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## **Semantic Loss in the Translation of Some Religious Texts**

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 The Problem of the Study**

Semantic loss, which concentrates on the over-, under-, or incorrect rendering of a source text, can cause a partial or total loss of meaning in the target text. Due to some cultural words' absence of equivalents in the target language, semantic loss is unavoidable when translating from a source language(Mohammed, 2005).

Translation of religious texts presents a unique challenge because of the complexity and richness of the language used in such texts. The meaning and significance of the text are often closely tied to its cultural, social, and historical context, making it difficult to convey the full meaning in another language(Hassan S. Kashoob, 1995).

**This study tries to answer the following questions :**

- 1- What is a semantic loss ?
- 2- What are semantic loss difficulties in translation?
- 3- Do these semantic losses affect the context if they are translated in a wrong way ?

### **1.2 The Aims of the Study**

- 1- Finding out the meaning of semantic loss .
- 2- Extracting some semantic loss difficulties in translation .
- 3- Avoiding semantic losses that affect the general context.

### **1.3 The Hypotheses of the Study**

It is hypothesized that:

- 1- Semantic loss means extraction of strange words .
- 2- The semantic difficulties can make these verses stronger .
- 3- Because the Arabic used in the Quran is such a rich language, many of its terms have nuanced meanings that are difficult to find in other languages, such as English.

### **1.4 The Procedures of the Study**

To achieve the aims of the study and to verify its hypotheses, the following procedures have been followed:

- 1- defining semantic loss in more than one definition
- 2- Extracting the semantic difficulties and compare them with similar kinds in another placements
- 3- Taking the entire context and analyzing it to find semantic losses and revealing some mistakes that occurred during the translation of the selected text

## 1.5 Limits of the Study

The research is restricted to the semantic loss of a few chosen texts, such as word ( تَيَمَّمُوا ) or the hole verse such as ( إِذَا وَقَعَتِ الْوَاقِعَةُ ) , and

(خُسْعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنْتَشِرٌ)

(وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ)

,because these texts are the most well-known and reputable sources of information in the world.

## 1.6 The Value of the Study

We hope that this study will benefit those who have interests in translation and religious texts, in order to avoid making mistakes in translation, whether it is an error in the meaning of the word itself, or in the context of the verse, or in the context of the entire surah.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 What is Semantic Loss in Translation ?**

#### **2.1.1 What is Translation ?**

Before we go ahead to the semantic loss , we should know what does translation mean ? Undoubtedly, translation is a tool for communication because it breaks down barriers between any two languages. However, complete command of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) is necessary to achieve fruitful communication between any two different linguistic codes. Without such comprehension, it would be difficult to translate the intended meaning from one language to another, which could lead to inevitable losses. Therefore, any translation process should make sure that the target text (TT) effectively incorporates the essential components of the source text (ST) to achieve the same results as the ST intended. (Translation, 2014)

#### **2.1.2 What is Semantic Loss ?**

In general , Semantic loss, which concentrates on the over-, under-, or incorrect translation of a source text, can cause a partial or total loss of meaning in the destination language. Due to some cultural vocabulary' lack of equivalents in the destination language, semantic loss is unavoidable when translating from a source language. To pinpoint the root causes of mistakes in the two English translations, Baker'sv in (typology of equivalence) was used:

equivalence at the word level, above the word level, textual, grammatical, and pragmatic equivalent. Hermeneutics, an interpretive framework used in translation studies, forms the foundation of this qualitative research. (Baker, M. 1992)

## **2.2 difficulties of semantic loss in translation.**

### **2.2.1 the ambiguity of meaning .**

There is a lot of fuzziness, obscurity, and ambiguity in the boundaries between any two languages, and the semantic relationship between words in two different languages does not match to one-to-one sets or even one-to-many sets (Nida, 1994). Translation teams must contend with the risk of losing meaning due to the complex borders between languages. There are too many meanings in the SL for the linguistic system of the TL to handle. For instance, there are several terms in the English language's grammar for which the plural form would significantly alter the meaning (Abdul-Raof, 2004).

The Arabic terms for "wind" [alriah] and "alreeh] have two distinct meanings; the plural form of the word communicates blessing, while the singular form expresses punishment. Because of these disparities in how various languages map their vocabulary, meaning loss during translation may happen.

Languages map words in various ways; an idea that may be represented in English with just one word may require several words to do it in another

language. For instance, the word "table" in English can be translated into many lexemes in Polish (Ameel, Malt, Storms, & Van Assche, 2009). This also happens regularly in Arabic.

The Arabic language can translate the English word cup into a variety of lexemes with varying degrees of meaning. In particular, the words "cup" can imply "ka/as," "koub," and "ibreeq" in Arabic and the Qur'anic language. Such a mapping vocabulary gap makes translation challenging, which increases the likelihood of loss. Neglecting the literariness or figurativeness of the ST may lead to semantic losses, cultural losses, or inequities.

