Original article

Rendering Arabic Indefinite Words Denoting Indeterminacy
and Aggrandizement into English

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Abstract

This article explores rendering the function of indefinite words especially those denote unidentified quality, indeterminacy and aggrandizement from Arabic into English. Data of this study are extracted verses of the Glorious Qur'an. Syntactic, semantic and functional analyses are used in analysing data of this article. An important fact which has come out of this study is that using English indefinite article alone does not, in some cases, convey the Arabic denotation of indefiniteness, i.e., additional English words may be used in order to indicate the purpose of Arabic indefiniteness, especially when the functions of an Arabic indefinite noun are various.

Key words: Indefinite – Functional Translation – Indeterminacy – Qur'anic Studies.

1. Introduction

The study aims at a) identifying the possible purposes and functions of in/definite noun phrases in Al-Baqara and Al-A'raf, b) analyzing how these purposes and functions are rendered into English in some English translations of the Qur'an, c) in case of variation in rendering Arabic in/definite nouns into English, the study explores the reasons for this variation, and d) exploring if syntax has any relationship with the rhetorical purposes of such linguistic styles or not. In other terms, does the place

of an indefinite noun, for example, inside a sentence have an impact on the functions of this noun? Does it add any new functions or increase the strength of its meaning or reduce the effect?

2. Arabic Indefinite Noun Phrases

2.1. Form and Meaning of Arabic Indefinites

Concerning the Arabic indefinite form, it is the noun which indicates something that is not specific and usually ends with '-*n*'. Abdel-Latif (1999), Al-Samarra'i (2003), Amin (1994a), and Al-Ghalaayiini (2010) divide Arabic indefinites into the following types according to the purpose of speech: indeterminacy or non-restriction [undefined individual(s)], e.g. [*wa ᶜalaa abṣaarihim ghishaawa(tun)*] 'and on their eyes is a covering', a different kind from the familiar things, e.g. [*lahum quluubun ˆ laa yafqahuuna bihaa wa lahum aᶜyunun ˆ laa yubəṣiruuna bihaa wa lahum ādhaanun ˆ laa yasmaᶜuuna bihaa*] 'they have hearts, but understand not with them; they have eyes, but perceive not with them; they have ears, but they hear not with them' (7:179), exaggeration, glorification, amplification or magnification, e.g. [*fiihi hudan ˆ lilmuttaqiin*] 'wherein there is a guidance to the godfearing' (2:2), multiplication or large quantity or increase of amount, e.g. [*ulā'ika ᶜalayhim ṣalawaatun ˆ min rabbihim waraħma*] 'upon those rest blessings and mercy from their Lord' (2:157), reduction, e.g. [*allāhu laa ilaaha illaa huwa ˆ alħayyu ˆ ulqayyuumu laa ta'khudhuhu **sinatun** wa laa nawm*] 'There is no god but Allāh, the Living, the Everlasting, slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep' (2:255) and diminutiveness or disdain, e.g. [*inna alladhiina ittaqaw idhaa massahum **ṭā'ifun** ˆ mina ashshayṭaani tadhakkaruu fa'idhaa hum mubəṣiruun*] 'The godfearing, when a visitation of Satan troubles them, remember, and then see clearly' (7:201).

2.2. Uses of Indefinite Nouns in Arabic

Below are the uses of the Arabic indefinite article according to Amin (1994a, pp. 95-109):

i. *Introductory Indefinite Nouns*: Indefinite nouns are used in order to introduce objects which have not been previously mentioned in the prior discourse or which are not situationally identifiable. Introductory indefinite nouns may be specific or non-specific, as in the following examples:

1. *aħtaaju kitaaban ᶜan ilmaᶜrifah.*   I need a book about definiteness. (any book, non-specific).

2. *ħaḍara shakhsun yuriidu muqaabalatak.*   a person came to meet you (specific).

ii. *Indefinite Nouns as Predicates***:** Indefinite nouns are used in various syntactic positions. They are most commonly found as predicate nouns, as the following example shows: [*khaalidun malikun*] (Khalid is a king)

Indefinite nouns in predicate or complement positions are commonly used with names of professions, trades, states, etc., or assigning the referent certain characteristics such as *huwa ustaadhun*. (He is a professor.)

iii. *Indefinite Article with Accusative Substantives***:** The indefinite article is used with a group of substantives which perform the function of adverbs or specifications or modification of other nouns. Some of these accusative nouns are used in order to modify the verb just as adverbs do. Consider the following accusatives:

1. with adverbs of circumstance: Nunation is used with adverbs of circumstance. These are considered indefinite in Arabic and are always used in the accusative case. They describe a subject or an object which is usually definite such as:

   jaa'a rrajulu maashiyan. (The man came walking.)

