# Some Linguistic Challenges in Translating the Holy Quran into English

**Abstract**

Translation is undoubtedly a tool of effective communication as it wipes out the impediments between languages. However, to achieve fruitful communication between any two different linguistic codes, full command of the two languages is required: the source text (ST) and the target Text (TT). Our scrutiny attempts to raise some lexical, syntactic and semantic losses that prevail throughout the Quranic verses. By doing this, our research, which is qualitative in nature, adopts descriptive analysis of some words or verses in attempt to figure out to what extent the Holly Quran is so rhetorically challenging. The results and findings showed partial or complete linguistic losses of meanings mostly due to mistranslations, semantic complexity of the vocabularies, and syntactic discrepancies of structure.

*Key words*: Holy Quran, rhetoric terms, translation, semantic loss, syntactic loss.

**ملخص**

نحاول من خلال هذا البحث تسليط الضّوء على عجز التّرجمة، و خاصّة إذا تعلّق الأمر بترجمة القرآن الكريم، مما لاشك فيه أنّ ترجمة معاني القرآن الكريم تعد من أصعب المحاولات التي تمّت في مجال التّرجمة على الإطلاق؛ وذلك لأنّ نقل معاني الآيات القرآنية المشحونة بالكثافة البيانية و المعنوية إلى لغة أخرى غير العربية ليس بالأمر السهل، إلى جانب عجز لغة التّرجمة عن نقل التركيب البلاغي للآيات وما تحمله من معانٍ ومدلولات لا تظهرها إلا لغةُ القرآن التي نزل بها، إنّ معظم التّرجمات التّي تعرّضت لتحويل معاني القرآن الكريم إلى اللّغات الأوروبيّة، اعتمدت على إحالات دلالية استقتها من كتب التفسير القرآني. وقد اظهرت نتائج البحث عجز التّرجمة في ترجمة اساليب البلاغة، و بالتالي الحفاض على دلالة الكلمة ومعانيها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية**: القران الكريم،مصطلحات بلاغية،التّرجمة،خسارة دلالية،خسارة نحوية.

## 1. Introduction

Translation has always been conceived as one of the most important ineluctable branches of linguistic sciences. It serves to reinforce mutual reflections and deep understandings between people belonging to different cultural environment. Translation helps to wipe out the boundaries and hurdles existing between languages relating to culture, beliefs and norms.

Having claimed that, translation is not a mere replacement of words from one language to another, it requires a deep harmony and firm interactions among extra-linguistic factors, semantic levels and textual context. Translation doesn't only require the understanding of words' meanings, but also accurate language use. Accordingly, a gifted translator should be aware of the cultural norms and different linguistic codes of both the source text (henceforth, ST) and the target text (henceforth, TT). Translation, as defined by Larson (1998), is the process of conveying the exact meaning of the source-language text through an equivalent target-language text.

However, this cannot always be fully achieved as it is difficult to transfer the form and meaning from source language into a target language. Concretely, translating the Holy Quran is more complicated because it is highly rhetoric. It is so meaningful, versatile and full with meaning to an extent that makes an attempt of translating its words, phrases and sentences challenging. Accordingly, the limits of translatability of the Quran, for many scholars, may stem from the complex nature of its linguistic idiosyncrasies and prototypical features. The language of the Quran is seen by Abdul-Roaf (2004: 92-95) as *"a rainbow of syntactic, semantic, rhetorical, phonetic and cultural features that are distinct from other types of Arabic discourse"*.

Hence, an attempt to translate the Holy Quran into another language often triggers a linguistic loss, which literally refers to over-, under-, or mistranslation of a source text (ST); this loss can be partial or complete loss of meaning in the target text (TT). This phenomenon is widespread in the translations of the Holy Quran due to the absence or lack of equivalence, obscurities and ambiguities of some words in the target language (TL). In connection to this, translators of this Holy book have been critically blamed for their inability to completely convey the true and accurate meanings of words, phrases and verses.

## 2. Linguistic Loss in Translation
### 2.1 Semantic challenges

Linguistic, Lexical and syntactic problems are among the prominent problems in translation. These may include metonymy, synonymy, polysemy and homonymy.