Sometimes, translators fail to recognize the SL's rhetorical devices or figures of speech. Additionally, they occasionally struggle with symbolism, which results in a loss in literary translation (Al-Masri, 2009).

This holds true for the Holy Qur'an as well, whose language is more complex than that of literary works. There are two main categories of translation issues that might cause semantic loss: linguistic (semantic and syntactic) and cultural issues. Lexical and morphological issues are examples of semantic issues.

One of the frequent forms of losses in Ali's translation of the Surah is the change in meaning that occurs when a term used in a semantic region is improper. A semantic field is a section of reality that is represented by a

group of related words. A common semantic characteristic unites these words in a semantic field (Brinton, 2000).

As a result, while many words can have similar shades of meaning, they do differ in both their denotations and their connotations. As a result, translators occasionally choose for one word even though the other is the alternative that is more accurate. As we can see from the translation of "الواقعة" as "When the Event inevitable cometh to pass," the translator frequently chooses words that do not convey the intended meaning.

The translation of "الواقعة" alwaqiAAat was given as "the event inevitable," but this is incorrect because the two words are not the same. An event is "something that happens, especially when it is unusual or significant," according to the English language. (Collins , 2006)

There may be a great number of occurrences, but there will only be one Day of Judgment, according to the Arabic word used in the Qur'an as one of its titles. The verse speaks about the Day of Judgment, not only an important event. (Ibn Kathir, 1995)

Additionally, the translation fails to capture the meaning that an Arabic native speaker would understand immediately. The word's literal meaning describes something falling from a height before becoming motionless. (Qutb, 2006)



This word is always employed to describe unpleasant circumstances and penalties; for instance, in another verse , "سأل سائل بعذاب واقع" means that "a questioner asked about a Penalty to befall". (Yusuf Ali's translation)

As a result, the Arabic word's underlying meaning in this context is punishment. Additionally, the phrase "comes to pass" is a poor translation of the word "وقعت" (waqaAAati), which in its authentic SL translation means "to occur" or "fall," and it denotes a prodigious event.( Al-Waseet Dictionary, p. 1050)

In the following Aya (verses), the word (اماني) is used as the plural of (امنية).

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

He refers to the translation of this line by ivory, which reads: "Some of them are illiterate and know the book only to say Amen to it."

Unless they are Jewish or Christian, no one will be allowed to enter the garden. They are only responding "Amen" to their leaders.

He claims that Irving mistook the letter (اماني) for the word "amen," which has an appreciative connotation. This exclamation is used at the conclusion of a prayer or hymn to express "so be it" or "may it be so," as in saying "Amen to that" meaning "I agree." Certainly, I concurred. (Translation and theory p. 2005)

The semantic loss in this verse indicates the reverence of one place, which is the eyes, while what is meant here is the reverence of the entire body. And God singled out the eye for reverence, because it is a trace of the humiliation of all humiliated and the glory of all who have dignity. The word (حُشِّنَا) denotes the reverence of the eye alone, while it denotes the reverence of the whole body, including the eyes. There are some translations that say (their eyes blink), and this is wrong. (Qutb, S. 2006)

One of the challenges in translating the Holy Qur'an is that some lexicons are unique to the Qur'an and have no English equivalents. For instance, the English language does not have a word that corresponds to the Qur'anic word تيمموا [tayammamoo1]. Therefore, its original meaning might be lost if this word were to be translated into English. (Khalaf & Yusoff, 2012)

## **3 Hypotheses**

### **3.1 Introduction**

For Muslims and non-Muslims around the world to understand the Divine message, the Quran must be translated into all human languages. The closest natural translation of the message from the source language into the target language, first in terms of meaning and then in terms of style, according to Robert Johnson. After all, translation is the act of facilitating communication between different languages and cultures.

One of the challenges in translating the Holy Qur'an is that some lexicons are unique to the Qur'an and have no English equivalents. Therefore, its original meaning can be lost if an attempt is made to translate such words into English. Both communicative and semantic approaches to translation have been proposed by Newmark (1988). By definition, communicative translation aims to give its audience an experience that is as similar to what the readers of the source language had. As closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the destination language will allow, semantic translation aims to replicate the exact context of the original. (Newmark 1988).

While communicative translation communicates effectively but may not be as exact as semantic translation, the latter is accurate but may not be as clear. Another issue is that some deviations and under translations exist as a result of failing to consult the Holy Qur'anic interpretations, a lack of knowledge of

Arabic linguistics, and an inability to decode and communicate the subtleties of polysemous words. (Abdul-Raof, 2004).

