him and not to counter their foolishness with the like.

On the other hand, Al-Zamkharī (2009), Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Shaʿrawī (1991) provide another interpretation of this verse. The Qur'ānic word العَفْوُ (*al-ʿafwa*) is interpreted differently as the opposite of الجهد *al-jahd* (thrust). They claim that this verse means: O Mohammed! Accept what issues spontaneously from the manner of behavior of your folk and do not scrutinize them, bid to what is honourable and avoid the ignorant. Al-Zamkharī (2009) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) also maintain that the Qur'ānic word العَفْوُ (*al-ʿafwa*) could be interpreted as the surplus of the money and fortune which is provided as alms and this had been exactly before the verse of alms was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed. It is noteworthy that both exegetes quoted a narration that when this verse was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed, he asked Gabriel about the meaning of the verse and Gabriel replied "I do not know but I will ask God about its meaning". When Gabriel returned to the Prophet Mohammed, he told the Prophet that this verse means that he should give those who withhold from him, keep ties with those who sever their ties with him and forgive those who tyrannize him.

Ibn Al-Jawzī (2002) summarizes the interpretations of this word as follows: a) what is impulsively issued from the people's manner of behavior; b) the surplus of people's fortune and money and c) forgiveness. In fact, the researchers are in favor of Ibn ʿĀshur's (1984) interpretation of this Qur'ānic word as forgiveness since it is more convincing and more importantly it contributes to the coherence of the Qur'ānic verse.

2. قال تعالى: "إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ" (١٢ الملك)
"Surely those who fear their Lord in the Unseen; there awaits them **forgiveness** and a great wage" (Al-Mulk: 12; Arberry, 2003).
"The ones who live in awe of their Lord even though [He is] Unseen will have **forgiveness** and a large payment" (Al-Mulk: 12; Irving, 2002).

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) interpreted this verse as follows: Verily, those who fear their God (though they do not see Him), there will be forgiveness for them (i.e. God will forgive their sins in life) and God will provide them with great reward (the paradise). Ibn ʿĀshur (1984) applauds that forgiveness is mentioned before the great reward to relieve the believers' worry and fear of punishment due to their sins in life. The great reward is, then, mentioned to bring good news to the believers and those who fear God though they do not see Him.

NUANCES BETWEEN العفو AND مغفرة (FORGIVENESS)

As revealed in the contextual analysis, the Qur'ānic word العفو *al-ʿafwa* (forgiveness) is polysemous having almost three meanings. As a result, it is interpreted differently by the exegetes. For the purpose of this study, the interpretation of this word as forgiveness will be discussed here. After conducting a thorough investigation into the meanings of العفو *al-ʿafwa* and مغفرة *maghferah* (forgiveness), it is revealed that scholars as well as exegetes have explained the differences in meaning between such lexical items. It is viewed that although both words share the meaning (not to punish someone who has done something wrong), there exist some nuances between these Qur'ānic words in terms of the denotative and connotative meanings. For instance, Al-Shaʿrawī (1991), Ibn ʿĀshur (1984), Dawud (2008) and Al-Asfahānī (2009) assert that العفو *al-ʿafwa* (forgiveness) might be associated with rebuke and blame while مغفرة *maghferah* (forgiveness) is associated with the veil, encasement and concealment of the sin. Al-ʿAskarī (1997) agrees with Ibn ʿĀshur (1984), Al-Shaʿrawī (1991), Dawud (2008) and Al-Asfahānī (2009) and adds that مغفرة *maghferah* (forgiveness) is to veil the sins and simultaneously provide rewards instead and thus it is one of the characteristics of God but not humankind. Al-ʿAskarī (1997) illustrates that humans can seek العفو *al-ʿafwa* (forgiveness) from people (such as president, king, sultan etc.) but can ask for both العفو *al-ʿafwa* and مغفرة *maghferah* (forgiveness) from God.

