Relevance Theory and Qur'anic Collocation

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Abstract:

The study explores lexical and figurative Qur'anic collocations in four translations. The four Translations chosen for the purpose of the study are as follows; *The Meaning of the Glorious Coran* (1970) by Marmaduke Pickthall, *The meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (1934) by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Koran* (1947) by N.J.Dawood *and The Qur'an: A New Translation* (1999) by M.A.S. Abdel-Haleem. The main aim of the study is to find out the problems that face the translator when s/he transfer lexical and figurative collocations from the Source Text to the Target Text. It also triggers some solutions to overcome such problems. Using the functional approach, the researcher tries to apply the Relevance Theory principles in analyzing the selected samples of collocations. It has been found out that applying the Relevance Theory helps the translator understand the implicit as well as the explicit meaning of the SL collocation. Consequently, this helps the translator find the right equivalent. The study has also proved that the functional approach matches the translation of Qur'anic collocations as it can be used in translating various types of collocations.

Key Words:
Lexical collocation- Figurative collocation- Relevance theory- Functional approach-Qur'anic collocation.

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نظرية الصلة والمصاحبات القرآنية

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الملخص:

تتناول الدراسة نواعيين من المصاحبات اللغوية في القرآن، المصاحبات اللغوية اللفظية والمصاحبات اللغوية الاستعارية في أربع ترجمات للقرآن الكريم وهي ترجمة يوسف علي، وترجمة محمد مارمادوك بكتال، وترجمة نعيم جوزيف دادود وترجمة دكتور محمد عبد الحليم. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تناول المشكلات التي يواجهها المترجم أثناء ترجمته للمصاحبات اللغوية ونقل معناها من اللغة المصدر إلى اللغة المنقول إليها. كما تهدف الدراسة أيضًا إلى تقديم بعض الحلول للتغلب على هذه المشاكل باستخدام المدخل الوظيفي. ويحاول الباحث تطبيق قواعد نظرية الصلة في تحليل نماذج المصاحبات اللغوية المختارة. وقد أثبتت الدراسة أن تطبيق نظرية الصلة تساعد المترجم على فهم المعنى الضمني والمعنى الصريح للمصاحبات اللغوية محل الدراسة بنوعيها، وبذلك يستطيع المترجم إيجاد المقابل المناسب أثناء ترجمته المصاحبات إلى النص المنقول إليه. كما أثبتت الدراسة أيضًا أن المدخل الوظيفي يساعد المترجم على ترجمة المصاحبات اللغوية بأنواعها المختلفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

نظرية الصلة– المصاحبات اللغوية في القرآن– المصاحبات اللغوية اللفظية– المصاحبات اللغوية الاستعارية– المدخل الوظيفي.

1. Introduction

Translating collocations is a challenging task especially when the translator deals with the Munificent Qur'an. The present paper deals with the translation of lexical and figurative collocations. Conveying the same effect of the explicit as well as the implicit meaning of the source text is an undeniable problem that faces the translator. The difference between Arabic and English adds to the complexity of the problem. This paper attempts to analyze some selected samples of lexical and figurative collocations to spell out the difficulty of translating them and how the translations differ from one translator to another.

2- Rationale of the study

The theory of the study is summarized on the logic behind the way collocations behave in Arabic and English in the Qur'an. The researcher assumes that the choice of such collocations is not random as they are Allah's verses.

It is supposed that the translators should maintain the same effect as well as implicit meanings as much as possible. This task is highly tedious, challenging and demanding especially when cultural and linguistic gaps are taken into consideration.

For the above reasons, the researcher has chosen this linguistic phenomenon to examine which of the selected translations is the most appropriate, the most accurate and the most communicative.

3. Research Questions of the Study

The study tries to answer the following questions:

1- What are the problems that face the translator in transferring lexical and figurative collocations from the ST to the TT?

2- Which translation strategy is the most appropriate in translating each type of collocation?

(ISSN : 2536 - 9555)

4. Theoretical Background

4.1 Classification of collocations

Collocation is a linguistic phenomenon. Each language has its own collocations and its own way of dealing with them. Thus, it is a tedious task for the translator to transfer the right collocation from the ST to TT or to try to narrow the gap between both texts to create the same effect on the reader. In order to accomplish this task, the translator has to be aware of the concept of collocation and its types. In addition, attention must mainly be paid to the function of the examined collocation.