Arberry (1982) concedes the relevancy of the orthodox Muslim view that the Qur'an is untranslatable; the rhetoric, he believes, and rhythm of the Qur'an are so characteristic, so powerful, and so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendor of the original. (Arberry 1982)

In this study, a few passages from several Suras of the Glorious Quran that have parallels are examined in order to discuss this subject. The analysis employs the exegeses and how they are translated by Ali, Pickthall, and Arberry to examine the meaning(s) of comparable terms and explain their various syntactical and rhetorical purposes. The analyzed lexical elements are marked in bold, and their counterparts are highlighted in italics. The three translations are then contrasted with the meaning of the studied lexical items in the original Arabic text. The authenticity of the translations is then evaluated by citing eminent exegetes such as Ibn Katheer, Al-Tabari, Al-Suytui, and Al-Ghernaty, among others.

In the analysis process, the researcher tries to answer these questions:

1. How well did each of the three translators do in capturing the rhetorical significance and purposes of similarity in the verses they chose?
2. When translated into English, do repeated words or phrases lose part of their importance and artistic eloquence?

### 3.2 Word Order in Sentences Changes.

There are two sorts of sentences in Arabic: verbal and nominal. An explicit doer comes after the verb in a verbal statement. Then the direct or indirect object comes after the doer. The direct object follows the explicit doer if it is an attached pronoun. In nominal sentences, the predicate comes after the subject. The predicate can be a sentence, verbal or nominal, a genitive noun formation, or a word/word construction (singular).

The Quranic Arabic frequently switches the word order of phrases, which is a key component of the Quran's inimitable nature. Regarding sentence structure, it alludes to "bringing something forward and delaying the rest". In other words, the phrase construction is "abnormal" for a specific grammatical reason. It could serve a variety of purposes, such as emphasis, exclusivity, indicating order or quantity, etc. This particular explanation for the word order change mainly has to do with the passage or segment of Quranic verses' overall context. For instance, the direct object is mentioned after the verb in a typical verbal phrase. If the direct object is brought forward purposely before the verb, then something significant is occurring linguistically.

The following verse (5) of Surah Al-Fatiha (The Opening), where the shift is made from the third to the second person, is an excellent example that highlights this shifting and can be used to examine the degree to which the translators are successful in transferring reference-switching in the Qur'an to the target language:

قوله تعالى: {إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ}

## Translations

(Thee do we worship, and Thee aid we seek.) Ali

(Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.) (1:5) Pickthall

(Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for 1000.) Arberry

When the servant speaks of Allah (SWT), Who is deserving of praise, and the excellent attributes expressed, his imagination conjures up this magnificent Creator who is deserving of praise, of complete devotion to Him, and whose assistance should be sought in crucial situations, according to Zamakhshar, who is frequently quoted. The servant then addresses this distinguished Lord directly, saying, "You alone do we worship." This direct address, following the introduction that shows He is truly deserving of adoration, is more demonstrative of the fact that He is being worshipped for His distinction.

The servant is about to beg Him to "Guide us to the straight path," so it might also be added that the change to the second person is significant here. (Al-Fatiha, verse 6) The third person was appropriate at the beginning of the book of Tawhd to designate the Lord Who should be honored and served. No pronoun of any type would have been appropriate in this context, and as was stated, in Islam, praise is most appropriately directed toward the name Allah.

Honoring by addressing is observed in such examples as those speaking of the blessed in Paradise: 'Happy in what their Lord has given them . . . "Eat and drink in health as a reward for what you need to do "' (Q. 52:18 – 19). The

address here is announced without an introduction such as 'it will be said to them' – a feature of Qur'ānic style known as *hadhf al-qawl*(deletion of speech) which gives a statement immediate and dramatic effect.

In this stanza, the direct object is put before its corresponding verb to serve an exclusive purpose. In fact, the significance of the Ayah would drastically change if this weren't happening. Instead, it would read, "We worship you and ask for your assistance." This would not be consistent with the concept of "you alone" and would even go against the fundamentals of Tawhid (monotheism), as the majority of polytheists who follow "Shirk" (diversity of gods) also worship and pray to other gods in addition to Allah.

### **3.3 Switching Pronoun References (Iltifat)**

The Quran's use of [Iltifat], which means "turning," to transition narrative tenses is another lovely feature. When addressing a focused audience, there may occasionally be an abrupt change in topic, admonition, mention of the audience's faults and wrongdoings, or mistakes, etc. This change in pronouns mostly affects the first, second, and third persons, which are the most prevalent and are typically broken down into six categories. Changes in number, between singular, dual, and plural forms, addressee changes, verb tenses, case markers, and the use of nouns in place of pronouns are all examples. This change in the narrative is a rhetorical device that strengthens and strengthens the message of the story. The Quran's translators should now

be aware of these narrative shifts and make the appropriate translation decisions to convey their intended meanings.

