Transferring POLYSEMIC Words from Arabic into English: A comparative Study of Some Samples from the Holy Quran

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INTRODUCTION

An ambiguity of lexical words causes a vital problem in both semantic and translation. Words consider ambiguous where they have more than one meaning or senses. Quiroge-claire (2003) explained that “Something is ambiguous when it can be understood in two or more possible senses or ways. If the ambiguity is in a single word, it is called lexical ambiguity. In a sentence or clause, it is structural ambiguity.” The cause of lexical ambiguity is various among some relations in semantic such as polysemy, homonymy, hyponymy and synonymy. Polysemy is one reasons of lexical ambiguity. According to Taylor (1995, p. 99) polysemy means that the association of two or more related senses with a single linguistic form. Palmer (1996, p. 100) described polysemy as a case in which the same word may have a set of different meanings. This phenomenon is existence in all natural languages. Moreover, Miyuki outlined that lexical word obtains its polysemic sense from numerous reasons such as: a shift in application, figurative of language, homonymic reinterpreted, borrowing from foreign languages, metaphorical transfer and metonymic transfer.

Translators and linguists have long been interested in the polysemy because of the disputed cases it emerges for both theories of semantic and translation. In translation, one of the crucial problems of the lexical semantic is that the perceived meaning of most words can vary from one context to another. Our main concern in this paper is the translating polysemy in the Holy Quran, which involved many polysemic words. The Holy Quran is one of the religious texts which conveying its meaning into other languages is very sensitive. So translators need to be aware that most of the words do not have only core meaning but also a contextual meaning, i.e. words gain new meanings from the context where they are used. Polysemy in the Quran known in the science of the Quran as (al-wijäh wa al-nażār – multiple meanings and senses). The most puzzling question in translating the polysemy in the Quran is how to choose and convey the meaning of the polysemic words which have more than one contextual sense.

Definition of Polysemy:

The complicated relations between meanings and words were attracted many linguists and scholars. Polysemy is one of the semantic relations between words that draw heavily on lexicology, syntax and translation. The word polysemy derived from Greek word (polysema) which (poly) means – many- and (sema) means – having many sense. According to Blank (1999) the origin of the term polysemy introduced first time in linguistic by Michel Bréal. He mentioned that polysemy occurs when a word denotes a new sense together with the old one. Ullman (1957, p. 117) defines polysemy as “one word can have more than one sense”. For Crystal (1980, p. 274) polysemy is a term used in semantic analysis to refer to a lexical item which has a range of
different meaning. Moreover, Penam (1982, p.108) argues that polysemy is the phenomenon that two or more identical forms have different but related meanings. Yule (1987, p. 97) also points out that polysemy is a case in which one form (written or spoken) has meanings which are all related by extension. However, Kharma & Hajaj (1989, p. 64) explain that polysemy is closely connected to homonymy and it occurs when a word has more than one meaning.

**Polysemy and homonymy:**

It is a bit difficult to distinguish between homonymy and polysemy. Falkum (2011, p. 16) stated that in polysemy, the different senses of a single lexical item are seen as being related in some non-trivial way, whereas in homonymy, the multiple encoding is a matter of historical accident. Furthermore, Lyons (1977, p. 550) differentiated between polysemy and homonymy as; if two identical forms have different origins, i.e., "belong to different etymologies", they are treated as homonyms, while if they belong to the same etymology they are treated as polysemic. For instance: the word “bank” in the following sentences consider as homonymy because there is no etymology relation between the two words: "John went to the bank" and "Jorge walked on the bank", the word “bank” means ('financial institution', ‘edge of river’) respectively. However, the word “bank” may consider polysemic if it refer to (specific building or financial institution), because the two meaning have a relation between them.