### 2.1.1 Metonymy

In English the expression metonymy comes from the Greek word *'metonymia'* which is derived from *'meta'* change and *'onom'* name (Jump, 1972). No precise definition of a 64 metonymy has been offered because most definitions of metonymy are *"so vague that they might also cover other concepts such as synecdoche, metaphor, and irony, etc"* (Seto, 1999:91). Metonymy is defined by Jump (1972:4) as *"a name of a thing that is transferred to take the place of something else with which it is associated"*. According to Seto (1999: 91) metonymy is *"a referential transfer phenomenon based on the spatiotemporal contiguity as conceived by the speaker between an entity and another in the real world"*.

However, Panther and Thornburg (1999:334) oppose the traditional view which considers metonymy as:

*"a figure of speech that involves a process of substituting one linguistic expression for another. The best-known case of metonymy in this traditional."*

In the same vein, Newmark (1988, p. 125) points out that metonymy occurs 'where the name of an object is transferred to take the place of something else with which it is associated'. This substitution requires the existence of a contiguity relation between the literal and figurative meanings and the existence of an implicit clue indicating that the literal meaning is not intended. Metonymy in the Holy Quran is not a useless substitution because it usually serves a purpose. Consider this example of metonymy from the Holy Quran:

» وَأَرْسَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِدْرَارًا « {الأنعام6} :

- For whom we **poured out rain from the skies** in abundance. (Yusuf Ali's translation, 2000) (Surah al-Anʿām 6:6)

In this verse, the word السماء (the sky) is meant 'rain', which metonymically refers to the heaviness of the rain. Arberry translated this verse as follows:

- *…and how we **loosed heaven** upon them intorrents…*

Arberry resorted to literal translation to convey the meaning of the verse, thus failing to completely unfold the meaning of the metonymic phrase which does not mean (***loosed heaven).*** Semantically speaking, the Quranic verse means that 'we sent or poured heavy rain upon them'. Hence, Arberry's literal translation of the metaphorical expression is completely out of context.

**2.1.2 Homonymy**

Crystal (2008, 231) defines homonymy as "a term used in semantic analysis to refer to lexical items which have the same form but differ in meaning". According to Yule (2003, 120), "the term homonymy is used when one form (written or spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings. Homonyms are words which have separate meanings, but have accidentally come to have exactly the same form."

Thus, homonymy refers to this contiguity relation when two words have the same spelling but different meanings (Crystal, 1991). As an illustration for homonymy is the word *bank* as a financial institution, which is defined by Collins (2006) *Co-Build Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* as ". . . an institution where people or businesses keep their money" (p. 97), or the bank of a river, which is defined by Collins Co-Build Advanced Learner's English Dictionary as ". . . the raised areas of ground along its [river] edge" (p. 98). Another example for homonymy is the word 'pupil', which refers to the student (at school) and also to the spot   (in the eye).

Accordingly, homonymy triggers an apparent loss for the translators as it creates ambiguity in the translation process. According to Newmark (1988, 219), this ambiguity is dubbed lexical ambiguity which emerges when "a word has two senses which are both equally effective (pragmatically and referentially) in the relevant stretch of language". In this vein, the translators attempt to determine all potential accurate meanings these similar words may reflect, and then they scrutinize deeply the context and select the intended meaning that the writer wants to convey by using homonymic expression.

Hence, it becomes a thorny issue and a great challenge when the translators attempt translating homonymic expressions in the Glorious Quran. The translators, no matter how knowledgeable they seem, they find themselves inapt to convey the accurate and intended meaning of the words, phrases and verses. For illustration, some translators failed to identify the exact meaning of the homonymic expression in the following verse:

"وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُون "

**Al-Baqara, verse 42**

Relying on the literal meaning, some translators like Yusuf Ali, Hilali Khan and Arberry translate the verse above as follows:

- **Yusuf Ali** And cover not **Truth** with falsehood, nor conceal **the Truth** when ye know what it is.
- **Hilali-Khan** And mix not **truth** with falsehood, nor conceal **the truth** [i.e. Muhammad Peace be upon him is Allah's Messenger and his qualities are written in your Scriptures, the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)] while you know (the truth) .
- **Arberry** And do not confound **the truth** with vanity, and do not conceal **the truth** wittingly.

