

Translating Denotative Meaning in the Holy Quran: Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a research that aimed basically at examining the loss in denotative meaning in the translation of the Holy Quran, and how these losses can be reduced. It also identified the causes of the identified losses. Five ayahs were purposefully selected to address the research questions. The research results showed that loss in denotative meaning occurred due to many factors such as lack of equivalence and the translation strategies employed. This research also suggests solutions for the identified problems.

Keywords: Denotative meaning, translation loss, the Holy Quran, translation strategies

INTRODUCTION

Of the most challenging translations is translating the genre of religious texts, especially the Holy Quran. Throughout many years, translators have attempted to produce an accurate translation of the Holy Quran; however, the nature of the sacred text made their job strenuous. The Holy Quran is the words of Allah, and thus it is so sophisticated, versatile and pregnant with meaning to a point that makes

translating its meanings challenging. The Quranic discourse has its own distinctive features at the syntactic, semantic, cultural and rhetorical levels (Abdul-Raof, 2010). These features of the Quranic text together yield the supreme vividness, which is challenging for a translator. Moreover, translating the Holy Quran text is challenged by many obscurities, ambiguities and non-equivalence problems (Tabrizi & Mahmud, 2013).

Although great efforts have been shown by some translators to produce reliable translation into English, the quality of those translations is poor; the translated texts are either inaccurate or biased; and thus, most of the existing translations of the Holy

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Quran suffer from serious shortcomings and limitations, which either distort the meanings of the sacred text of the Holy Quran, or make it incomprehensible (Al-Jabari, 2008; Abdul-Raof, 2005). These shortcomings can be viewed as semantic losses in the translation, which are the results of several causes such as differences in mapping vocabularies between different languages and the differences of the semantic fields between source languages and target languages.

Although losses in translation occur at different levels, loss in denotative meaning is considered the weightiest. Denotative meaning is the most important type of meaning that translation is concerned with, as it is the primary meaning that needs to be conveyed in the target language (TL). This type of meaning is the first meaning that a translator, in practice, seeks to find equivalents for in the TL. In this regard, Baker (1992) argued that one notion that should be considered in relation to the denotative meaning is semantic fields, and which refers to lexical concepts that shared semantic properties, or simply to the relatedness of meaning among the word class (Lobner, 2002). Baker believes that semantic fields are integral in the translation process for two reasons; the first reason is to assess the value of a given item in a lexical set, or to understand the differences between source text (ST) and target text (TT) structuring of semantic fields. The second reason of the importance of understanding semantic fields in translation is to understand the hierarchical classification of words in terms of hypernyms and hyponyms.

In practice, it is important to distinguish between lexical items and units of meaning to achieve good translation (Baker, 1992). Meanings differ in the orthographic words which represent them from one language to another. A meaning of one orthographic word in one language may be represented by several orthographic words in another language, and vice versa. For instance, “كسوف” and “خسوف” in Arabic have only one equivalent representation in English; namely, ‘eclipse’. Another example is the English word “camel” which is represented by many words in Arabic (e.g. جملة، ناقية، بنت ليون، زاملة، among others) (Almaany.com, n. d.). Consequently, this means that there is no one-to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning within or across languages. Such lack of one to one equivalence effects encounters for a translator. The challenge is aggravated when rendering a complex and multi-faceted text such as the Holy Quran, whereby losses occur. In this regard, translation losses should not be perceived as a negative word that hampers a translator from doing his great job. Rather, translation losses should be highlighted as an inevitable fact in most of translations, and that a translator, thus, should aim at reducing the loss than unrealistically attempting to achieve ultimate translation of the ST. A translator, as suggested by Hervey and Higgins (2002), should understand how to reduce losses “by deciding which of the relevant features in the ST it is most important to preserve, and which can most legitimately be sacrificed in preserving them.” (p. 25). They added also that reducing translation loss can be

achieved by minimizing difference rather than maximizing sameness. These losses in translation occur due to differences between languages, or due to a translator's failure to pick the appropriate equivalent. This research, therefore, attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do losses in denotative meaning occur in the translation of the Holy Quran?
2. How can the identified losses be reduced?
3. What are the causes of the difficulty in conveying some denotative meanings in the translation of the Holy Quran?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexical Gaps between English and Arabic

English and Arabic are two different languages that express reality in different ways. Thus, in translation between these two languages, losses ensue and problems arise (Abdul-Raof, 2005). One of these problems is the lexical gaps, which might occur at different levels including the semantic and the morphological levels (Abdul-Raof, 2005), or due to differences in the denotative meanings between SL and TL (Bentivogli & Pianta, 2000). Lexical gaps ensue when one lexical item is missing in the semantic field structure (Lyons, 1977), which occurs due to differences between languages (Darwish, 2010; Lyons, 1977). For example, the Arabic verb *يج*/*ya'hujj*/ does not have an equivalent item in English; or in other words,

it is not lexicalized in English. Baker (1992) discussed lack of lexicalization as one of the major problems in translation between Arabic and English. Another example to highlight the lack of lexicalization problem in translation was given by Conner (1983), who introduced the example of the semantic field of temperature, which was represented in English by four words: cold, cool, hot, and warm. By contrast, in Arabic language, the same semantic field of temperature is represented by three words: *بارد، دافئ، حار*. There is no lexical item which matches the English item of "cool". As a result of this lexical gap, the two words "cool" and *بارد* may be translated as synonyms, though they are antonyms (Abdul-Raof, 2005). Actually, "cool" and *بارد* are antonyms in some contexts. For example, *بارد* sometimes means cold weather which is a near-antonym of 'cool', which means nice weather that is neither cold nor hot. Another example of lack of lexicalization is the Arabic word *جهاد/jihad*/, which is not represented in the English language. Lack of lexicalization occurs due to lack of lexical equivalence, which in turn occurs due to differences between languages (Benfoughal, 2010). Each language has its own peculiarity in terms of vocabulary, grammar or style. Some words are lexicalized in one language, but are not lexicalized in the other one. This applies to many languages. Take for example the adjective word 'standard', which is a very common word in English, but it does not have an equivalent item in Arabic (Baker, 2011).