**Polysemy in Arabic and Holly Quran:**

Arabic language is a rich and full of the concepts which make it unique. Polysemy is a characteristic of all languages which based on the principle of metaphor where words can be used in new conceptual meanings (Marzari, 2006, p. 15). In Arabic the case that words have multiple senses called (al-Ishtīrāk al-Lafḍī). Al-Munjīd (1999, p. 15) argues that polysemy is a common linguistic phenomenon in all natural languages. He considers polysemy as multiplicity of meaning which one word has different meanings. Numerous books and dictionaries have been written on the polysemic words (al-Ishtīrāk al-Lafḍī) in Arabic. The most will know book in polysemy in Arabic was written by Ali Ibn al-Hassan al-Hanāyy, who called ( Kīrī' al-Ḥamalī) “ al-Munjīd fimā itafaq Laṣfī wa Alkhtalaf Ma'nah- المنجج فيما أتفق للغة وختلف معناه”. This book includes approximately 900 polysemic words (Ma’tūq, 2012). Another book involves polysemic words is for Ibn Salam “al-Ajnīs mīn kalām al-ʾArab wa ma ṣaḥīhah fi al-Lafḍī wa ikhtalafī fī al-Ma’na - الأعمال من قطر العربية، وما صحيح في اللفظ والاختلاف في المعنى”. In addition, there are three famous books regard polysemy in Arabic, which have the same title (Ma Ąṭīfaq Laṣfī wa Alkhtalaf Ma’nah) written by three different authors, al-Asma’ī, Ibn al-Shajary and abū al-A’mithal. As mentioned above, there are many words in Arabic can interpreted into more than one meaning according to the context of the text, so that it cannot translated into English using the core meaning.

By the same token, the verb “لُعِم” (ya’mal) has multiple meanings such as:

a) "لُعِم خيرًا" He did rightness.
b) "لُعِم بالقانون" He applied the law.
c) "لُعِم على نثر الكتب" He tried to publish the book.

So here one word in Arabic it can be translated into different words in English, because the context of the text is not same. The word ( لُعَم ) in the above sentences, if they translated literary they become meaningless, because the intended meaning various in the three sentences.

In the Holly Quran there are lots of work have been done in the polysemy. Abdussalam (2001, p. 66) emphasis that multiplicity of meaning of words in the Quranic expressions received adequate attention of Muslim scholars under the science “al-Asbāb wa al-Naẓārīr or al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓārīr,” i.e. the study of Quranic polysemic senses and used. There are many scholars in the science of the Quran interested in polysemy in the Quran. The Muslim scholars, in their books regard polysemy in the Quran; they collected the polysemic words in the Quran and stated its senses then give examples of each sense from the verses in the Quran. Al-Ďāmaghānī, one of the scholars in the science of the Quran, indicated that there are more than 500 polysemic words in the Holly Quran, whereas, al-Nisābūrī offered 540 entries of polysemic words (Abdussalam, 2008, p. 27). Nowadays, it can be found many books written in the polysemy in the Holly Quran such as:

i. al-ʿAshbāb wa al-Naṭāriʿ fī al-Maṣāfīl al-Balkhy.
v. **Al-Wi'yūḥ wi al-Nadārī fi al-Qurān al-Karīm** for al-Dāmaghānī

Recently Abdussalam (2008) wrote a book “Concordance of Qur'ānic polysemy” regard polysemy in the Quran. He identified at least 470 polysemic words in the Quran. For more illustrating, consider the word “كتاب” (kitab – book) in the Holly Quran have nine polysemic senses such as: a- writing, b- Record, c- Preserved tablets, d- Women period (menstruation), e- The Quran and f- The Bible.

**Methodology:**

The aim of this paper is to shed light on translating polysemy in the Holy Quran. The study attempts to explain and determine the strategies that the translators follow in translating polysemy in the Holy Quran. The researcher will not examine all the polysemic words in the Quran. He will be choose three polysemic words in the Holy Quran as a sample (Kiswah- ثياب، ثياب – ثياب, Thīyāb, libās – لباس، لباس and will not study all the senses of these words, just choose some polysemic senses as samples. Moreover, the study will just choose three translations of the Quran: Yusuf Ali’s translation in1934, Arberry’s translation in 1964, Abdel Haleem’s translation in 2004, then it will conduct a comparative study to compare how translators convey polysemy in the Quran. The study will consult two books in the polysemy of the Holly Quran to determine the polysemic sense of the words, which are:

a. **Al-Dāmaghānī (Qāmūs al-qūrān aw Aslāh al-Wi’yūḥ wa al-Nāzaār fī al-qūrān al-karīm –Dictionary of the Quran; or repairing the polysemy and its sense in the Glorious Quran, 1983).**

b. **Abdussalam, Ahmad Shehu (Concordance of Qur’ānic polysemy, 2008).**

To interpret the intended meaning of the Quranic verses the study will depend on two commentaries of the Holy Quran, Tafsīr al-Tabari, Jām’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurān, 1983, and Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Mukhtasār Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, 1996). The procedures of analyzing the data will divide into two stages. Firstly, determining the situational context of the verses and identify the polysemic sense to make clear all the contextual meanings of the source text. Secondly, review the three chosen translations to investigate how far they convey the intended meaning of the polysemic sense.