In this gorgeous verse, the homoymic expression concerns the words الْحَقَّ. Ibn Katheer (1998, 150) gives different interpretations for the word الْحَقَّ . He defines الْحَقَّ as 'truth' and this reflects the literal meaning of the word and means "don't mix the truth with falsehood and honesty with lying". Additionally, the homoymic expression may mean "the religion of Islam". Al-Tabari (1987, 272) interprets الْحَقَّ as "the truth that Allah revealed".

However, differently from the first word 'truth' which receives literal interpretation, the second word is metaphorically interpreted insofar as refers to "the prophet Muhammad-Peace be upon Him" (Ibn Katheer (1998, 153)). Thus, the most accurate translation for the second Arabic word الْحَقَّ seems to be the one interpreted by Hilali and Khan since they unfold a clear explanation in the main text for the meaning of "truth ": [i.e. Muhammad Peace be upon him is Allah's Messenger and his qualities are written in your Scriptures, the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)]. Accordingly, their translation is nearly close to Ibn katheer.

## 2.1.3 Polysemy

Polysemy is one of the semantic and linguistic features that characterize the Holy Quran. Kalakattawi (2005, p.4) defines polysemy as a phenomenon in which a word has several different meanings that are closely related to each other. According to (Crystal, 2003, 347), polysemy is defined as "a term used in semantic analysis to refer to a lexical item which has a range of different meanings". It is also defined as "one form (written or spoken) having multiple meanings that are all related by extension. For instance: foot (of person, of bed, of mountain))" (Yule (2006, 120).

Accordingly, the translator encounters obvious hurdles when he attempts to convey the accurate and intended meaning of the polysemous words because he is confused by the various meanings that these words can semantically carry. The Holy Quran possesses many polysemic words in its verses. For instance, the word *ūmmah* ( أُمَّة - people) is polysemous item with multiple meanings . It can mean a period of time, as indicated in surah Yusuf:

( وَقَالَ الَّذِي نَجَا مِنْهُمَا وَادَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا أُنَبِّئُكُم بِتَأْوِيلِهِ فَأَرْسِلُونِ )

- (But the man who had been released, one of the two (who had been in prison) and who now bethought him after (**so long) a space of time,** said: 'I will tell you the truth of its interpretation: send ye me (therefore)'. (Yusuf Ali's Translation, 2000) (SurahYusuf (12:45).

In this verse, the polysemous word (ūmmah: أُمَّةٍ ) is interpreted as notion of time, which means a long period of time. However, in some cases, the word ūmmah refers to the leader of the people who teaches or guides the believers to the righteous path in their religion and life, as in surah al-Nahl:

(إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِّلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ)

- Abraham was **indeed a model**, devoutly obedient to Allah, (and) true in Faith, and he joined not gods with Allah. (Yusuf Ali's Translation, 2000) (Surah Al-Nahl 16:120).

Arberry (1964) translated this verse as follows:

-  (Surely, **Abraham was a nation** obedient unto God, a man of pure faith and no idolater.)

Arberry adopts literal translation to deal with the meaning of this verse. However, his translation is not tenable insofar as it does not account for the polysemic meaning of the word (ūmmah), which means (imam/leader/a righteous educator), rather than a nation.

In addition to this, the word concerned can also mean 'a group of people', as indicated in the verse below:

﴿وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةً مِنَ النَّاسِ يَسْقُونَ...﴾   (القصص, 23)

- Yusuf Ali: "And when he arrived at the watering (place) in Madyan, he found there a group of men watering (their flocks)…"

**2.1.4 Metaphor**

Metaphor has been defined in an array of ways. According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary (1999), metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object, or idea and is used in place of another to suggest likeness or analogy between them..." Charteris-Black (2004:21) represents metaphor as "a linguistic representation that results from the shift in the use of a word or phrase." In this respect, Ross (1952:1457) views metaphor as "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else."

The etymological origin of the word metaphor comes from the Greek "*meta*" and "*pherein*" (*meta* refers to "over" and *pherein* to "bear" or to "carry", which means "to transfer" or to "carry over". Accordingly, that definition is found in Oxford English Dictionary where the word "metaphor" defines as " a word or phrase used in an imaginative way to describe somebody or something else, in order to show the same qualities and to make the description more powerful". In Webster Dictionary, metaphor is defined as "A figure of speech in which one thing is linked to another different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other; implied comparison in which a word or phrase ordinarily and primarily used of one thing is applied to another". Similarly, metaphor is defined in Longman Dictionary (1995) as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them".