Darwish (2010) added that the difference in a denotative meaning between SL and TL was another cause of lexical gaps in translation; for example, the Arabic word *صوم*, which is always rendered into English as “fasting” has different denotative meanings according to culture. “Fasting” in Christianity is completely different from “fasting” in Islam. That explains why Nugroho (1999) underscored the importance of understanding the components of meaning in the SL, to be able to render them accurately to a TL. A denotative meaning may undergo a syntactic marking (e.g. the difference between “he saw a cloud” and “the quarrel will cloud the issue”, or semiotic marking (i.e. the interrelationships among words). For example, the difference between “he runs a company” and “his nose is running” is a difference that occurs due to the different subjects and their meanings (Nugroho, 1999).

Another face of lack of lexicalization problems arises when a specific concept is expressed by one lexical unit in a SL, while the same concept is expressed by a free combination of words in the TL (Bentivogli & Pianta, 2000; Darwish, 2010). For example, the English kinship relation of “cousin” is represented by eight words in Arabic, which are، *أبن العم، بنت العم، أبن الخال، بنت الخال، أبن العمّة، بنت العمّة، أبن الخالة، بنت الخالة*. Thus, one lexical item in English is represented by eight counterparts in Arabic, creating lexical gap which results in quandaries and translation problems.

One more cause of lexical gaps, as identified by Darwish (2010), is when the SL and TL taxonomies are different; for example, eclipse in English has two Arabic counterparts in relation to the sun and the moon. One last cause of lexical gaps, as mentioned by Darwish, is cultural gaps which cause lack of lexicalization. All these causes, concisely, can be described as lexicalization differences between a SL and a TL. Such lexical and semantic gaps are likely to get wider in the translation of a sophisticated text such as the Holy Quran.

Lexical Gaps in Quranic Translations

The Holy Quran is the most eloquent, elevated and sophisticated dialect among the different Arabic dialects; this results in many lexical gaps in translation from the Holy Quran to English. Quran is rich with examples that show lexical gaps in the Quranic translation. A case in point is the difference between *نَزَّلَ* /*nazzala*/ (*ayah* 3) and *أَنْزَلَ* /*anzala*/ (*ayah* 4) in *Surah* al-Imran, which cannot be conveyed in translation attributable to the lexical or morphological gap. The first word /*nazzala*/ reflects the piecemeal revelation, while the latter one, /*anzala*/, reflects the one-time revelation. However, Yusuf Ali rendered the two words as one word in his translation (Abdul-Raof, 2004). The Quranic word *وَيَل* in *Surah* al-humaza is another example of lexical gap (Al-Ghazali, 2010). Consider the following *ayah* and its translation:

ويل لكل همزة لمزة (104:1)

Woe to every (kind of) scandal-monger and backbiter (Ali, 2006, p. 462).

Woe to every slanderer, defamer (Shakir, 1999, p. 311).

As seen, the Quranic ST word (ويل) is in the nominative case, in specific, the predicative case. While Ali and Shakir rendered it in the subjunctive case, i.e. woe. This affects the meaning because the nominal case in the Arabic language in general indicates continuity, and in this context in particular refers to the ongoing torturing and punishment (Al-Ghazali, 2010).

Another example that indicates the lexical gap between Arabic and English is the two Quranic words in *Surah* al-Kahf, namely, أسطاع /*istaAAa*/ and أستطاع /*istataAAa*/. Both the two Quranic words أسطاع /*istaAAa*/ and أستطاع /*istataAAa*/ were translated interchangeably as ‘could’ or ‘was able to’ by Sale (1734), Ali (2010), Muhammad Ali (2010), Pickthall (2001) and Rodwell (2012). The two words are not identical in meaning; there is a delicate difference in meaning between the two words. The Quranic word أسطاع *istaAAa* is only used for relatively easy actions such as climbing a hill, whereas أستطاع *istataAAa* is used for a more difficult task as boring a tunnel through the hill (Khalifa, 1989). A one more example of lexical gaps is the two Arabic words /*ridwanun*/ رضوان and /*rida*/ رضا; these two words are not complete synonyms, as رضوان is more pregnant with meaning than رضا; it means

complete pleasing with believers. However, English lacks such ability to show nuances between these near-synonyms. The Quranic words /*hayawan*/ حيوان and /*hayatun*/ حياة provide another example of lexical gaps in translation. The Quranic word حيوان was mentioned once only in the Holy Quran, in the context of the virtue of the Hereafter (i.e. Jannah) over the earthly life. حيوان is the real and complete life, which refers only to the everlasting life in Jannah (Al-Qurtubi, 2004). This may be due to the fact that adding some letters in the Arabic language, such as ان, adds extra meaning to a word.

