LINGUISTIC COMPLEXITY OF ARABIC LANGUAGE: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF ANTONYMOUS HOMONYMS IN THE HOLY QUR'ĀN.

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ABSTRACT

Homonymy, is one of the two main sub-divisions of lexical ambiguity that represents the complex nature of form and context of the Qur'anic Arabic which presents a challenge in the translation process. Since Qur'anic discourse abounds with homonymic expressions whose meaning is derived from the context, the translators of the Qur'an should undertake a demanding task decoding the intended meanings. The present paper aims at clarifying some linguistic complexities in some verses of the Qur'ān which may pose difficulty to translators of the holy book most especially those who are not familiar with antonymous homonyms in Arabic language. The reason is that antonymous homonyms are special features of the Qurʾanic Arabic language. It may be viewed as one of the stylistic feature of the Qur'an. Therefore, classification of these linguistic complexity is offered and the samples of these classifications from the Holy Qur'ān are mentioned in relation to antonymous homonyms. Samples of translated Qur'an are compared in

order to ascertain the qualities of translations and English translation strategies of the stated verses.

BACKGROUND

The first step toward the selection of appropriate equivalents of the source language (SL) text items in the process of translation is the 'decoding' stage (Karimi, 2006). Among the variety of problematic issues that a translator may face in fulfilling the stage of successful decoding are ambiguous lexical items which cover two or more pragmatic interpretations where only one has been intended. "Lexical ambiguity is not a homogeneous phenomenon, it is rather subdivided into two distinct types, namely homonymy and polysemy" (Rasekh, 2012). Homonymy, which is the focus of the present study, is thought to be one of the linguistic phenomena giving rise to misinterpretation of the source text. As far as Qur'anic discourse with its abundant homonymous expressions is concerned, the translator would undoubtedly face obstacles. One of these obstacles is observed in the translation of lexical items of antonymous homonyms.

Translating a text into another language may not be an easy task. Due to the differences and complexities of languages, a comprehensive knowledge of the two languages is difficult to be obtained on the part of the translator. One of the linguistic complexities that makes the translation a tough task is linguistic ambiguity. Ambiguity is an issue that makes problems for the translator. It can both be in the source text itself or it may occur in the translated text. Sometimes, a text is ambiguous. So, the translator cannot get the meaning across and consequently translates that text ambiguously. At times, source texts may not be ambiguous, but since the translator has got the point mistakenly, s/he produces an ambiguous translation. To produce unambiguous translations,

the translators should consider the type of the text they are translating. Because of the existence of different types of texts, there may be different types of translations, each one enjoying its own characteristics; for instance, for literary or religious texts there are literary or religious translations. A literary or religious translator must be fully aware, of literary or religious genres and texts. So, each text should be translated according to its own specifications. Translating religious texts is very delicate and important, since such kinds of texts have to do with people's ideologies and beliefs. That is why the translator of such texts should try to produce as more appropriate translation as possible. As a religious text, the Holy Qur'ān enjoys a complicated text. Since the verses of the Holy Qur'ān are revealed in different situations, apart from translator's linguistic knowledge, s/he should be familiar with the context of situation in which a verse is revealed. As one of the important issues, ambiguity is frequently observed in the Holy Qur'ān. Hence, many of the produced translations of the ambiguous verses suffer some shortcomings. The reasons of such shortcomings are both linguistic differences and complexities of this Holy Book and sometimes the translator's lack of knowledge of context of situation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The linguistic approach of the Qur'ān structure is so complex in form and content that Arabs categorize the structure of their language as Qur'ānic Arabic and non-Qur'ānic Arabic (Mustapha, 1998). Due to the significance of this scripture, the proper translation of the content is required. If the translations of the Holy Qur'ān are problematic, it would be difficult to understand the meanings. Therefore, the very aim of its revelation might be disrupted. Because of the linguistic and contextual differences and complexities of the Qur'ānic text, the translations of the Holy Qur'ān, in one way or the other, suffer from different types of deficiencies.

Although, it is very difficult to overcome all the translation problems, but at least, translators should be acquainted with some lexical complexity such as antonymous homonyms that this paper attempts to discuss. As evident, the Holy Qur'ān is revealed in the Arabic language, and there are many people all over the world who are not familiar with this language, so the proper translation of the Holy Qur'ān is obligatory. One of the most confusing Qur'ānic issues is the existence of ambiguous words or sentences. For the reader of this divine book to understand the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān and especially the meanings of ambiguous verses,

the translator of the Holy Qur'ān has to determine the ambiguity and then disambiguate these meanings.