An excellent example that highlights this shifting is found in Sura Al-Baqara (The Cow), verse (196), where the shift is made from the second person (plural) to third person (singular) to second person (plural) to third person (plural). This shift is done to examine the extent to which the translators are successful in transferring reference-switching in the Qur'an to the target language.

فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَتَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ ۚ فَمَنْ لَّمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامٌ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ  
وَسَبْعَةَ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ ۚ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ۚ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ لَّمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلَهُ حَاضِرِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ  
وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ (196)

### Translations:

-(...And when you are in peaceful conditions (again), if any one wishes to continue the 'umra on to the hajj, He must make an offering, such as he can afford, but if he cannot afford it, He should fast three days during the hajj and seven days on his return, Making ten days in all. This is for those whose household is not in (the precincts of) the Sacred Mosque. And fear Allah, and know that Allah is strict in punishment.) (2:196) Ali

-(....And if ye are in safety, then whosoever contenteth himself with the Visit for the Pilgrimage (shall give) such gifts as can be had with ease. And whosoever cannot find (such gifts, then a fast of three days while on the



pilgrimage, and of seven when ye have returned; that is, ten in all. That is for him whose folk are not present at the Inviolable Place of Worship. Observe your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is severe in punishment. (2:196)

Pickthall

(...When you are secure, then whosoever enjoys the Visitation until the Pilgrimage, let his offering be such as may be feasible; or if he finds none, then a fast of three days in the Pilgrimage, and of seven when you return, that is ten completely; that is for him whose family are not present at the Holy Mosque. And fear God, and know that God is terrible in retribution)(2:196)

Arberry

## **Homonymy**

Since not all pairs of similar words indicate deliberate homonymy or a hidden desire to produce a homonymic effect in order to increase reader awareness and the text's aesthetic value, the phrase "two similar words with different meaning" is used. Homonymous words that cause a translation issue can be seen in the passage "Ar Rum, verse 55" that follows.

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ كَذَلِكَ كَانُوا يُؤْفَكُونَ (55)

## **Translation**

(On the Day that the Hour (of Reckoning) will be established, the transgressors will swear that they tarried not but an hour: thus were they used

to being deluded!) Ali (And on the day when the Hour riseth the guilty will vow that they did tarry but an hour – thus were they ever deceived.) Pickthall (Upon the day when the Hour is come, the sinners shall swear they have not tarried above an hour; so they were perverted.) Arberry

The words (الساعة) and (ساعة) in this Glorious verse are where the homonymic phrase is found. (الساعة) is interpreted as "the Day of Judgment" by Al-Sabouni (2004, 444) and as "the Day of Resurrection" by Al-Tabari (1987, 37).

Picktall and Arberry transcribed the word (الساعة) as "the Hour" by capitalizing it, maybe to show that the first word "Hour" has a different meaning from the next one, but they don't offer any further explanation. Ali, on the other hand, adopts the exact same translation—"the Hour"—but he added (of Reckoning) in parentheses to make it clear that (الساعة) refers to the Judgment hour. In the footnote (1992,1023)

When the equilibrium is ultimately restored, all apparent inequities will be eliminated, making the strong appear to oppress the weak and vice versa. That will occur in due course, in fact so swiftly that the Transgressors will be caught off guard. They were duped into believing that what they saw to be their victory or their freedom to live their lives as they pleased was actually just a "Term Appointed" during which they may make amends and seek Allah's Mercy. If they fail to do this, they will face the penalties they believed they had avoided or defied.

## Chapter four

The examination of the Holy Quran's lost translation has been the main subject of this work. In order to examine the various linguistic and rhetorical interpretations those repeated verses hold, the study has also paid particular attention to verbal similarities in the Quran. The goal of this investigation is to shed light on the translation losses experienced by translators that affect the syntactical and rhetorical meanings of similar words, as well as the degree to which these various types of losses result in partial or complete semantic loss.

The study's conclusions showed that translation errors, non-equivalence issues, and cultural gaps cause meaning shifts in words with metonymic and homonomic roots, syntactic order, and reference switching. The Qur'anic language has its own lexicons that are culturally constrained. In light of this, translators have employed a variety of translation techniques, including literal translation and communicative or semantic translation. However, the Holy Qur'an cannot be translated literally, and the communicative approach results in meaning loss. Therefore, a literal translation technique is not appropriate. In order to make translations with the fewest errors possible, it was advised adopting the exegetical translation method, which is based on exegesis books and helps a translator achieve an accurate understanding of the text. The Holy Qur'an should also be translated by a group of scholars who are experts in the various fields of knowledge related to the Holy Qur'an and who are fluent in

both the Arabic language used for the original Arabic text (SL) and the language used for translation (TL) for non-native English speakers.

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