Another example of lexical gaps is the Quranic verb أسرى /*asraa*/, which cannot be rendered into a one equivalent lexeme in English (Abdul-Raof, 2004) because it is a semantically complex verb. Semantic complexity, as identified by Baker (1992), is one of the non-equivalence problems in translation between Arabic and English. Other examples may include words such as /*tayammamoo* / تيمموا (take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it), /*yastarikhoona*/ يصطرخون (cry out loud), and /*yataṭahhar*/ يتطهر (to stay chaste). These words are used in the exaggerated form in the Arabic Quranic language. However, English does not have such a distinctive feature. A working example could be the Quranic verb /*yastarikhoona*/ يصطرخون, which was mentioned in the Holy Quran in the context of telling about the torment disbelievers will go through on the Day of Judgment. They do not merely ‘cry’, but they extremely cry from the depth of their hearts, to ask Almighty Allah, as they

think, give them another chance of going back to the earthly life to do good deeds (Ibn’Ashur, 1984). Another example that indicates lexical gaps in translation between a ST and a TT is the following example from *Surah* al-Baqarah, as provided by Abdul-Raof (2004):

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ (2:2)

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, for those who fear God. (2:2) (Ali, 1968, p. 8)

In the above example, *لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ* was translated as “for those who fear God”, which is redundant and inaccurate because the Quranic word has sensitive overtones which encompass performing all kinds of good deeds that Allah Almighty ordained, and avoiding everything Allah Almighty forbade (Abdul-Raof, 2004). Abdul-Raof commends what Khan and Hilali followed in their translation, as they gave a periphrastic translation after providing the transliteration. They translated it as:

“*Al-Muttaqun* [the pious and righteous persons who fear Allah much (abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which He has forbidden) and love Allah much (perform all kinds of good deeds which He has ordained)].”

(Khan & Hilali, 1996, p. 3)

However, to avoid prolongation and the feeling of boredom, I would suggest transliterating the ST word and providing the periphrastic translation in a footnote in its first occurrence in the translation. This

will contribute to enriching the repertoire of vocabulary of the readers of the translation.

Similarly, in his study of the lexical gap in the translation of the Quranic verb, *كاد* / *kada*/, Al-Utbi (2011) signposted how the translation failed to find equivalents of the verb *كاد*, due to the lexical gap between the SL and the TL. The investigated translations revealed several changes in the word class of the Quranic verb to different word-classes, namely adverbs, verbal constructions, and adjectives. Largely, the translations of the Holy Quran are plentiful with examples that show such lexical gap in translation. In one study about the translation of the Quranic verb phrase, Al-Ghazalli (2012) found that translators failed to accurately render the verb phrase in the Quranic translation due to the gap in grammatical structure or the inaccuracy in selecting lexicons. The following *ayah* shows such a loss or inaccuracy in translation:

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكَ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ
يُدَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِّنْ
رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٍ (2:49)

He delivered you from the people of Pharaoh: they set you hard tasks and punishments, slaughtered your sons. (2:49) (Ali, 1968, p. 11)

As seen in the example, the ST verb *يُدَبِّحُونَ* was translated as “slaughtered”, which reveals a loss in the translation. The derivative verb *يُدَبِّحُونَ* signifies the sense of abundantly doing the act of slaughtering Jews’ sons by Pharaoh’s supporters. Al- Ghazalli, moreover, mentioned that overtranslation is unavoidable due the fact

that Quranic vocabulary is pregnant with meaning, while there is a syntactic and lexical gap in the TL. Further, he showed how derivative germinated-by verbs were not accurately rendered because germination in Arabic is functional but it is not so in English; for example, in translating the following *ayah*, the translator failed to render meaning accurately:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ (7:138)

Those who reject Our signs, We will lead them step by step to ruin while they know not (Ali, 1968, p. 56).

As seen in the *ayah*, the derivative verb in the *ayah* (i.e. سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ) indicates gradual change from a state to another; however, the translation failed to convey such depth of meaning (Al-Ghazalli, 2012).

In relation to such lexical gaps' problems in translation, Abdul-Raof (2004) postulated that the only way to translate such Quranic lexemes. i.e. those which suffered from lexical gaps' problems, was to seek periphrastic translation. Abdul-Raof gave examples of some Quranic words such as /الموقوذة / *mawqoo/, which could only be rendered periphrastically as "any animal that receives a violent blow, is left to die, and then eaten without being slaughtered according to Islamic law." However, I think transliteration followed by such periphrastic rendition in a footnote sounds more proper, as it gives a chance to introduce new SL word into the TL. Other examples provided by Abdul-Raof (2004) include /الصمد / *katheem*كظيم / *aS-Samad*./*

تيمموا / *tayammamoo*//, and many other lexical items

Denotative Meaning

Most words have a denotative meaning on one hand, and a connotative meaning on the other hand. Both the two types of meaning among others cause problems in translation between any two linguistic codes. Denotative meaning sometimes poses difficulty in translation due to the lack of equivalency problem which causes lexical gaps' problems. For example, translating a Quranic word such as /أسراء / *israa*/ can be problematic, as it cannot be rendered into one lexeme in English (Ahmed, 2008). An example of such semantic loss in the translation of the Holy Quran is the translation of the very first *ayah* in the Holy Quran. Consider the following example, as given by Ahmed (2008):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ (1:1)

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate (1:1) (Arberry, 1982, p. 19). In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful (1:1) (Ali, 1968, p. 7).