Collocation was first introduced by J. R. Firth (1968). According to him, it is the "the company that words keep" or "actual words in habitual company" (p.182). Firth also highlighted two kinds of collocations, i.e. "general or usual collocations and more restricted technical or personal collocations" (1968, p. 195). Translators have to bear into consideration that what is normal in one kind of text may be quite unusual in another depending on its genre.

As for J. Sinclair (1991), he replaces the two kinds of collocations known as "usual" and "unusual" collocations with "casual collocation" and "significant" collocation" (p.418). Frequency is a key factor in differentiating between the different kinds of collocation. "The frequency of repetition of the collocates in several occurrences of an item" (Sinclair, 1991, p.411) is what distinguishes "casual" from "significant" collocations. In other words, the more frequent an occurring item is, the less significant it is and vice versa. Collocation frequency is a core concept in the present study.

Peter Newmark (1988) who defines collocation as "the element of system in the lexis of a language" (pp. 114-116), divides collocation into various types according to two axes of syntagmatic or horizontal and paradigmatic or vertical. The syntagmatic axis is concerned with the relationship that a linguistic element has with other elements inside the sentence whereas choosing another word

from a set of semantically related words, not mentioned in the sentence, is the function of the paradigmatic relation. Newmark (1995) divides collocations into seven groups depending on their grammatical word class. The most common of them are adjective + noun, noun + noun and verb + object (Newmark, p. 213).

The concept of "collocational range" lies at the heart of the present study. Many scholars depend on this concept in their classification of collocation. According to Stephen Gramely and Kurt Michael Patzold (1992), collocation refers to "combinations of two lexical items which make an isolable semantic contribution, belong to different word classes and show a **restricted range**" (PP.53-54, emphasis is mine). David Crystal (2003) also explains what is meant by "collocational range"; he highlights that "the potential of items collocates is known as their collocability or collocational range" (p.83).

Having "collocational range" at the crux of their definition of collocation, Gramely and Patzold (1992) recognized different types of collocations (pp. 62-63). The first is called "illogical collocation" like "rained solidly all day". Second, the two scholars pinpoint the difference between "free combinations", which is also called unrestricted collocations" by some scholars, and "restricted collocation". This difference is based on "collocational range". Items that are not closely related to others are known as free collocations whereas closer associations between lexical items are called "collocations" or "restricted collocations".

Some scholars classify collocations according to the function they perform. For instance, A.S. Hornby (1995, p.310) distinguishes five types of collocations as follows:

1- adjectives collocating with particular nouns
2- prepositions collocating with particular verbs
3- verbs collocating with particular nouns
4- adverbs collocating with particular verbs

(ISSN : 2536 - 9555)

5- nouns collocating with particular adjectives.

Peter Fawcett (1997) deals with collocations in the same broad framework that Newmark has drawn, i.e. in terms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, focusing on the functional aspect. He pinpoints that "a translation problem that cannot be solved at one point in the chain" or the syntagmatic choice, "may be solved by an appropriate point" or the paradigmatic choice (pp.6-8).

4.2 Gut's Approach to Translation and the Relevance Theory

The present study adopts Ernst-August Gutt's Theory of Relevance (1989); a theory that is tightly related to pragmatic that govern the process of understanding between the communicators, considering the translator as a mediator between the source text and the target text.

Sperber and Wilsons (1995) are the founder of the Relevance Theory (RT). Gutt has driven many of the used concepts from them, but he applied these concepts to translation. Being relevant to translation, Gutt's Relevance Theory is chosen as one of the main pillars of the present study. According to Sperber and Wilson, RT is concerned with the contextual and inferential aspects of language communication, i.e. the relationship between how what is implied in language contributes to the meaning that is explicitly mentioned. In other words, the speaker produces a stimulus when s/he intends to convey some information which enables the receiver to identify a piece of information by recognizing the intended meaning the speaker wants to convey.