Since the word يخشى *yakhsha* (fear) is used in the second verse, it is of vital importance to explain the differences in meaning between الخشية *al-khashyah* and الخوف *al-khawf* (fear) in the Qur'ān. Ibn Al-Qayyem (2011) claims that الخوف refers to the fear of punishment or any other misfortune while الخشية (fear) is more specific than الخوف (fear) which refers to the fear associated with the awareness of the reasons behind such fear. Al-Asfahānī (2009) agrees with the distinction made by Ibn Al-Qayyem (2011) and adds that الخشية (fear) is also associated with glorification. In the same vein, Dawud (2008) distinguishes between الخشية *al-khashyah* and الخوف *al-khawf* (fear) claiming that الخشية *al-khashyah* (fear) is the fear which is associated with awareness, obedience and submission while الخوف *al-khawf* (fear) is more general and does not have such semantic features.

TRANSLATION ISSUES

The contextual analysis reveals that there exist some differences in meaning between the near-synonymous words الخشية *al-khashyah* and الخوف *al-khawf* (fear) in terms of denotation as well as connotation. Furthermore, it is found that العفو *al-ʿafwa* (forgiveness) in this verse is a polysemous word and has three meanings. Based on these meanings, this lexical item is interpreted differently. However, both translators considered one meaning and ignored the other meanings which the word has. In particular, Arberry (2003) rendered the word العفو *al-ʿafwa* as “abundance”. Although other exegetes maintain that this word has a meaning of forgiveness, such interpretation is ignored in Arberry's translation.

In addition, Irving (2002) does not distinguish between both Qur'ānic words العفو *al-ʿafwa* and مغفرة *maghferah* and rendered them as “forgiveness”. Although there are some nuances between these words in terms of denotation and connotation, the differences in meaning between such words are not reflected in his translation. Based on the nuances between the words, it would have been better had the translator rendered the word العفو *al-ʿafwa* as “clemency” while مغفرة *maghferah* could be translated as “forgiveness”. Such translation would be more faithful and reflects the nuances between the Qur'ānic words.

Additionally, it is viewed that there are differences in meaning between the word *يخشى* *yakhsha* and *يخاف* *yakhaf* (fear) and this has been already explained in the previous section. The words *يخشى* *yakhsha* and *يخاف* *yakhaf* (fear) have slight differences in denotation as well as connotation. It is noticed that Arberry (2003) translated this word as “fear” which is the English equivalent of the Arabic word *يخاف* *yakhaf* (fear). However, the contextual analysis of the word *يخشى* *yakhsha* (fear) reveals that the rendering of this word by Irving (2002) as “live in awe” is more appropriate and reflects the meaning of the original word in the Qur'ān. Because Irving is a Muslim, he could understand the real meaning of this word in the Holy Qur'ān and thus succeeded in translating this Qur'ānic word. However, Arberry's rendition of this word is literal and incongruent with the meaning of the original Qur'ānic word. Further, it is noticed that both renderings of *أجر* 'ajr in this verse as “wage” and “payment” are not appropriate since both words are always associated with money. Since the intended meaning in the Qur'ānic verse is “the paradise” as indicated in the exegeses, it would have been better had the translators rendered *أجر* 'ajras “reward”.

DISCUSSION

The contextual analysis of the verses reveals that although these Qur'ānic words appear to be synonymous at the first glance, they have slight differences in meaning in terms of denotation as well as connotation. When translating such near-synonymous words, the translators, Arberry (2003) and Irving (2002), almost fail to reflect the shades of meaning of some near-synonymous words. To better understand, Arberry (2003) did not reflect the shades of meaning of *السعير* *as-sa'ir* (the Burning), *تمسنا* *tamassana* (touch us), *السنة* *as-senah* (slumber) and *يخشى* (fear) in his translation. Similarly, the shades of meaning of *تمسنا* *tamassana* (touch us), *السنة* *as-senah* (slumber) and *العفو* *al-afwa* (forgiveness) are not reflected in Irving's (2002) translation. The analysis reveals that although the investigated Qur'ānic words seem to be synonymous, they have slight differences in meanings. This conclusion goes in congruence with Al-Sha'rawī (1993), Al-Omari and Abu-Melhim (2014) who contend that full synonyms do not exist in the Holy Qur'ān and what exists in the Holy Qur'ān should be simply termed near-synonyms.

