



Translating Words Conveying a Sense of Fear in the Holy Qur'an

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Abstract

The Holy Qur'an encompasses various words that convey a sense of fear, such as خوف (xawf), خشية (xašyah), رعب (ruʿb), and فزع (fazaʿ). Due to the richness of near-synonyms within the text, translating words associated with fear poses a significant challenge for translators. This research paper aims to explore how translators approach the translation of fear-related words in the Holy Qur'an, taking into account their overlapping denotations and connotations. Specifically, it examines the differences in translation choices for fear-related words within the same verse by different translators. The study focuses on four English translations of the Holy Qur'an: 1. A New Translation by Abdel Haleem (2008); 2. The Koran Interpreted by Arberry (1983); 3. The Qur'an by Irving (1985); 4. The Noble Qur'an: English Translation of The Meanings and Commentary by Hilali and Khan (1984). These translations were selected based the following criteria: the translators' native language (Arabic or non-Arabic), their reputation and acceptance among English-speaking audiences, and their recognition by Muslim scholars. To investigate the semantic features of fear-related words in the Holy Qur'an, the study consults four Qur'an exegeses: al-Zamaxšarī (2009), Ibn Kaṭīr (1983), al-Tabarī (2001), and al-Šawkānī (2007). These exegeses provide insights into the intended meanings and nuances of fear-related words. Additionally, the study explores the connotative and denotative meanings of selected fear-related words in the Arabic language, relying on Arabic lexicons such as Lisan al-ʿArab by Ibn Maṣūn (1956) and Al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qurʾān al-Karīm by al-Muṣṭafawī (1995). The analysis involves comparing and contrasting the translations of selected fear-related words to assess their appropriateness in conveying the intended meanings. The findings reveal that translators often fail to distinguish between the nuanced differences of fear-related words in certain verses of the Holy Qur'an. They struggle to accurately reflect the semantic distinctions between the selected Arabic words that convey the general sense of fear. Furthermore, inconsistencies arise in how translators render the same word in different contexts, leading to confusion and potential loss of meaning in the target texts.

Keywords: Qur'an; Qur'an Translation; Near-Synonyms; Connotative Meaning; Denotative Meaning; Exegeses, ST, TT, SL, TL, OED.

1. Introduction

According to Bell translation fundamentally aims to transform "a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language retaining, as far as possible, the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the original text" [11]. The translation of the Holy Qur'an into different languages, especially English, has been and still is an issue of importance to translators from different religions and backgrounds. However, the Holy Qur'an is admired and respected among all Muslims because it is the speech of Allah and the foundation and guidance of the Islamic religion. Accordingly, the untranslatability of the Holy Qur'an is an issue of debate which arises from its sensitivity and unique linguistic style. Thus, while translation in general is a complex process of rendering a text from one language into another which involves transferring the meaning, the style, and the tone from the ST into the TT, the complexity of this process become even greater in translating the Holy Qur'an especially when dealing with near-synonyms. Jackson questions the translator's ability to produce a perfect translation of the Holy Qur'an taking into consideration its rhetorical devices, simile, paronomasia, and syntactic structure [12]. Irving agrees on the untranslatability of the Holy Qur'an highlighting that any accurate rendering of the Holy Qur'an is considered as a commentary in the TL rather than a translation [3]. So, the translator's role in translating the Holy Qur'an is limited to transferring the meaning of the Holy Qur'anic verses into another language. On the other hand, Ali argues that the need for translating the Holy Qur'an cannot be overlooked and that Holy Qur'an translation is a moral duty as cited in Alduhaim [13]. Unlike Ali, Fatani believes that translating the Holy Qur'an is an unachievable task because of its semantic uniqueness [14] (p.657).

Bauer presents a list of the frequency of the common words describing emotions in the Holy Qur'an according to the word's root from most to least frequent as follows:

Muṣṭafawī [10]. Then, it analyses and compares the translations of the selected words to examine whether they convey appropriate renderings.

4. Results

4.1 Assessing the quality of the translations of words for ‘fear’: خوف - *xawf*, رعب - *ruʿb*, and فزع - *fazaʿ*

The meaning of the word خوف (*xawf*) and its derived forms according to al-Muṣṭafawī is “حالة تأثر تعالی: ولا تخف إنك من “صد الأمن، قوله: “a state of disorder and expectation of future harm which eliminates security” [10] (p.161). Additionally, he highlights that it is: “the opposite of security. God Almighty says: and fear not. Indeed, you are of the secure, after their fear, security, and made them safe, [saving them] from fear.” [10] (p.161). On the other hand, the word رعب (*ruʿb*) and its derived forms is defined according to al-Muṣṭafawī [10] as, “حالة استيلاء خوف على القلب يسلب الأمن بالكلية”, “a state of fear dominating the heart and completely precluding the notion of security” [10] (p.167). Finally, فزع (*fazaʿ*) according to al-Muṣṭafawī [10] (P.88) is “اصلان صحيحان: أحدهما الذعر والأخر الإغاثة” “two essential elements: panic and relief”.