Considering the translations above of the first *ayah* of *Surah* al-Fatihah, it is identified that the translation did not render the name of Allah Almighty and His attributes into equivalent denotative or connotative meanings. The word 'God' is not denotatively or connotatively an equivalent to the great name الله. The Arabic word, الله is a proper noun referring to the name of Allah Almighty, and names are not assumed to be translated into other languages, but they

should be transferred. Another problem in using God (with a capital G) as equivalent to the name of Allah Almighty is that in other Quranic *ayahs*, there is the word **الاله** which is an equivalent to “God”. Though some might argue that **الاله** can be rendered as ‘god’ with a small g, it is still confusing because capitalization per se cannot change the denotative meaning of a word. Sperber and Wilson (1995) also mentioned that the use of word “Allah” instead of “God” heightened the attention of the audience on their relevant reference framework, and therefore contributes to a better conveyance of the message to the target readers. In a similar vein, Van der Spuy (2015) found that nonnative speakers of Arabic preferred the word “Allah” more than the word “God”, as it had more implications and connotations than the word “God”

Ahmed (2008) provided another example of problems or losses in conveying connotative meanings in the translation of the third *ayah* in *Surah* al-Baqara which reads:

الذين ومنون بالغيب (2:3)

who believe in the mysteries of faith (2:3)
(Sale, 1734, p. 20)

According to Ahmed (2008), Sale’s rendition of **غيب/ghayb/** does not communicate the meaning accurately because the word “mysteries” has connotations which do not exist in the Quranic word. Ahmed’s view sounds correct because the word “mystery”, according to Cambridge Online Dictionary (2008), means “something strange or not known that

has not yet been explained or understood”, whereas the Quranic word refers to the unseen, but which is quite understood and explained in the Holy Quran and prophetic hadiths.

Some recent studies investigated problems faced in translating the Holy Quran (Al-Kanani & Saidi, 2017; Abdelaal & Md Rashid, 2015; Abdelaal & Md Rashid, 2016). Abdelaal and Md Rashid (2015) examined the semantic problems encountered in translating *Surah* Al Waqiah and how the semantic loss is inevitable but reducible. In a similar vein, Abdelaal and Md Rashid (2016) showed in their study how loss in denotative meaning can result from grammatical gaps between the ST and the TT. Al-Kanani and Saidi (2017) examined the problems encountered by translators while translating Islamic literature from Arabic into English, whereby they found that translators sometimes rendered some concepts into inequivalent terms in the target language. One example that was provided by Al-Kanani and Saidi is the translation of the ST word **حيواني** as ‘instinctive’, which is not deemed to be a denotative equivalent of the ST word. In a similar vein, Dweik and Khaleel (2017) found that Jordanian translators faced some problems in translating some Islamic related texts from English to Arabic.

METHODS

Research design

Due to the complex nature of the examined text (i.e. The Holy Quran), the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research was sought

as a research design of this research. As suggested by Creswell (2007), qualitative research is conducted when a researcher seeks understanding of a complex issue, and when quantitative measurements and analyses do not seem appropriate for the research problem under investigation.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was adopted for this research, as it is deemed appropriate for a qualitative research, such as this study. Five examples were purposefully extracted from *Surah Al Anaam* (the Cattle). In this regard, the researcher carefully selected the samples that show semantic losses or problems at the denotative meaning level. The identified and selected samples would thus reflect some of losses that exist in the English translation of the Holy Quran on the denotative level. The researcher, in this research, reached the saturation point, which is important and one of qualitative inquiry sampling technique (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In relation to this, Merriam (2009) mentioned that it was not possible to decide on the number of samples in a qualitative research. She mentioned that it all depended on the research questions, the data collected, the data analysis, and the availability of resources. What is important in such a kind of sampling, as one of qualitative inquiry sampling techniques is to reach saturation point, which is the researcher's responsibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Replication is an evidence of saturation (Morse, 1991), and which was achieved in the current research that presented more

than one example of the phenomenon under study, viz. loss of denotative meaning in the translation of the Holy Quran. Morse (1995) states that "The quantity of data in a category is not theoretically important to the process of saturation. Richness of data is derived from detailed description, not the number of times something is stated. Frequency counts are out." (p. 148). The translations selected are Yusuf Ali's translation and Muhammed Abdel Haleem's translation. These two translations were selected because they belong to two different far-between periods of translation, which can explain clearly the differences between translations of the Holy Quran throughout a long period of time. In addition, the methodology adopted in the two selected translations is quite poles apart. Ali's translation is elaborative which mostly tends to employ paraphrase and transliteration as translation strategies. However, Abdel Haleem's translation tends to be brief and avoids paraphrasing and transliteration (Shah, 2010). Thus, selecting these two translations is to identify the extent the employment of certain translation strategies succeeds in conveying the denotative meaning in the translation.