**Analyzing the Samples:**

The study will not analyze all the polysemic senses of the three chosen words. It will just choose seven polysemic meaning for them which carrying ambiguous and confusing meaning for translators.

1. **The word لباس (libās – clothe):**

According to al-Dāmaghānī (1983) and Abdussalam (2008) this word has four meanings. We just examine three of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Yusuf Ali’s translation</th>
<th>Arberry’s translation</th>
<th>Abdel Haleem’s translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>لباس (libās – clothe)</td>
<td>Ye People of the Book! Why do ye clothe Truth with falsehood, and conceal the Truth, while ye have knowledge?</td>
<td>People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal the truth and that wittingly?</td>
<td>People of the Book, why do you mix truth with falsehood? Why do you hide the truth when you recognize it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**a. Situational Context:**

In this verse Almighty God inquiry the people of Torah and Bible, why you mix or mingle the truth with falsehood, in spite of, you recognise the differentiations between them. This verse revealed when some of Christian and Jewish people intended to belief of what revealed to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in the morning and disbelief of him in the night. Al-Tabari indicated that the word (tālbasūn - لباس) means mix and mingles between truth and falsehood. According to the two commentators of the Quran and according to al-Dāmaghānī and Abdussalam the word (tālbasūn - لباس) in the verse has not refer to the core meaning (clothe or wear). It has a polysemic sense which refers to mix something with other.

**b. Review of Renditions:**

Yusuf Ali translate the word (tālbasūn - لباس) as (ye clothe). He applies literal translation to convey the polysemic word and he just convey the referential meaning of the word (yālbas – لباس). He misunderstands the extended meaning of the word. However, Arberry rendered the word (tālbasūn - لباس) as (confound). He did not choose the right word to express about the polysemic sense of the word. According to Oxford and Merriam Webster dictionaries the word (confound) means that someone confused from things which already mixed. The context of the word (confound) in English is different with the meaning of (tālbasūn - لباس) in the original text. It means that the person finds himself in front of very confused and mixed things, so he did not have a power for mixing that things. While, the word (tālbasūn - لباس) means that the person intentionally mixes the things...
together. On the other hand, Abdell-Haleem conveyed the word (tālbasūn - تلبسون) as (you mix) and it seems the appropriate translation of the polysemic sense of this word.

1. **Situation Context:**
   
   According to Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathîr commentaries, this verse regards that a Muslim in night of Ramadan (the fast month) can intercourse with his wife until the dawn time. Moreover, a man cannot relax and remove the fatigue without his wife and the woman does so. The word لباس (لباس - clothe) in the verse did not refer to the primary meaning of the word. It refer to the polysemic meaning that a man can repose with his wife, so they become as a cover to keep all the relations between them secrete in the home.

   **Review of Renditions:**
   
   Translations Yusuf Ali and Arberry did not render the actual meaning of the word لباس – clothe in the verse. Both of them used literal translation, which did not work here to convey the polysemic sense. The words (garments and vestment) did not refer the intended meaning of the word, because both of the words refer to the type of clothe and did not refer to situational context of the verse. Abdel Haleem translated the word لباس – clothe as (close) as garments. He tries to explain the meaning for the target audiences so he used the (close) to explain the relation between a man and his wife. However, he still did not convey the entire situational context for the target reader, it is better to use the words (repose or tranquillity). The verse may better to translate as (They are your repose and you are their repose).

2. **The word لبس (yâksū – clothe)**
   
   It has one polysemic meaning besides its primary meaning.

2.1 **Situation Context:**
   
   Almighty God talks to the Children of Adam that he sent down to them clothes to cover their shame and the best things are the good deeds, this a context of the verse. The word لباس (لباس – clothe) in the verse has a polysemic sense which differs from core meaning. It does not refer to the clothes; this is what al-Tabari confirmed. It refers to righteous deeds or faith which the best for all Muslims.