The use of metaphor, along with other rhetorical usages, is a linguistic feature that overwhelmingly characterizes the Holly Quran. Therefore, translators should be aware when attempting to translate the text consisting of metaphors. Consider this example:

"وفي عاد إذ أرسلنا عليهم الريح العقيم" (الذاريات 41)

- (Al-Hilali & Khan, 2000):"And in 'Ad (there is also a sign) when We sent against them the barren wind", (Al-Hilali & Khan, 2000).
- (Yusuf Ali, 2004): "And in the 'Ad (people) (was another sign): Behold, We sent against them **the devastating wind**}, (Yusuf Ali, 2004).

As shown by their translation, Al-Hilali and Khan translated the metaphor literally in the TL without adding any any description or explanation of the word "barren", which makes their translation look deficient. By doing so, the translators were unable to unfold the metaphorical image and convey the intended image, hence making comprehension difficult for non-Arabic readers. Similarly, Ali did the same when translated this verse by dropping this metaphor and just adding the description word 'devastating'.

Contextually, in this verse Allah the Almighty is telling stories about the people who lived before Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him). Allah started with a story of the Prophet Ibrahim then the Prophet Moses, and then the story of the tribe of 'Aad "the people of Hud." Allah sent his messenger Hud to the 'Aad people not to worship idols and believe in Allah, the creator of the heavens and earth, but they did not listen and insisted on their ignorance and delusion. The people of 'Ad are said to have perished through a furious wind. In the verses of the Quran, it is mentioned that this furious wind lasted for seven nights and eight days and destroyed 'Ad totally. The metaphor here is using the attribute barren in describing the wind that blow and destroy because it leaves everything dead and lifeless.

Another rhetoric image to be interpreted and analysed is the one concerned the prophet Mohammad, peace be upon Him, who is described metaphorically as a 'سِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا' 'lamp':

"وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا" (الأحزاب46)

- Itani, T. (2012) : "and a caller towards God by His leave, and an illuminating beacon"
- Ali, Y.: "And as one who invites to Allah's (grace) by His leave, and as a lamp spreading light."
- Khan: "And as one who invites to Allah [Islamic monotheism i.e. to worship none but Allah (Alone) by His leave, and as lamp spreading light (through your instructions from the Quran and the Sunnah-the legal ways of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم".

Itani and Ali provide a literal meaning to the word 'lamps'; and thus they don't convey the accurate and intended meaning of the metaphorical image of the word. On contrary, Khan translated the metaphor literally in the TL and then he added an explanation by saying "through your instructions from the Quran and the Sunnah-the legal ways of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم". It was a good technique to further explain the metaphor or the purpose behind the metaphor. However, this isn't the accurate meaning of the word. In praising the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, especially in Sufi (mystic) discourse, the light metaphor is often invoked to symbolize his mission of guidance of humanity to the path of Islam, as well as his bounty, his knowledge, and spiritual elevation and purity. In fact, light is one of the most significant attributes of the prophet. Among the bundles of attributes assigned to the

prophet, we find «نور» (light), «سراج» (lamp), «مصباح» (lamp), «منير» (illuminator), and « النجم الثاقب» (the star of piercing brightness).

Given that lamp serves to enlighten the dark places, and the fact that the prophet is metaphorically analogized to a lamp, Allah intends to highlight the prophet's purpose in enlightening the right path.

Moreover, in addition to being analogized to "a lamp" (سراج) as shown by Al-Jazouli (2000), the prophet is designated as "a lamp spreading light" (سراج منير), which refers symbolically to its shining and brightness, and hence serves to remove darkness. Similarly, the prophet, by being analogized to a shining lamp, serves to remove darkness which embodies ignorance, deviation, and confusion.

## 3. Syntactic Challenges
### 3.1 Loss in Pronoun

Arabic is surrounded by myths. It is classed as an inflectional and derivational language. On the basis of syntax, Arabic can be categorised as a theme pro-drop language that expresses person, number, and/or gender agreement, as well as tense, aspect, and modality markers with the referent on the verb. Every particular inflection of the verb is quantified exclusively.