Data Analysis

A qualitative inquiry, such as this research, usually follows inductive data analysis, as a researcher builds his patterns and themes from bottom-up; he organizes data in increasingly more abstract units of information, and he may go back and forth to establish a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; LeCompte

& Schensul, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2002). Thus, the researcher in this study is the person who interpreted the data based on his prior knowledge and understanding, as suggested by Creswell (2007). In specific, this study employed directed content analysis of the text, as it allows better in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

In practice, the researcher read through the translations to understand the meanings of the *ayahs*, and the meanings of the lexicons used. Different dictionaries such as Collins Cobuild Dictionary, Merriam Webster Dictionary, and Cambridge Online Dictionary were consulted to understand the primary and secondary meanings of the lexicons used in the translation. Some of the *ayahs* that show loss in denotative meaning in the translations were identified and extracted; the causes of such loss in translation were derived then from the analysis. Exegesis books, Arabic heritage books, monolingual and bilingual Arabic and English dictionaries were consulted to verify the losses in the translation, i.e. by comparing the meanings in the translation and the authentic ST meanings as interpreted in the exegesis books, and the Arabic monolingual dictionaries. In conducting the analysis, Stenius et al.'s (2008) suggestions about good analysis were followed. They suggested that the data set and its social or cultural place be significant; the data should be sufficient to cover the analysis; the analysis be transparent and repeatable. The notion of denotative meaning and

the causes of the identified losses were based on Baker's (2011) typology of non-equivalence between languages at word level. Baker categorized the most common non-equivalences between languages at the word level into eleven types, which are: 1. cultural specific concepts; 2. SL concepts are not lexicalized in the TL; 3. Semantically complex SL words; 4. Different distinctions in meaning in the SL and the TL; 5. The TL lacks a superordinate; 6. The TL lacks a specific term (hyponym); 7. Interpersonal or physical perspective differences; 8. Differences in expressive meaning; 9. Differences in form; 10. Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific form; and 11. The use of loan words in the SL. This research is also supported by Dickens et al.'s (2005) definition of denotative meaning as "that kind of meaning which is fully supported by ordinary semantic conventions" (p.52). It is, thus, the primary meaning of a ST word in its Quranic context. This definition is similar to what Cruse (1997) and Baker (1992) called as the propositional meaning, which is used to describe the relation between a word and its real or imaginary meaning. For example, socks are "a kind of cloth worn on feet". This kind of meaning can be judged in terms of true or false.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section I: The Identified Losses in Denotative Meaning and how they can be Reduced

Recapitulating the first objective of the study, it aimed at examining the extent

the translators succeeded in rendering the denotative meaning in the translation of the selected *ayahs* from the Holy Quran. Content qualitative analysis was conducted for this purpose. Back-translation was adopted for verifying the findings. The examples to follow indicate the extent the selected two translators succeeded in rendering the denotative meaning in the translation of the Holy Quran. The focus is put on the words that indicate a loss in the denotative meaning in the translation.

Example 1

ST الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ الظُّلُمَاتِ وَالنُّورَ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ يَعْدِلُونَ

**Translit-
eration** Alhamdu lillahi allatheekhalaaqa
assamawati wal-ardawajaAAaala
aththulumati fawannoorathumma
allatheena kafaroo birabbihim
yaAAadiloon

**Abdel
Haleem's
transla-
tion** **Praise** belongs to **God** who
created the **heavens** and the
earth and made darkness and
light; yet the disbelievers set up
equals to their Lord ”

**Ali's
transla-
tion** **Praise** be **Allah**, Who created
the **heavens** and the **earth**,
and made the darkness and
the light. Yet **those who reject
Faith** hold (others) as equal,
with their Guardian-Lord (Ali,
1968).

As seen in Abdel Haleem's translation in example 1, a loss in denotative meaning seems to have occurred in translating the

name of Allah the Almighty into “God”, which does not seem to be accurate if the TT word is back-translated, it will be equivalent to “اله”, and not an equivalent to the ST word الله. In this context, translating the ST word as “God” can create confusion for a reader of the translation, as in other contexts of the Holy Quran there is the word “اله”, which can be really translated as “God”. In addition, the ST word is a proper noun that refers to Allah the Almighty, and which does not have a plural form. However, “God” can be pluralized. Moreover, the ST word الله is the main name of Allah, which all other names of Allah the Almighty are always attributed to Him; it is the comprehensive name that entails all the attributes of Allah and conveys the principal meaning of Tawheed al Uluhayyah (Monotheism of Worship). Ali seems to be more successful in rendering the ST word as “Allah”, which is a kind of transliteration. In this regard, transliteration can be a useful strategy in translating ST words which do not have equivalents in the TL, as suggested by Baker (2011). However, one problem with this strategy is that it might confuse a reader who is not familiar with the ST word. A suggestion is then can be to provide an explanation for the ST word, when it is transliterated for the first time. This will help a reader of the translation of the Quran acquaint himself with the Quranic words that do not have equivalents in the TL. It will also enable him to attain the ST word with its different connotative meanings.

Translating السموات [alssamawati] as “heavens” in the two translations does not

seem to be proper, as if the TT word is back-translated, it will be a near-equivalent to الملكوت or الجنان. Although the word ‘heavens’ seems more idiomatic and target text-oriented, it does not convey the ST word denotative meaning. The ST word refers to the physical existence of the seven skies that indicate the might and power of Allah the Almighty. Thus, rendering the ST word as ‘skies’ would have been more informative and accurate. The creation of the seven skies is one of the greatest evidences of Allah’s might and power, and which He created in two days. Literal translation will be more proper in translating the Holy Quran if the meaning of the ST is conveyed more accurately. In this regard, Newmark (1981) believed that literal translation was not only the best, but it was the only valid method of translation if it yielded accurate translation of the ST.