METHODOLOGIES

The study benefited from a variety of research works in the field of general linguistics and Arabic linguistics precisely. Works of Ibn Al-anbariy, a renowned Arab linguist, *kitab Al Ad-Daaad,* prominent work of Ibn Manzoor, *Lisaan al-Arab* were particularly of immense contribution to the background of this study. To establish the problems antonymous homonyms pose to translators of the Qur'an, several translations of the meanings of the Qur'an were consulted. Prominent amongst them were translations of the meaning of the Qur'an by Mamarduke Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, and Malik. Other sources of information used for the current study include different exegesis of the Qur'an as well as internet sources and scholarly articles in reputable academic journals. Derivative methods was also used, where necessary, to determine the roots of the verbs used to ascertain their authenticity using Ibn Manzoor's *Lisaaan al-Arab.* Verses of the Qur'an were used as evidences to support the various instances of antonymous homonyms cited.

HOMONYMY IN ARABIC LANGUAGE
DEFINITIONS OF HOMONYMY

Homonymy in Arabic language is known either as المشترك اللفظي or المتجانس in the holy Qur'an الوجوه والنظائر. Homonyms are also called المتشابه اللفظي or اللفظي (Al-Dhamin 1990). In philology, scholars such as Al-Salih (1968), Al-Khuli (2001), and Mansur (2009), defined homonymy as a word or phrase that has one articulation (or form) and more than one meaning. For example, the word سن has one articulation whether it means age or tooth; and دقيق which means flour, precise, and thin. An instance of homonymy from the holy Qur'an is: "فلا رفث ولا فسوق ولا جدال في الحج" whereby the word رفث may mean to have sexual relationship or to say obscene words. Therefore various translations emerge in respect to this word as follows:

"…while on pilgrimage, abstain from lewd speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling…" (2:197, Asad, 2002).

"…abstain from husband-wife relationship, obscene language, and wrangling during Hajj…" (2:197, Malik, 1990).

"…there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage…" (2:197, Pickthall, 2002).

"…let there be no obscenity nor wickedness nor wrangling in the Hajj…" (2:197, Yusuf A, 2002).

Homonymy is a controversial subject among Arab linguists. In one hand, linguist, such as Ibn Dorstoya, denied the existence of this linguistic phenomenon as he claimed that only one of its meanings is real while the others are metaphorical. For instance, the word وجد has several meanings like to find, anger, to love, etc. They declared that "One may think this word has several meanings but actually all these meaning are related to one thing." On the other hand, scholars, like Al Kheleel bin Ahmed, Sibawayh, Abu Zeid, and ibn Al Anbariy affirm to its existence in Arabic language to the extent that scholars like Ibn al Anbariy wrote a complete book –*Kitab Al Ad-Daad* on the subject matter.

Types of Homonyms

Although, the subject matter of this paper is to discuss and clarify the existence of linguistic complexity in the Qur'ān with special reference to antonymous Homonym, but it is worthwhile to mention some kinds of Homonyms in Arabic language in general. The following types of Homonyms exist:

1- Homonymic words that have two meanings. For example, قدم (foot: part of body) or (unit of length). Another example is لسان (tongue: organ of body) and (language) (Al-Khuli, 2001).

2- Homonymic words that have multiple meanings. For instance words such as فصول (chapters; of a book), (seasons; of a year), (semesters; in school), (acts; of a play), etc. Another example is the word عين (eye; of a needle), (eye; of man), (fountainhead), (spy), etc. (Al Khuli 2001). The word صدى has the meanings (echo), (extreme thirst), (to preserve money), etc. (Ibn Jinni,

2008). Another word is بأس (dread), (bravery), (torture), (power), (battle) (Waffi, 1957; Atlas, 2007). A well-known example that has more than thirty meanings is the word حوب which may mean sin, sister, daughter, need, sadness, haughtiness, heart softness (Ahmed & Areej, 2010; Ya'koob, 1999).