Table 1 the translations of خوف (*xawf*), رعب (*ruʿb*), and فزع (*fazaʿ*).

| Translator | Translations offered | | |
|--------------|---|--|--|
| | خوف - <i>xawf</i> | رعب - <i>ruʿb</i> | فزع - <i>fazaʿ</i> |
| ST | { إِثْمًا ذَلِكُمْ أَنْتُمْ أَنْتُمْ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُوا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ } (3:175) | { وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَلَمُلِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعبًا } (18:18) | { إِذْ تَخَلَّوْا عَلَى دَاوُدَ فَقَزَعَ مِنْهُمْ قُلُوبًا لَا تَخَفَتْ خَصْمَانِ بَعْضُ تَعَصُّوا عَلَى بَعْضٍ فَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُمُ الْبَيْنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تُسْطِطُوا وَهَدَيْنَا إِلَى سَوَاءٍ كَمِيزًا طَيِّبًا } (38:22) |
| Abdel-Haleem | It is Satan who urges you to fear his followers; do not fear them, but fear Me, if you are true believers. | You would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance. If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them | When they reached David, he took fright, but they said, 'Do not be afraid. We are two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other: judge between us fairly- do not be unjust- and guide us to the right path. |
| Irving | That was only Satan who intimidated his adherents. Do not fear them and [instead] fear Me, if you are believers! | You would reckon they were awake, while they [really] lay there asleep. We turned them over on the right and on the left, while their dog lay stretched out with his forepaws over the threshold. If you had chanced upon them, you would have been filled with awe of them! | Thus they burst in upon David so he was startled by them. They said: 'Don't be afraid: [we are] two litigants, one of whom has injured the other, so judge correctly between us and do not act too stern. Guide us along the Level Road. |
| Arberry | That is Satan frightening his friends, therefore do not fear them; but fear you Me, if you are believers | Thou wouldst have thought them awake, as they lay sleeping, while We turned them now to the right, now to the left, and their dog 'stretching its paws on the threshold. Hadst thou observed them surely thou wouldst have turned thy back on them in flight, and been filled with terror of them | when they entered upon David, and he took fright at them; and they said, 'Fear not; two disputants we are -- one of us has injured the other; so judge between us justly, and transgress not, and guide us to the right path. |
| Hilali-Khan | It is only Shaitan (Satan) that suggests to you the fear of his Auliya (supporters and friends (polytheists, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah and in His Messenger, Muhammad SAW)), so fear them not, but fear Me, if you are (true) believers. | And you would have thought them awake, while they were asleep. And We turned them on their right and on their left sides, and their dog stretching forth his two forelegs at the entrance (of the Cave or in the space near to the entrance of the Cave (as a guard at the gate)). Had you looked at them, you would certainly have turned back from them in flight, and would certainly have been filled with awe of them | When they entered in upon Dawood (David), he was terrified of them, they said: "Fear not! (We are) two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other, therefore judge between us with truth, and treat us not with injustice, and guide us to the Right Way |

The analysis of various translations of the word خوف (*xawf*) ('fear') and its derived forms in verse 3:175 of the Holy Qur'an reveals significant differences between the selected translations. Arberry, and Irving emphasize the nuances of يُخَوِّفُ (*yuxawwifu*) ('he frightens'), تَخَافُوهُمْ (*taxāfū-hum*) ('do not fear them'), and خَافُونَ (*xāfū-ni*) ('fear me'), whereas Abdel-Haleem and Hilali and Khan employ the term 'fear' in their translations of these words. However, Abdel-Haleem and Hilali and Khan also include 'suggests' and 'urges' to capture the intended meaning of يُخَوِّفُ (*yuxawwifu*), despite using 'fear' in translating يُخَوِّفُ (*yuxawwifu*), تَخَافُوهُمْ (*taxāfū-hum*), and خَافُونَ (*xāfū-ni*), which is somewhat confusing. Abdel-Haleem considers رُعبًا (*ruʿb*), يُخَوِّفُ (*yuxawwifu*), تَخَافُوهُمْ (*taxāfū-hum*), and خَافُونَ (*xāfū-ni*) as involving absolute synonyms in terms of their core 'fear' meaning and fails to reflect the nuances of meaning of خوف (*xawf*) and رعب (*ruʿb*) and their derived forms. In contrast, Irving and Hilali and Khan agree on the translation of رعب (*ruʿb*), both rendering it as "filled with awe" while Arberry translates it as "filled with terror". It is noteworthy that all translators add "filled with" to their translations, reflecting the definition of 'dominating the heart' provided by al-Muṣṭafawī [10]. Arberry's translation effectively conveys the intended meaning of رعب (*ruʿb*) by using 'terror' which is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as "The state of being terrified or extremely frightened; intense fear or dread". Consequently, Arberry's translation is to be considered the most appropriate of the three translations. Regarding the translation of the derived forms of فزع (*fazaʿ*), translators show differences in their choices, as shown in the table above. Hilali and Khan translate فَزَعًا (*fa-faziʿa*) as "was terrified", which aligns with the OED definition of terrify: "to make (a person or animal) very afraid; to fill with terror, to frighten or alarm greatly". Based on this semantic analysis, Hilali and Khan's translation can be



considered as the most appropriate, as it conveys the meaning of the source text (ST). Irving's translation, "startled", reflects the meaning of فَزَعٌ (*fa-faziʿa*), in that 'startle' is defined in the OED as: "to feel sudden astonishment or alarm; to take fright". Finally, Abdel-Haleem and Arberry agree in translating فَزَعٌ (*fa-faziʿa*) as "took fright", where 'fright', according to the OED means "sudden fear, violent terror, alarm". All translations successfully capture the meaning of فَزَعٌ (*fa-faziʿa*). Nevertheless, Hilali and Khan's and Irving's translations are thought to be the most appropriate based on consultation of the selected exegeses, as both convey the precise meaning of فَزَعٌ (*fa-faziʿa*) as understood within the context of the Holy Qur'an.

5. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that there are difficulties in translating near-synonyms found in the Holy Qur'an, when dealing with words that convey a sense of fear. This is because these words share a general meaning of fear but differ in their precise semantic features and the specific meaning they convey. The study concludes that the selected translators did not successfully translate all the near-synonyms with these roots. This could be attributed to their inability to effectively convey the nuanced differences between the near-synonyms or their lack of understanding of the precise semantic features of each term. Additionally, the translators may have neglected to consult exegeses and Arabic lexicons, which could have provided valuable insights for accurate translation.

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