The term pro-drop has been already formed by Chomsky (1981) in his masterwork of (Lectures on Government and Binding). According to Universal Grammar (UG), and in the Principles and Parameters (PP) framework, the concept of pro-drop is justified by cross-linguistic evidences. This syntactic property is based on the idea that rich verbal morphology allows subject pronoun deletion. On contrast, non-rich verb morphology is assumed to disallow this syntactic feature. This phenomenon is classified as parameterized cross-languages due to structure-dependent principle. Hence some languages such as Italian is said to be (+ pro-drop) language as seen in sentence (1), whereas English is (-pro-drop) language as in sentence (2). Obviously, a language according to this scenario can be classified on the basis of rich or non-rich verbal morphology into [+/- language]. Standard Arabic (SA), as a Semitic language, with high level of rich morphology, allows subject drop in initial position as shown in (3). In fact, the conjugation system of the verb as in (rakib-a) of sentence (3) can compensate the absence of the subject. The verb conjugation is rich too and has the property of inflection in which the root can be modified to fulfil a new morpho-syntactic requirement in the structure.

1. . ….….mangio la   riso
       Ø   eat the rice

   "(I) eat the rice"   eat the rice
2. *…. usually eats there.
3. . ….… rakib-a     ?ssayara-t-a
       (He) ride.Past  the car
       "he rode the car"

Look closely now at the following verse and its translation:

" قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ" ( سورة الأعراف13)

- Al-Hilali and Khan:"Allah said : (O Iblis) get down from this (Paradise), it is not from you to be arrogant **here**. Get out, for you are of those humiliated and disgraced."

As seen in the translated verse, the translator has turned the implicit pro-drop subject pronoun into explicit subject by using the word "Allah," which is not explicit in the ST. Similarly, the object pronoun in the Quranic word منها was translated as "here," which is an adverb, which indicates a shift from the object pronoun into the adverbial pronoun (Catford, 1965). However, the adverb "here" may be ambiguous for a reader, as he may not understand what the adverb refers to (which is Paradise). This ambiguity can be clarified and understood from the context, that is, from the understanding the content of the Holy Quran.

Syntactically, these pronouns are called pro-drop pronouns, or implicit pronouns, which are similar to the dropped English pronoun (you) in the imperative mood. This characteristic of the Arabic language, as being a pro-drop language, may cause confusion for a translator, as he may be unsure whether to retain the implicit pronoun explicit or just leave it implicit as it is. In general, losses in translating pronouns are avertible, and therefore they can be mostly clarified by other terms, including between brackets) so as not to create semantic losses and trigger a kind of confusion.

**3.2 Loss in Syntactic Order**
A closer look at the existing literature on SA shows that it exhibits two dominant word order alternations: SVO and VSO. With respect to agreement, such alternations create an asymmetry known as subject-verb agreement asymmetry. With SVO word order, full agreement can be found between the subject and the verb in all phi-features (i.e. gender, person and number). However, with VSO word order only gender agreement can be obtained, a phenomenon dubbed partial agreement. Such alternation isn't random; it serves a purpose as focalizing or tropicalizing a sentence, especially when the subject precedes the verb (SVO).

At syntactic level, English doesn't exhibit an alternation in terms of the word order due to the weakness of inflection, and therefore cannot equivalently express the purpose as Arabic does, which triggers a real loss when translating the holy Quran.

Accordingly, it seems evidently clear that the syntactic order of Arabic can be hardly kept in English. Arabic is a language which shows flexibility in the syntactic order. The subject, compliment, or the verb can be post-verbal or pre-verbal based on the purpose and the importance of the location of lexical item. This characteristic of the Arabic language is recurrent in the Holy Quran; it serves to highlight the most important meaning. As Al-Samraai (2006) point out that there is no single word that is pre-posed or post-posed in the Holy Quran for no purpose. The English language does not have such flexibility of pre-posing and post-posing, and thus the syntactic order of the source language is lost in the translation.

"فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْآتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ" (الأعراف20)

- **Mohsin Khan**: Then Shaitan (Satan) whispered suggestions to them both in order to uncover that which was hidden from them of their private parts (before); he said:

"Your Lord did not forbid you this tree save you should become angels or become of the immortals."