RT has a strong impact on translation studies and their applications. David J. Weber (2005) mentions that "a rich theory of communication, particularly one that grapples with the role of context in interpretation, has profound implications for translation. RT is such a theory" (p.35). Drawing inferences, in which contextual assumptions play an important role, is one of the basic ideas related to the Relevance Theory. This idea enables translators to bear the different assumptions implied by the author and its

different interpretations of the source text when they translate in order to narrow the gap between the ST and the TT.

The idea of relevance is a core notion according to the Relevance Theory; a communicator communicates the important information that is relevant enough to the hearer/reader. In turn, the hearer/reader tries to interpret the speaker's/writer's intention by bringing all sorts of information from the context; s/he tries to get "ideas previously learned, ideas triggered by the environment, assumptions about the speaker's goals, and so forth" (Weber, 2005, P.55). According to RT, the term "environment" includes physical as well as cognitive environment. The listener/readers also have many assumptions to choose from. S/he chooses the strongest assumption proposed. There are times when speakers/writers aim at suggesting an array of possible interpretations and assumptions rather than specifying one. This concept is very beneficial when we deal with Qur'anic verses and figurative language like the sacred language of the Qur'an as it may correspond to the different interpretations offered by various exegetes. Thus, RT is of great benefit to the field of translation as translation is a process of human communication that takes the language as its medium.

Another core concept related to RT is the idea of "explicature" and "implicature". Explicature refers to the immediate meaning of the text or the utterance whereas "implicature" is the vast amount of implicit information, which results in different interpretations.

"Implicature" is the result of the inferential process where the hearer or the reader tries to infer the speaker/writer's meaning depending on the evidence provided and the different assumptions raised. According to Relevance Theory, the hearer/the reader has to be guided by precise predictable expectations in order to get the most precise implicit meaning.

According to Gutt (1989), the assumptions the writer intends to communicate can be expressed in two different ways, i.e. they can be expressed as "explicatures" and/or "implicatures". The concepts of "explicature" and "implicature" are significant in the

(ISSN : 2536 - 9555)

process of translation as the translator has to communicate the same explicatures and implicatures as those stated in the source text. Gutt states that "the explicature of the translation should be the same as the explicatures of the original, and the implicatures of the translation should be the same as the implicatures of the original" (p.152). Gut (1989) also states that implicit information enriches the text as it embraces different interpretations. However, it burdens the translator's shoulder with a huge responsibility as s/he finds more difficulties in translating these pieces of implicit information to the target texts. Relevance Theory offers valuable insights about ways of dealing with some of these problems as well as significant concepts, which translators need to understand and apply to translation.

The "interpretive use of language" is another concept correlated to "implicature" and "explicature". According to RT, an utterance is said to be "used interpretively when it is intended to represent what someone said or thought" (Gutt, 1998, p44). This means that the two texts have interpretive resemblance because they share many explicatures and/or implicatures, i.e. the target text represents the original thought of the communicator interpretively so the two texts both resemble each other.

5. Methodology

The following are the steps to be followed in the present study:

1- The Arabic verse is produced.

2- Collocations are extracted and highlighted.

3- Functional analysis of the verses are conducted

4- An analysis is conducted by applying Gutt's Relevance theory

5- An analysis of the selected translations is attempted

6- A suggested translation is proposed.

6. Analysis

Sample (1) -Lexical Collocation

" أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ وَأَنفُسُهُمْ ۖ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ " (سورة السجدة- آيه ٢٧)

In this verse, the lexical collocation "الأرض الجرز", is composed of a noun + an adjective, has three different translations proposed by four translators, i.e. “the barren land”, “parched soil”, and “the parched land”. The following analysis tries to answer the following question:

1- Among the various assumptions introduced in the ST, which one has the translators chosen?

1- Has s/he been a success in conveying the implicit and the implicit meanings of the ST?

A-Pickthall:

Have they not seen how We lead the water to **the barren land** and therewith bring forth crops whereof their cattle eat, and they themselves? Will they not then see?

B- Yusuf Ali:

And do they not see that We do drive Rain to **parched soil** (bare of herbage), and produce therewith crops, providing food for their cattle and themselves? Have they not the vision?

C-Abdel-Haleem:

Do they not consider how we drive rain to **the barren land**, and with it produce vegetarian from which their cattle and they themselves eat?

(ISSN : 2536 - 9555)

D- Dawood:

Do they not see how We drive the water to **the parched land** and bring forth crops which they and their cattle eat? Have they no eyes to see with?