In a similar vein, both Abdel Haleem and Ali rendered the ST word الحمد as “Praise”, which if back-translated would result in الثناء. It seems that the translations mix-up the word الحمد with the word الثناء. The Quranic word الحمد is different from الثناء ; the former word only belongs to Allah Almighty, and it means to praise only Allah Almighty with knowledge (ibn al Qayem, n.d.). However, the latter can be used to refer to both of Allah Almighty and common people, with the incomparable inferences of meaning when used with Allah Almighty than when used with people. “Praise” refers to expressing approval or glorifying someone such as a divinity (Webster, 2007). While, the Quranic word is only used with Allah Almighty, with

its pregnant meaning. Again, the problem with translating the ST word is the lack of an equivalent item in the TL. Transliteration or periphrastic translation can be sought as proper strategies for rendering the ST words that lack equivalents in the TL.

Another loss in denotative meaning seems to have occurred in translating “الذين كفروا” “those who reject Faith”, which is divergence from an equivalent that exists in Arabic (i.e. those who disbelieved). Though the TT lexemes “reject Faith” implies disbelief but it is a rather divergence from a more direct equivalent for the ST word. In addition, if we back -translate the TT lexemes, the resulting translation will be يابى الأيمان, which is different from the ST words. Abiding by the direct lexical equivalents for ST words is more proper in translating an authoritative text such as the Holy Quran.

Example 2

ST	وَهُوَ اللَّهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ يَخْلَعُ سِرُّكُمْ وَجَهْرَكُمْ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَكْسِبُونَ
Transliteration	Wahuwa Allahu fee assamawatiwafee al-ardi yaAlamu sirrakum wajahrakum wayaAlamu mataksiboon
Abdel Haleem’s translation	He is God in the heavens and on earth, He knows your secrets and what you reveal, and He knows what you do
Ali’s translation	And He is Allah in the heavens and on earth. He knoweth what ye hide, and what ye reveal, and He knoweth the (recompense) which ye earn (by your deeds)

As seen in example 2, the Quranic word *تَكْسِبُونَ* was translated as “earn” by Ali. The English word refers to a positive sense of gaining something such as money, praise or reputation (Sinclair, 2006). However, the Quranic word is more comprehensive, as it refers to every kind of deed (whether good or bad) (Ibn Ashour, 1984), that is done by human beings or Jinn, and for which they will be rewarded or punished. Although the TT word “earn” is similar in meaning to the ST verb *تَكْسِبُونَ* in its general meaning, it does not seem to be equivalent to the ST verb in this Quranic context. Abdel Haleem’s decision to translate it as “do” seems to be more accurate, as the TT verb includes good and bad deeds.

Example 3

ST *قُلْ أَعْبَدُوا اللَّهَ أَنْجَذَ وَلِيًّا فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ يُطْعِمُ وَلَا يُطْعَمُ قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ*

Transliteration Qul aghayra Allahi attakhithu waliyyan fatiri alssamawati waal-ardi wahuwa yutAAimu wala yutAAamu qul innee omirtu an akoona awwala man aslama wala takoonanna mina almushrikeena

Abdel Haleem’s translation Say, ‘Shall I take for myself a **protector** other than God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds but is not fed?’ Say, ‘I am commanded to be **the first [of you] to devote myself [to Him]**.’ Do not be one of the **idolaters**.

Ali’s translation Say: "Shall I take for my **protector** any other than Allah, the Maker of the heavens and the earth? And He it is that feedeth but is not fed." Say: "Nay! but I am commanded to be the first of those who bow to Allah (in Islam), and be not thou of the company of **those who join gods with Allah**."

As seen in example 3, the ST word *ولي* was rendered as “protector” in the two translations, which seems to show loss in denotative meaning. If the TT word is back-translated, it will be equivalent to *حامي*, which is different from the ST word denotative meaning. Makhoulf (1992) mentioned that the Quranic word means ‘a worshipped creator and God who supports and helps His creatures’ *معينا ناصرًا و ربًا معبودًا*. However, the word ‘protector’ means to “to keep someone or something safe from harm, damage, or illness (Procter, 2009). The loss could have been reduced by translating the ST word following a periphrastic translation accompanied by transliteration of the ST word. Another option could be transliterating the ST word and adding explanation or periphrastic translation of the word in a footnote.

Similarly, the Quranic word *فاطر* was rendered by Abdel Haleem as “Creator”, while it was translated as “Maker” by Ali. Abdel Haleem’s translation sounds more accurate because the Quranic word *فاطر* means to create without imitating a previous model, or example (Makhoulf, 1995). Ali’s

translation sounds inaccurate and shows loss of the denotative meaning, as “Maker” does not necessarily convey doing something which has never been done. If the TT word “Maker” is back-translated, it will yield *صانع*, which seems to be divergence from the ST word meaning. Although the TT word “Creator”, as translated by Abdel Haleem, if back-translated, it will be equivalent to *خالق*, which is different from the ST word in the context of the *ayah*, the meaning of the English word seems to be close to the ST word. This can be justified by the difference between English and Arabic in distinguishing meaning. In other words, Arabic makes a distinction in meaning between *فاطر* and *خالق*. However, English does not make such distinction.