3- Homonymic words that have a relation in meaning. For instance, in Arabic, the word يد may mean (Hand; part of body and power) and the word ذراع has the meanings (arm: part of the body and unit of measurement. This kind is actually known as polysemy in English (Ahmed & Areej, 2010; Al Khuli 2001; Umer 1982).

4- Homonymic words that have no relation in meaning. The word قرن may mean the horns of an animal or a hundred years. The word وجد which has no relation between its meanings that are to detest someone or to know. Another example is قال (to say from يقول) and (to fire somebody from يقيل) (Al Khuli 2001).

5- A unique kind of homonymy in which the pronunciation is the same while the writing is different, i.e., homophone, is found in Arabic. Examples of this type are يحيى (to live) يحيا (name of a person) another example is:

رأيت الناس قد ذهبوا، إلى من عنده ذهبُ

رأيت الناس قد مالوا، إلى من عنده مالُ

Here ذهبوا means 'went' and ذهبُ is 'gold'; مالوا means 'incline' and مالُ means 'money' (Nasir Al-Deen, 2010).

6- Homonyms created because of shift in application or register

Sometimes, the meaning of a particular word depends on the context or specialization area it is used. In Arabic, for instance, a word like عملية (operation) may mean surgical operation, action, practicability, agency, process, procedure, execution, or maneuver. The word جدار (wall) has

different meanings such as wall, counter scrub, firewall, dike, pier (Ahmed & Areej, 2010; Umar, 1982; Waffi, 1957).

7- Homonyms that have identical present and past participle

The present and past participle that have the rhythm (افتعل) in Arabic for words such as مُسْتَن

مُخْتَار, مُعْتَاد, مُعْتَد, and the rhythm (انفعل) in words like مُنحّل are identical in enunciation and writing (Ahmed & Areej, 2010; ibn Jinni, 2008).

8- Homonyms that have the same singular and plural forms

Examples of these homonyms are فُلْك and دلاص (as in درع دلاص and أدرع دلاص) (Ibn Jinni 2008)

ANTONYMOUS HOMONYMS

It is important to differentiate between antonym and antonymous homonym. Antonym occurs between two lexical items with opposite meanings. Whereas, antonymous homonyms occurs with a lexical item with two opposite meanings. It is therefore, a kind of antonyms in Arabic language. For example يبيع (to sell) and يشتري (to buy); سهل (easy) and صعب (difficult), are antonyms. While antonymous homonym occurs with the same lexical item with two reverse meanings as mentioned above. (Al-Dhamin, 1990).

In this case, homonyms have two antonymous meanings. Thus, such words create great problems in communication in Arabic and by extension translation. Consider the following examples of antonymous homonyms in Arabic (Al Khuli 2001):

جون = black, white

صريم = day, night

بسل = forbidden, lawful

سليم = uninjured, stung

أبيض = white, black

بصير = blind, sighted

وراء = front, rear

حلق = fly, sink

وثب = jump, sit

طاعم = to feed, to be fed (Al-Salih 1968)

Scholars of Qur'anic exegesis are of the view that both اشترى and شرى are from the same root, although different in their derived forms. Hence, it is antonymously used in the expression of the Qur'an to mean "buy" or "sell" especially when it is used with the conjunction "ﺑ" as above.

8- راغ (to turn upon/ turn away)

The term "راغ" was also used interchangeably and antonumously in the Qur'anic expression to mean either "to turn to" or "to turn away from".

﴿فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ﴾

"Then did he turn upon them striking (them) with the right hand" (37: 93) here it means he approached them.

Meanwhile;

﴿فَرَاغَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ فَجَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ سَمِينٍ﴾

"He went quietly to his family, brought a roasted calf" it means he turned away and returned to his family.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are many linguistic complexity cases in the holy Qur'an which could be difficult for people who are not familiar with traditional Arabic linguistics or the Qur'anic Arabic language. One of such cases has been the bane of discussion of this paper with regard to their various interpretations and translations. This complexity could be resolved by handling the complete text or verse as a single macro unit in which an ambiguous or complex lexical item may be viewed as stylistic feature of the Qur'an occurring in parallel structures that constitute a form of paradigmatic patterning fulfilling not only semantico-pragmatic functions but also discoursal, aesthetic, rhetorical, and stylistic functions that interact to give the text its unique texture and identity. The knowledge of antonymous homonyms can provide helpful clues in disambiguating such cases.

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