- **Arberry**: Then Satan whispered to them, to reveal to them that which was hidden from them of their shameful parts. He said, 'Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels, or lest you become immortals.'

In Arabic verse, the syntactic order of the verse "فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ" is (verb + object + subject). However, the same syntactic order could not be preserved in the English, which is "Satan whispered to them" (subject + verb + object). This different syntactic order in both languages creates partial loss in meaning, which cannot be avoided due to the linguistic differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). This is because the ST verb is pre-posed in the ST to highlight the action of Satan. However, the rendered clause in the target text (TT) highlights the agent, which is "Satan.

Similarly, in translating "مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا" the syntactic order of the ST is not kept as it should, which disrupts conveying the intended interpretation and affects its expressive meaning; that is, highlighting the verb which indicates forbidding.

## 3.3 Loss of verbal property
Look closely at the following verse and the translated verse:

"قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ" ( الأعراف 13)

- Ali, Y.: (Allah) said: "Get thee down from this: it is not for thee to be arrogant here: get out, for thou art of the meanest (of creatures)."
- Itani, T.: He said, "Get down from it! It is not for you to act arrogantly in it. Get out! You are one of the lowly!"

The Quranic sentence "فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا" was translated as "it is not for thee to be arrogant here/ It is not for you to act arrogantly in it," which is a kind of categorical unit shift (Catford, 1965). The verb "تتكبر" in the ST could not be rendered into an equivalent TT verb due to the lack of equivalence in the TT. In addition, the English noun "arrogance" doesn't have a derived verb form. It is a reason why Itani, T. resort to the expression "to act arrogantly". Hence, the fact of changing the verb to an adjectival phrase "to be arrogant" or an adverbial phrase "to act arrogantly" makes the translation less faithful and more deviant.

## 3.4 Loss of Tense
Rendering tense is another hurdle that faces translators and constitutes an obstacle, especially when translating the holy Quran. In some cases, tense, as a temporal feature, is hardly kept due to the apparent discrepancies existing between Standard Arabic and English. To concretize this fact, let's focus our interest on the following verse and see to what extent tense can trigger a loss and deviancy:

"فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْءَاتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِن وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَن تِلْكُمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُل لَّكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ "

- **Ali, Y. :** So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: "Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?"

As shown seen in the Quranic ST, "إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ" is translated as "Satan was an avowed enemy," resulting in loss in tense. The Quranic verb-less sentence is syntactically deprived of an auxiliary verb which temporally refers to present tense. However, it is rendered in the TT as past tense (i.e., was), which disrupt and affects the intended meaning conveyed in the TT. The TT past tense verb does not convey the fact that Satan is still an enemy to Adam and his offspring. However, the ST present tense indicates that Satan is not an enemy for Adam and Eve only, but for all their offspring as well. This ST meaning is not conveyed in the TT due to the loss in tense.

## 4. Discussion and finding

(Lack of equivalence triggers an overall linguistic loss)

The lack of equivalence at the linguistic level may trigger losses for a translator, especially when he translates from Arabic to English. Arabic is a rich language in its rhetoric style, its metaphorical imageries and syntactic structure. Being like that, Arabic is completely different from English and other languages in many regards. The challenge becomes apparently greater when the ST is the Holy Quran, which is a sacred book that is sought to be rendered as closely as possible to the intended meaning in the ST. Translating the Holy Quran seems to be more challenging due to its being a sacred book, and due to its rich language, which is the words of Allah Almighty. Furthermore, the Holy Quran language possesses brilliant attributes which make it hard to translate the form and the intended meaning from the ST to the TT. Obviously, there are many verses that prevail in the glorious Holy Quran, which are full of literal, rhetoric and figurative style. Additionally, its structure, which shows flexibility in syntactic order by exhibiting an alternation of word orders, makes it challenging.