Checking the Quranic Corpus, it is found that "الأرض الجُرز" is mentioned only once in the Quran and the word "جُرز" is correlated to whatever has a relation to land. For example, it is mentioned in Surat "The Cave" in verse 8 " وَإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا" .This means it is a marked collocation.

As for the ST explicature, Al-Zamakhshary explained that الأرض الجرز هي "الأرض التي جُرز نباتها لعدم وجود الماء وإما لأنه رُعي وأُزيل" (٥٤٢). Thus, analyzing the sense relation of the word "الجرز" in the ST would be (+ related to land) (+ has no plant) (+has no water) (+ very dry).

Analyzing the different assumptions that may correspond to the meaning of "الأرض الجرز", the four translators proposed three different translations, i.e. "barren land", "parched soil", and "parched land". This means that every translator has chosen the strongest assumption that corresponds to a certain interpretation of the ST. According to the dictionary meaning and the co-text of the verse, "land" is more accurate than "soil" so it is the closest equivalent to "الأرض" mentioned in the ST. As it is mentioned in MacMillan Dictionary, "land" is defined as "an area of ground, especially one used for a particular purpose such as farming or building" (p.797) whereas "soil is defined as "the substance on the surface of the Earth in which plants grow" (p.1360). Since the latter is concerned with the surface of the Earth, which is not well-fit with the adjective "parched", land is a better choice for the Arabic source. Besides, the word "land" is used more in literary/religious texts. This means that it has a better rhetoric

effect on the target reader. As for the adjective “parched”, it relates dryness to heat. According to MacMillan Dictionary, for example, “parched” is defined as “extremely dry because of hot weather” (p.1029). Free Dictionary Online defines “parched” as “dried out by heat or excessive exposure to sunlight”. These definitions go with the interpretations of some exegetes. According to Al-Nishapuri (486 H.) in his book *Al-Waseet* (1994), he interprets "الأرض الجرز" as "الأرض الي لا تنبت في الشتاء حتى إذا جاء الماء أنبتت ما يأكله الناس والأنعام" (p.455). This interpretation implies that the land needs both heat and water to grow plants. Thus, the adjective 'parched' is the most suitable choice for the adjective "الجرز" in the ST and Dawood’s collocation “the parched land” is the closest to Arabic text as well.

Applying the concepts of “explicature vs. implicature” on the TT, the explicit meaning of this collocation is that a parched land is converted into a living one because Allah sends rain so rich crops grow to satisfy the hunger of both man and animal. The implicit meaning of the collocation is to set a comparison between this image and the state of man when he hungers for a state of spirituality. Yusuf Ali (1938) explains “the dead man is revivified by God’s grace and mercy, through his Revelation. He becomes not only an asset to himself but to his dependents and those around him” (vol.2, p.1099). The collocation "نسوق الماء" at the beginning of the verse comes to support this meaning and highlights the fact that Allah is the Supreme Upright Sustainer. Imam Muhammad Metwali Alsharawi explains the implied meaning of using the verb "نسوق". In his interpretation of the Quran (1991), he mentions " ومعلوم أن السوق يكون من الوراء، على خلاف القيادة، فهي من الأمام، فالذي تسوقه وهو أمامك، فلا ينقلب منك، ولوكان خلفك

(ISSN : 2536 - 9555)

فهو عرضه لأن يهرب منك، فلا تشعربه. فكلمة نسوق بها دلالة على قيومية الله" (١١٨٦٧).

Sample (2) - Figurative Collocations:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاشْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُن بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا
(مريم ، آيه ٤)

A-Pickthall:

Saying: My lord! Lo! The bones of me wax feeble and my head is shining with grey hair, and I have never been unblest in prayer to Thee, my Lord.

B- Yusuf Ali:

Praying: “O my Lord! Infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of head doth glisten with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to Thee!

C-Abdel-Haleem:

Lord, my bones have weakened and my hair is ashen grey, but never, Lord, have I ever prayed to you in vain

D- Dawood:

Lord, my bones are enfeebled, and my head glows silver with age. Yet never, Lord, have I prayed to you in vain.