It is also viewed that the translations of the Qur'ānic words which are mentioned in the preceding paragraph are not equivalent with the original ones. In this regard, Baker (2011) maintains that the equivalence at the lexical level largely contributes to the overall equivalence of a particular text. This study attributes such translation issues to many factors among which the lack of English equivalents for the Qur'ānic words. Furthermore, such issues might be also attributed to the fact that the translators did not rely heavily on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān which explicitly explain the meanings of the Qur'ānic words. It also appears that the context-based meanings of some Qur'ānic words are not conveyed since such words are translated out of context and that is why translators should carry out a contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses before the translation takes place. This result is congruent with Chan (2003) who asserts that translators should consider the context when they translate a text from one language into another. Specifically, it is similar to the finding obtained by Issa (2011) who emphasizes that the contextual meaning of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms should be considered in translation.

Moreover, both translators misunderstood the meaning of *معدودات* *ma'dodāt* (a limited number of) and rendered this word inaccurate in the target as “several” (Irving, 2002) and “a number of” (Arberry, 2003), both of which give the opposite meaning of the original word. Accordingly, the Qur'ānic message is deviated. Such inappropriate translation is

attributed to the translators' lack of proficiency of the source language (Arabic) since they are non-native speakers of Arabic. This result is consistent with that of Aldhahi (2017) who claims that translators are expected to have a good command of both the source and the target language. This also indicates that both translators did not consult the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān while translating this word since its meaning is clearly explained in all exegeses.

Most importantly, the contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses reveals that the translations of two other Qur'ānic words, namely, الحي *Al-haī* (the Living) as well as القيوم *Al-qayyum* (the Eternal) are not appropriate. Some constituents of the denotative meanings of both words are not preserved in both translations. In fact, these words are significant not only because they are Qur'ānic words but also because they are two names of God. Moreover, it is found that some Qur'ānic words (e.g. العفو *al-afwa* forgiveness) are polysemous and have more than one meaning. Such words are, as a consequence, interpreted differently by the exegetes of the Qur'ān. In fact, providing different meanings of the Qur'ānic words is regarded as one of the challenges that the translators encounter while translating the Qur'ānic texts (Hassan, 2003).

CONCLUSION

The data analysis of this study reveals that the Qur'ānic text is different from all other types of texts written by humans in that the Holy Qur'ān is revealed by Allah for human kind. It appears that each word of the near-synonyms in the Holy Qur'ān is carefully chosen to communicate a particular meaning which cannot be conveyed by another word in the same context. Moreover, it is found that there exist some nuances between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and in some cases the differences in meaning between the pairs of near-synonyms are not reflected in translation. Therefore, the current study highly recommends that the Qur'ān translators should identify and consider the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms whenever they encounter words with seemingly similar meanings and ensure that such differences in meaning are reflected in their translations. It is also revealed that some Qur'ānic words are polysemous having more than one meaning and thus they are interpreted differently by the exegetes of the Holy Qur'ān. Consequently, readers and translators should consult many prominent exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān whenever they encounter a polysemous word so as to perceive its meaning and choose the most agreed meaning among many exegetes. It is noticed that interpreting a Qur'ānic word differently by the exegetes is regarded as one of the challenges facing the translators of the Holy Qur'ān. Besides, it is revealed that the context where the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are used plays a vital role in making the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms clear to the reader. Therefore, the translators of the Holy Qur'ān should conduct a contextual analysis of the verses which they intend to translate since this is useful in showing the nuances between the pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms. More importantly, the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān should be consulted by both readers and translators so as to better understand the meaning of near-synonyms because they are helpful in explicating the Qur'ānic words. It should not be left unmentioned that the findings show that the translators misunderstood some Qur'ānic words due to low proficiency in the source language, which is Arabic, and thus they rendered such Qur'ānic words inaccurate in the target language. Accordingly, this study emphasizes the importance of proficiency in both the source and target languages for all translators in general and the translators of the Holy Qur'ān in particular. Finally, literature reveals that few studies have investigated the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how the nuances between pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected in translation (Al-Omari & Abu-Melhim, 2014). Much research is, thus, needed to investigate the meanings of near-synonyms and their translation especially in the Holy Qur'ān.

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