As for semantic challenges that the Holy Quran manifests, it has been shown that there are basically three rhetoric expressions which trigger deep losses and apparent confusion in translation. These expressions concern metonymy, homonymy and polysemy. For metonymy, we pointed out, through the verse, that it is very significant insofar as it serves a purpose. This purpose becomes apparently clear when we decipher a contiguity relation between the literal and figurative meaning. In the selected verse repeated here:

﴿ وَأَرْسَلْنَا **السَّمَاءَ** عَلَيْهِمْ مِدْرَارًا ﴾ {الأنعام6} :

Here, the metonymic expression (the sky) isn't the word intended; it is literally used to refer metaphorically to 'rain'. Accordingly, the glorious verse means that 'we sent or poured heavy rain upon them'. Hence, literal translation is not tenable since it leads to false interpretation and inaccurate meaning. For illustration, those who lie on literal translation to convey meaning usually failed to unfold the real meaning of this metonymic sentence. To squeeze these relevant ideas, we propose the following chart:

| Metonymic expression | Literal meaning | Intended meaning |
|---|---|---|
| السَّمَاء | Sky | rain |

Such contiguity connection between 'sky' and 'rain' is apparently clear for Arab translators; however, it is complicated for non-Arab translators to render these metonymic expressions and convey its meaning, and thus yielding a loss and confusion.

As for homonymy, it has been shown that it triggers an apparent loss for the translators as it creates an ambiguity and confusion in the translation process. The translators, no matter how knowledgeable they may be, they find themselves incapable to convey the accurate and intended meaning of the words, phrases and verses. For illustration, some translators failed to identify the exact meaning of the homonymic expression for the word الْحَق. They usually define it literally as 'the truth'. Such translation, however, isn't unique due to the fact that it has other interpretations. For example, it can refer to "the religion of Islam" or to "the prophet Muhammad- Peace be upon Him". To sum up these crucial ideas, we represent the following chart:

| Homonymic expression | Literal meaning | Intended meaning |
|---|---|---|
| الْحَق | The truth | Islam or the prophet Mohammed PBUH |

The choice of interpreting this homonymic word represents a real hurdle for translators insofar as it yields to confusion when they render it.

Another rhetoric feature that characterizes the glorious Holy Quran and challenges the translators is polysemy. When encountering an expression pregnant with various meanings, the translators usually find themselves inapt to convey the accurate meaning. For illustration, a word like ūmmah (أُمَّة) is polysemous item with multiple meanings. It can mean a long period of time as indicated in the verse Yusuf. It can also mean 'a group of people'.

As it can be interpreted through this verse, the word (ūmmah: أُمَّةٍ) is interpreted as a long period of time. However, in other verse, the word ūmmah refers to the leader of the people who teaches or guides the believers towards the righteous path, as in surah al-Nahl. It can also mean 'a group of people'.

Based on both verses, we can deduce that the word above is an item with multiple meaning, and thus we the translators can select the intended meaning relying on the context. To concretize all this information, we propose the following chart:

| Polysemous expression | literal meaning | intended meaning |
|---|---|---|
| أُمَّة | Nation | Time/righteous leader/model |

As last semantic feature that brings a great perfection to style but remains a rhetoric challenge for translators is Metaphor. The use of metaphor, along with other rhetorical usages, triggers a semantic loss. For illustration, in the glorious verse:

﴿ وفي عاد إذ أرسلنا عليهم الريح العقيم ﴾ (الذاريات 41)

As shown by their translation, Al-Hilali and Khan translated the metaphor literally in the TL without adding any description or explanation of the word "barren", which makes their translation look deficient. By doing so, the translators were unable to unfold the metaphorical

image and convey the intended image, hence making comprehension difficult for non-Arabic readers. Similarly, Ali did the same when translated this verse by dropping this metaphor and just adding the description word 'devastating'.

Contextually, the metaphor here is using the attribute barren in describing the wind that blows and destroys because it leaves everything dead and lifeless. Having said that, we can reformulate these ideas as follows:

| Metaphorical expression | literal meaning | intended meaning |
|---|---|---|
| الريح العقيم | Barren or devastating wind | It doesn't pollinate anything |

Another rhetoric image that triggers a semantic loss and apparent challenge to translators is the one concerned the prophet Mohammad, peace be upon Him, who is described metaphorically as a 'lamp''سِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا':

﴿ وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا ﴾(الأحزاب46)

Itani and Ali provide a literal meaning to the word 'lamps'; and thus they don't convey the accurate and intended meaning of the metaphorical image of the word. On contrary, Khan translated the metaphor literally in the TL and then he added an explanation "through your instructions from the Quran and the Sunnah-the legal ways of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم". It was a good technique to further explain the metaphor or the purpose behind the metaphor. However, this isn't the accurate meaning of the word. In praising the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, especially in Sufi (mystic) discourse, the light metaphor is often invoked to symbolize his mission of guidance of humanity to the path of Islam, as well as his bounty, his knowledge, and spiritual elevation and purity. In fact, light is one of the most significant attributes of the prophet. Among the bundles of attributes assigned to the prophet, we find «نور» (light), «سراج» (lamp), «مصباح» (lamp), «منير» (illuminator), and «النجم الثاقب» (the star of piercing brightness).