2. with nouns of specification: Nunation is used with a class of nouns known in Arabic studies as *tamyiiz* 'specification' and usually used in the accusative to specify a certain amount. This is mainly associated with measurement, weight, and number, which are used with any countable noun. This class of nouns is different from the partitives. The latter relates a part of a quantity to the whole. Nouns of specification limit or determine the type of substance indicated by the given quantity, e.g., *maᶜii khamsuun junayhan* (I have fifty pounds).

3. Indefinite article with cognate objects: It is often the case that a verbal noun which is derived from the same verb is repeated as the object of the verb. This type of complement is termed by the Arab grammarians as *al-mafᶜuul al- muṭlaq* 'the absolute object'. This structure is used in order to

strengthen or emphasize the meaning of the verb, e.g., *taħaddatha arrajulu ħadiithan jamiilan* (this man has said a good saying).

4. Indefinite with causative objects: The indefinite article is used with the accusative form of what is called in Arabic studies *al-mafᶜuul li'ajlih* that on the account of which something is done. As the name indicates, it is a verbal noun which expresses the reason for performing the action designated by the verb. It generally answers the question: why? E.g., *ataytu qaaṣidan alkhayr* (I have come aiming good things).

5. Indefinite article with the negative particle *laa*: The noun which follows the negative particle *laa* 'no, none' is always indefinite. This usage is restricted to the type of *laa* which absolutely denies the existence of the whole genus, as the Arab grammarians called it, laa *annaafiya liljins*[1]. Although the noun is indefinite, nunation is generally omitted when laa precedes the noun immediately or when the noun is not modified. Wright (1898) attempts to account for the omission of the nunation. He states that once the /*laa*/ is separated from the noun, nunation is restored, as the following examples show:

a. laa ilaaha illa allāh "There is no god but Allāh" (no nunation)

b. *laa fiihaa ghawlun* "in it (the wine of Paradise) there is no injurious force" (with nunation)

6. The indefinite article with vocative*:* Nouns used in the vocative, i.e., directly addressed, are definite but do not take the definite article. When no specific individual is addressed, the noun is indefinite and used in the accusative case. This is not a very common situation, but it is quite possible to call for somebody and to use the second person pronoun when no specific person is intended, as a blind man or person in trouble might say: [*yaa rajul-an saaᶜidnii*] 'O man, help me'.

Although the noun in this example is somewhat definite in reference, the speaker considers what he knows about the addressee is not enough to regard him definite. Sometimes this style is used in order to indicate that the speaker is ignoring the hearer or pretending that he doesn't know him.

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[1] Laa as a negative particle for negating the whole genus or all individuals of the same genus

7. The indefinite article with verbs of praise and blame: The noun which follows the verbs of praise *ni^cma* 'to be good' and blame *bi'sa* 'to be bad' is usually made definite by the definite article or by annexation. Sometimes, however, the noun used with these verbs has to be indefinite in the accusative case, as in: [*ni^cma ṣaaħiban al-kitaab*] 'excellent as a companion is the book'.

8. The indefinite Article with Monoptotes[2] [*almaqṣuur*]: The indefinite article can be used with a certain group of indeclinable words which have one form with the three cases, i.e. monoptote. Some of these words are nouns, but some are termed nominal verbs, i.e., verbs which share some syntactic features of nouns such as accepting nunation, having no past or present, etc. It is indicated that when these words are indefinite or used in a general sense, as is the case with verbal nouns, they are used with the indefinite article (Al-Ghalaayiini, 2010, pp. 114-15), e.g. [*hudan^llilmuttaqiin*] 'a guidance to those who are the pious' (2:2), [*^cala hudan^min^rrabihim*] 'they are on true guidance from their Lord' (2:5) and [*ṣahin*] 'shut up' (Al-Ghalaayiini, 2010, pp. 30,154).

9. Indefinite article with *rubba*: The term which is generally associated with indefinite nouns is *rubba* 'perhaps'. It is used with an indefinite substantive in the genitive which is usually followed by an indefinite adjective in the same case (Amin, 1994a, p. 346), as in: [*rubba ṭaalibin^mujtahidin^ rasaba fi^limtiħaan*] 'perhaps a hard-working student could fail in his exam' (Annaadi, 1997, p. 771) and [*rubba ḍaarat-in naafi^cah*] 'perhaps a calamity could be useful'.