Likewise, a loss tends to be in the translation of *مشركين* as “Idolaters” by Abdel Haleem. Idolaters implies extreme love (Procter, 2009), or “worshippers of idols; in addition “idols” basically refers to statute that is worshipped (Sinclair, 2006), or an image that is worshipped as “God”. Idolaters can be an equivalent for the SL word *وثنيين*, which is different from the ST word in the above example. The Quranic word means polytheist, that is, to worship others with or without Allah Almighty, whatever the others are. Even believing that someone or something can do you harm or good without Allah Almighty’s will is a kind of shirk (polytheism). Ali translated the ST word as “those who join gods with Allah”, which tends to be close to the ST word meaning. However, one problem with Ali’s translation is that it shows overtranslation, as many

words were used to render a one ST word. One more option could have been translating the ST word as ‘polytheists’, which seems to be a direct equivalent for the ST word.

Similarly, Ali translated the Quranic *أسلم* to “who bow to Allah”, which is inaccurate. According to Hacker (2013), “bow” means “to bend the head or body (as in submission, courtesy, or assent)”; this is quite far from the Quranic meaning of the word. The Quranic verb *أسلم* in the context of the *ayah*, according to ibn Ashour, refers to being the first Muslim in the Islamic nation, and devotion or submission to Allah Almighty only. This comprehensive meaning of *أسلم* is not conveyed in the translation; there tends to be clear divergence in the translation, which is a semantic loss in denotative meaning. As for Abdel Haleem, he translated the ST word as “the first [of you] to devote myself [to Him]”. Abdel Haleem’s translation does not seem to be accurate either because if it is back-translated, the equivalent Arabic meaning will be *اول واحد منكم يكرس نفسه له*. The translation does not seem to be equivalent to the ST verb. Better translation could have been “embrace Islam” or “become Muslim.

Example 4

ST *وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ ۗ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ
الْخَبِيرُ (18)*

Transliteration- Wahuwa alqahiru fawqa
AAibadihi wahuwa
alhakeemu alkhabeeru

Abdel Haleem’s translation He is the Supreme Master
over His creatures, the All
Wise, the All Aware

Ali's translation "He is the irresistible, (watching) from above over His worshippers; and He is the Wise, acquainted with all things."

As seen in example 4, the ST Word **الْقَاهِرُ** was translated as "the Supreme Master" by Abdel Haleem and as "the irresistible, (watching)" by Ali. The two target words do not seem to convey the ST denotative meaning. The ST Word **الْقَاهِرُ** is one of the names of Allah Almighty; thus, it is a wide-ranging and pregnant word, which cannot be translated into an equivalent lexical item. It is a semantically complex word. Ibn Kathir, in his tafsir, mentioned that **القاهر** refers to "هو الذي قهر كل شيء و خضع لكبريائه و عظمته" (p. 267), which means that it is Allah Almighty, Whom everything is subjugated to His control. Allah Almighty makes people die, sleep, and get sick among others, without their being able to defend or help themselves. Thus, Abdel Haleem's translation did not convey the meaning of Allah Almighty's name. In addition, back-translation of the TT word will yield a different word, that is, **السيد الأعظم**. As for Ali, he translated it as "the irresistible (watching)". Although one of the shades of the meaning of **القاهر** is that Allah Almighty is irresistible, it does not convey the accurate meaning of the Quranic word, which has far wider shades of meanings. Thus, a loss in denotative meaning occurred in the translation of the Quranic word. A more proper strategy that could have better conveyed the meaning

is transferring the word as it is. In other words, transliterating the word supported by paraphrase as a footnote would have been a more appropriate strategy.

In a similar vein, the ST word **عباده** in example 4 was translated by Abdel Haleem as "His creatures", which seems to be somehow proper, though it is not a direct equivalent of the ST word. A direct equivalent would be His slaves'; however, the translator rendered the ST word pragmatically. Using a direct equivalent of the ST word (i.e. slaves) would be more proper and conveys the denotative meaning of the ST word. Some translators shy away from using the word 'slaves' because of its negative connotations. However, the word does not have such negative connotations when it is related to Allah Almighty. It is a source of pride to be a slave to Allah Almighty. As for Ali, he translated it as "His worshippers", which is not accurate because all creatures whether they worship Allah Almighty or not are under His control. Thus, Ali excluded all the other creatures from being under the Subjugation of Allah Almighty. This is a denotative loss in the translation of the ST word.

As for **الحكيم**, it was rendered by Abdel Haleem as "the All Wise", which sounds accurate. However, Ali translated it as "the Wise", which shows partial loss of denotative meaning, as everyone may be wise, but it is only Allah Almighty Who can be the All Wise. In regards to **الخبير**, which is one of the names of Allah Almighty, it was rendered by Abdel Haleem as "the All Aware", which does not convey the

meaning completely. The Quranic word, according to Alt-Tabari (2004) refers to complete knowledge of the gains and losses of everything, whether explicit or implicit. However, Ali translated it as “acquainted with all things”, which expresses the meaning to some extent well. Although, one Arabic word was rendered into four English words, the meaning was somehow conveyed.

Example 5

ST وَقَالُوا إِن هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَبْعُوثِينَ (29)

Transliteration Waqaloo in hiya illa hayatuna alddunya wama nahnu bimabAAoothena

Abdel Haleem’s translation They say, ‘There is nothing beyond our life in this world: we shall not be raised from the dead

Ali’s translation And they (sometimes) say: "There is nothing except our life on this earth, and never shall we be raised up again."