   **Review of Renditions:**
   
   All the three translations refer to some kinds of clothes to convey the word لبس – لباس in the verse. Yusuf Ali rendered the word as (raiment of righteousness), Arberry conveyed as (garment of godfearing) and Abdell-Haleem translated as (garment of God-consciousness). The words (raiment and garment) refer to clothes which means all translators use literal translation which not suitable to convey the polysemic sense of the word. By using those words, the target reader may misunderstand the context of the verse. The appropriate translation, according to Abdussalam (2008), which may convey the polysemic sense, is (But the righteousness deeds, that is the best).
a. **Situational Context:**

The verse talking about the phases of creates the human. It refers that after the stage of created the bones then cover them by flesh. Al-Tabari interpreted the verse as after Almighty God created the bones he covers it by flesh. While Ibn Kathîr explained the verse as after created the bones covering them by flesh to strengthen them.

b. **Review of Renditions:**

Yusuf Ali translated the phrase (فَ َٓهِّرْ) as (clothed the bones), whereas Arberry conveyed as (garmented the bones) and Abdell-Haleem rendered as (clothed those bones). All the three translations did not fully convey all situations and the sense of the verse. The word (كُسْرُونَ كَاسِمَ) did not refer to the clothes but it refers to cover or hide something. It is important to interpret this verse to refer to the previous verses to understand all the situations. This verse and the previous verses talking about the stages of create the human, so after creating the bones it covering with flesh not clothing, which is not give sense for the readers. The three translators adopting the literal translation strategy to convey the verse to be closer with the source text but this did not serve the aim of communicate translation.

3. **The word ثياب (Thîyâb – clothes):**

The word (Thîyâb – clothes) has four polysemic meanings according to al-Dâmaghînî (1983) and Abdussalam (2008). We will examine one polysemic meaning which seems vague for translator.

3.1 The word ثياب (Thîyâb – clothes) means heart as in the verse (74:4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The word ثياب (Thîyâb – clothes) means heart.</th>
<th>Yusuf Ali’s translation</th>
<th>Arberry’s translation</th>
<th>Abdel Haleem’s translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And thy garments keep free from stain!</td>
<td>Cleanse yourself.</td>
<td>thy robes purify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. **Situational Context:**

The meaning of the verse according to the interpretations of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathîr is to clean yourself and heart from sins. It is not specifically refer to the clothes, but part of purity is to clean the clothes. Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathîr indicated that in Arabic literature and language, it can be say ‘شخص نقي الثياب’ (shakhs naqî al-thîyâb – a person with pure clothes) to refer to the person who did not commit any sins.

b. **Review of Renditions:**

As can be seen Yusuf Ali and Arberry translated the word ثياب (Thîyâb – clothes) as (garments – robes) respectively. Arberry and Yusuf Ali’s choice is not accurate, because they did not convey fully the intended meaning of the phrase. The reader understands from their translations that should be clean your clothes, which is not intended in the original text. On the other hand, Abdel Haleem conveyed the verse as (cleanse yourself) which seems to be intelligible for the target reader, but still there is some part of the meaning not fully conveyed. It may understand from Abdel Haleem’s translation ‘cleanse yourself from dirty’, so that it still need to add some explanations to convey the intended meaning of the polysemic word (Thîyâb – clothes). It will be more intelligible of he added that (cleanse yourself from sins or guilt). However, it will be more appropriate and comprehensive of it translated as (Keep yourself and heart free from sins and stain).

Results of the Analysis:

It is clear from the analysis that the polysemy is one of the major obstacles which confronting the translators of the Holly Quran. Translators of the Holly Quran did not adopt workable strategies to overcome the problem of translate polysemic words. The result of this study show that most samples under the study translated literary. Yusuf Ali and Arberry adopted literal translation to translate most of the samples, whereas in some cases Abdel Haleem uses communicative or paraphrase translation strategies to convey the polysemic senses in the Quran. A possible explanation for adopting literal translation might be to imitate the style and form of the original text. Furthermore, it noticed that not all the three translators covered all the word senses in their translations of the samples. However, the more significant finding which emerges from this study is that literal translation strategy was not the suitable method to render the polysemic senses of the verses in the Holy Quran. This study observed that the translators, under the study, did not depend on the sound knowledge in the science of the Holly Quran and numerous interpretations to grasp the intended meanings of the verses precisely. Additionally, the translators seem that unaware of that many words in the Holly Quran could be interpreted in different way according to the given context.

Conclusion:

It safe to assume that translation of the Quran is a very daunting task. It needs special skill in various fields to overcome this task. There are many ambiguous words have multiple senses which need from translators to
increase their offers to grasp them and convey them in a suitable ways to target readers. To conclude the debate, the problem of polysemy in translation still needs elaborated studies to explain all the boundaries of the problem and suggested solutions to solve it. In translating the Holly Quran, translators should establish or develop workable method to overcome the problem of polysemy in Quran.

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