Having said that, we can represent these relevant ideas as follows:

| Metaphorical expression | literal meaning | intended meaning |
|---|---|---|
| مُنِيرًا سِرَاجًا | lamp | guide to the path of Islam |

Given that lamp serves to enlighten the dark places, and the fact that the prophet is metaphorically analogized to a lamp, Allah intends to highlight the prophet's purpose in enlightening the right path.

Moreover, in addition to being analogized to "a lamp" (سراج) as shown by Al-Jazouli (2000), the prophet is designated as "a lamp spreading light" (سراج منير), which refers symbolically to its shining and brightness, and hence serves to remove darkness. Similarly, the prophet, by being analogized to a shining lamp, serves to remove darkness which symbolizes ignorance, deviation, and confusion.

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After having pinpointed some of the semantic features of the Holly Quran that present a great challenge for translators and trigger a loss, then we try now to mention some of the syntactic features that also impede and prevent translators from conveying the accurate meaning.

On the basis of syntax, Arabic can be categorised as a pro-drop language, whereas English is non-pro-drop language. Such distinction triggers a loss and confusion when translating from Arabic to English.

A closer look at the existing literature on Arabic shows also that it exhibits two dominant word orders: SVO and VSO. This alternation serves a syntactic purpose like achieving focalization. Hence, it seems evidently clear that the syntactic order of Arabic can be hardly kept in English. Arabic is a language which shows flexibility in the syntactic order. The subject, compliment, or the verb can be post-verbal or pre-verbal based on the purpose and the importance of the location of lexical item. This characteristic of the Arabic language is recurrent in the Holy Quran; it serves to highlight the most important meaning.

Unlike Arabic, English doesn't exhibit such alternation due to the weakness of inflection, and therefore cannot express this syntactic purpose; thus triggering a real loss when translating the Holy Quran into English.

Additionally, when rendering some verbal structures in the Holy Quran, these structures lose their verbal property. For illustration, the verb'تَتَكَبَّرُ' is rendered by translating it into an adjectival phrase 'to be arrogant' or adverbial phrase 'to act arrogantly', which makes the translation less faithful and more deviant.

Rendering tense is also another hurdle that faces translators and constitutes a real obstacle, especially when translating concerns the Holy Quran. In some cases, tense is hardly kept due to the apparent discrepancies existing between Arabic and English. In the verse like:

﴿ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴾

is translated as "Satan was an avowed enemy," resulting in loss in tense. Syntactically, the verb-less sentence is deprived of an auxiliary verb which temporally refers to present tense. However, it is rendered in the text target (TT) as past tense (i.e., was), which disrupt and affects the intended meaning conveyed in the TT. The TT past tense verb does not convey the fact that Satan is still an enemy to Adam and his offspring. However, the source text (ST) present tense indicates that Satan is not an enemy for Adam and Eve only, but for all their offspring as well. This ST meaning is not conveyed in the TT due to the loss in tense.

## 5. Conclusion

This research has revealed that linguistic loss in the English translation of *some verses in the glorious Holy Quran*. The loss occurs either semantically or syntactically. However, semantic loss tends to be as dominant as syntactic loss. In addition, translators, sometimes, select words that are improper or out of context. Such inaccuracy of selected vocabulary leads to a shift in meaning. Many non-equivalence problems were as causes for the semantic losses found in the translation of the *Holy Quran*.

This research reveals that semantic loss occurs mainly because of misunderstanding and confusion; the Holy Quran language has its own lexicons that are culturally bound and apparently rhetoric. Another cause is the translator's relatively poor knowledge of Arabic and its semantic richness. In this light, many approaches of translation such as literal translation or semantic translation have been applied by translators. However, the former (literal translation) usually disrupt the meaning of the Holy *Quran*, and the latter creates loss.

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