The Quranic word “بمبعوثين” in example 5 was translated as “be raised up from the dead” by Abdel Haleem, and as “be raised up again” by Ali. Both of the two translations are inaccurate. They create inaccuracy, and hence loss in the translation. Ali’s translation is confusing as the English word ‘raise’ is defined by Sinclair (2006) as to move to a higher position. Ali’s translation created loss of denotative meaning because it is too general and can be confusing. Abdel Haleem’s translation conveyed the meaning,

but it could have been more faithful to the ST through the use of more approximate equivalent for the word, say “resurrect”.

Section II: Causes of the Identified Losses

The second research question aimed at identifying the causes of the identified translation losses in denotative meaning. A thorough analysis of the results of the research revealed different causes of such translation losses. These losses, based on Baker’s (1992/2011) typology, are discussed as follows:

Culture-specific Concepts

Lack of equivalent items in the TL is one of the major causes of non-avertable losses in the translation. Some Quranic ST items are culture-bound, and thus it is hard to find equivalents for them. For example, in example 4, the word القاهر, which is one of the names of Allah Almighty does not have an equivalent item in the TL. Thus the word became semantically complex, which is one of the challenges in translation as mentioned by Baker (2011). A translator seems to have to resort to paraphrasing as a translation strategy to explain the word with its complex meanings. However, a paraphrase may not result in conveying the all shades of the ST word meanings. Transliteration accompanied with paraphrase can be a better option, as it will be a chance to introduce the ST item into the TL. Although Baker (1992) differentiated between semantically complex words and culture-specific concepts, the two terms

seem to overlap sometimes. Many of the culture-bound terms and concepts are semantically complex.

Different Distinctions in Meaning in the SL and the TL

Languages make fewer or less distinctions in meanings from each other. What may be important in one language is not necessarily equally important in the second language. In example 3, the ST word فاطر was inaccurately translated because the SL differentiates between فاطر and خالق. In contrast, the TL does not make such distinction in meaning. As a result the two ST words are likely to be translated as synonyms in the TL.

Differences in Form

It is hardly found equivalent forms in a SL and TL. For example, in English, adjectives are derived from verbs by adding certain suffixes (e.g. work vs. workable); however, it is not the case in Arabic. Hence, translation from English to Arabic must change the form to render the meaning, depending on the context. In example 3, the ST verb أسلم does not have an equivalent verb in English, though the noun 'Islam' exists in English.

Inappropriate Selection of Translation Strategies

As Baker (1992) highlighted, translators use different translation strategies to overcome lack of equivalence problem. However, the problem is that sometimes such strategies are not proper. For example, Abdel Haleem translated the ST word الله as "God" in example 1, which is not proper. Abdel

Haleem used a more general word (i.e. God) to translate a specific word, that is, the name of Allah the Almighty. One motivation behind Abdel Haleem's tendency to use such a strategy might be his aim to translate every single word in the Holy Quran and make it comprehensible by native speakers of English. However, this seems to be improper because الله is a proper noun that should be transferred rather than translated. In addition, even non-Arabs know the word "Allah" and they know that it refers to the worshipped creator.

As seen in the analysis, different examples of losses in denotative meaning were found, which are similar to those found by Ahmed (2008), Abdelaal and Md Rashid (2016), and Al-Kanani and Saidi (2017). Therefore, this study suggests the following solutions to reduce the identified losses in the translation:

- (1) A translator should use the direct equivalent of the ST word if it exists in the TL (as in example 1). He should not diverge to other lexemes which might sound more idiomatic and natural in the TL. Accuracy and faithfulness to the ST should be prioritized over idiomaticity due to the sacred nature of the Holy Quran text.
- (2) In case a direct equivalent does not exist in the TL, a proper strategy should be adopted as follows:
 - (a) For culture-bound terms, it is suggested to transliterate the SL words and provide elaborative

explanation in a footnote or endnote (see example 3).

- (b) For words, which have equivalents in meaning in the TL but lack equivalents in form (as in example 3), it is suggested to render the ST words into an equivalent TT in meaning and sacrifice form. If possible, a new word can be coined and introduced in the TL. This seems proper in English, which is flexible in accepting words from other languages.
 - (c) In case, there is a distinction in meaning between words in SL, which does not exist in the TL (see example 3), it is suggested to explain such difference in a footnote providing the ST words in transliteration form and explain the nuances in meaning between them.
- (3) Back-translation can be a useful strategy, but it cannot be solely an evidence of a good or poor translation. Peer-triangulation and consulting experts could be a method to reach a better quality in translation.
- (4) Using translation memories to help provide a better translation of the Holy Quran

CONCLUSION

This research aimed at identifying the losses in rendering the denotative meaning in the translation of the Holy Quran, and how these losses can be reduced, and the causes of the difficulty in conveying some denotative meanings in the translation of the Holy Quran. For this purpose, a qualitative analysis of five ayahs (verses) from the Holy Quran was conducted. Back translation was employed to check the accuracy of the TT words in relation to the intended meaning in the ST. The results of the research proved that loss in denotative meaning occurs because of different factors that can be subsumed under lack of equivalence in the TL that results from the cultural differences between SL and TL, and under the translation strategies adopted by the translators. Further research about loss in denotative meaning in the Holy Quran and how to be reduced is still needed. It is thus suggested to examine the proper translation strategies to handle loss in translation, especially the denotative meaning.

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