The collocation "اشتعل الرأس شيبًا" is a figurative one. This kind of restricted collocation is a marked one as the combination of its constituents is rare; it is also mentioned only once in the Qur'an.

In this verse of Surat Mary, Prophet Zakariya reveals his fears to Allah. The implicit meaning is to show weakness and old age, and its internal and external traces. The translator has to do his best to convey the same effect of this metaphorical collocation "واشتعل الرأس شيبا" to the target reader and convey the same “expliciture and impliciture” as much as possible.

The verse compares the immense spread of the grey hair to fire, using a concise eloquent style. Moreover, the word "head", not hair, is used because grey hair appears on the head as a following phase to its appearance on the chin and the moustache; this is a vivid physical sight of getting old.

Trying to create the same effect on the reader, Pickthall uses "head", not hair, in his translation which is more accurate as mentioned above. However, using "shinny" to describe the "head" as a collocation is not accurate as it has a positive connotation. According to MacMillian Dictionary Online, "shiny" is defined as follows: "something that is shinny has a bright hair that reflects light". Applying the concept of "implicature", the ST implicit meaning does not match with its counterpart in the TT. The Qur'anic verse implies how the old Prophet Zakariya is; a concept which is not clear in Picktall's translation because "shinny" implies a sound health. Moreover, the English collocation is less marked than the Arabic one.

Dawood has succeeded in using "head" instead of hair, but the different senses of the verb "glow" does not create the same effect on the readers as of its equivalent collocation mentioned in the TT. According to Longman Dictionary Online, "glow" is always associated with positive meanings like "to glow with pride/ joy/pleasure". Its different senses of meanings are always positive. For instance, "if your face or body glows, it is pink or hot because you are healthy, you have been doing exercise, or you are feeling a strong emotion". A second positive sense is "if something glows with a quality or colour, it is attractive and has a strong colour". Choosing "silver" to collocate with "glow" strengthens this positive connotation and creates a less marked expression than that highlighted in the ST.

(ISSN : 2536 - 9555)

Abdel-Haleem uses "hair" as an equivalent to "رأس" in Arabic while Yusuf Ali uses "the hair of my head". As previously-mentioned, Allah uses "head", not hair, as an indication of His Prophet's weak body internally and extremely; weak bones reflect internal weakness whereas "grey head" indicates extreme external weakness. Thus, the choice of the Qur'anic lexeme is purposefully emphasized. As for Abdel-Haleem's choice of the collocation "ashen grey" to translate the Arabic collocation "اشتعل شيبًا", it is more accurate and marked than Yusuf Ali's collocation "doth glisten with grey". Although the old English expression "doth glisten" matches the Qur'anic style, it does not imply the same meaning because it has a positive connotation. According to MacMillian Dictionary Online, "to glisten" means "to shine and look wet or oily". Using "ashen" by Abdel-Haleem, which means "looking very pale because you are ill, shocked or frightened", is more accurate as its implicature matches the ST. Thus, the collocation "my hair is ashen grey" is more marked than "the hair of my head doth glisten with grey". Thus, some translators have managed to convey the closest explicit and implicit meanings of the ST while others could not.

7. Conclusion

It has been found that translating Qur'anic collocations is a very challenging task for the translator due to many reasons. First, the language and the cultural gap between English and Arabic as they belong to two different families. Second, collocations are language-specific; this adds more responsibility on the translator's shoulder. In order to overcome this obstacle, s/he has to be fully aware of this collocational features. Moreover, a translator has to recognize the existence of the collocation in the ST in order to be able to

find the right equivalent in the TT. It has also been found that finding a collocational equivalent that can create the same effect on the target reader is a highly-challenging task. The difficulty of this task is undeniable when the translator deals with figurative collocations because s/he has to do their best to mirror the rhetoric effect of the unmatchable holy Qur'anic verses. It has also been found that the functional approach is the best choice in translating Qur'anic collocations as it matches the different types of Qur'anic collocations. In some cases, the translator resorts to communicative translation to convey the message accurately and clearly. In other cases, the semantic or the literal translation is preferred. It has also been found that applying the principles of the Relevance Theory assists the translator to comprehend the source collocation and choose the right collocation in the target text. The Relevance Theory is a reliable means for the translator to understand the implicit as well as the explicit meaning.

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