10. Indefinite article with *kul*: Like *rubba*, some of the uses of *kul* are associated with indefinite nouns. The word *kul* is used as a noun and a determiner. When *kul* means 'every' it is frequently followed by an indefinite noun in the genitive singular to denote that all the objects possess this or that quality (Amin, 1994a, p. 96), as in: [*kullu yawm-in huwa fii sha'n*] 'every day He is in a state (of glory)'.

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[2] A noun having only one case; having only one ending for the oblique cases.
Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, published 1913 by C. & G. Merriam Co.

11. Indefinite article with proper nouns: It is mentioned earlier that the indefinite article is used with the majority of proper names. Although nunation with proper nouns may convey some degree of indefiniteness (because more than one individual may have the same name) the main reason is etymological. Almost all native Arabic proper nouns are derived from, and are still used as, common nouns, as it is clear from the meanings associated with the following proper names: [*ħasanun*] 'handsome' and [*ṣaaliħun*] 'good', etc.

It is clear from the above mentioned uses that the major function of indefiniteness in Arabic is to introduce a noun as a new topic of discourse or to introduce a noun that is new and perhaps anonymous or unknown or unspecific. The other classified usages presented in the previous pages are due, in many cases, to syntactic reasons which still work within the major function. They may express indeterminacy, non-restriction, undefined individuals, unfamiliarity, generality, amplification, multiplication, large quantity, reduction or diminutive. In addition, the indefinite noun phrases may be used generically in Arabic.

It is important noting that if the Arabic indefinite noun is modified by an adjectival phrase, it will assign a determined reference (Al-Zamakhshary, 1430AH, p. 86). Therefore, the noun *kitaabun* in the sentence *kitaabun min ᶜindi ˆillaah[3]* (a book from Allāh) is indefinite; it is supposed to refer to unidentified reference, however, as being modified by the phrase, *min ᶜind illaah* (from Allāh), it marks a specific book which is the Qur'an. This does not work with modification by single adjectives, i.e. the word *ᶜadhaabun* in the sentence *wa lahum ᶜadhaabun aliim[4]* (and for them is a painful torment) does not assign an identified torment but a type of torment which is painful (restriction and specification). Al-Ghalaayiini (2010, p. 641) states that if a modified noun is indefinite it will denote restriction and specification. However, if it is definite it will indicate illustration. E.g. */jaa'a alwaladu ˆulmujtahid/* 'the assiduous boy has come' illustrates who has come of the boys, however, */jaa'a waladun mujtahid/* 'an assiduous boy has come' restricts and specifies this boy with assiduity.

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[3] Verse 89 Al-Baqara

[4] Verse 10 Al-Baqara

It is interesting noting that speakers can begin a text with an indefinite noun when it is modified by an adjectival phrase. Amin (1994a, pp. 185-88) states some cases that enable speakers to begin with an indefinite noun in Arabic such as: modified indefinites (e.g. /ṭaalibun mujtahidun fi ˆ iddaar/ 'a good student in the house' and /kitaabun ˆ min ʕindi ˆ illaah/ 'a book from Allāh'), coordinated indefinites to a modified noun (e.g. /imra'atun wa rajulun kariimun fi ˆiddaar / 'A woman and a good man in the house'), indefinites used for denoting a fact (e.g. /mu'minun khayrun ˆ min kaafir/ 'a believing man is better than a disbelieving one'), ambiguous indefinites etc…

2.3. Purposes and Functions of the Indefinite Article in Arabic:

Qassaam (2004, pp. 26-28), Al-Samarra'i (2006, pp. 102-05) and Abdel-Mu'ti (1984, pp. 161-62, 258-59) mention some of the purposes of the indefinite noun phrases in Arabic. They mention six purposes of the indefinite subjects and four purposes of the indefinite predicates. These are presented below:

i. Purposes of the Indefinite Subjects:

1. Singularization/singularity which denotes one individual which is undefined (undetermined referent), e.g. *wa jā'a rajulun ˆmin almadiinati* (a man came from the city). This means any man and one man.

2. Unidentified quality which is achieved through unfamiliar type of a reference, e.g. *wa ᶜala abəṣaarihim ghishaawah* (and on their eyes there is a covering or a veil). This means that it is a type of unfamiliar veil. (2:7)

3. Aggrandizement or Disdain which is achieved through either increase of power, rank, wealth or importance of or a complete lack of respect that one shows to someone or something, e.g. *'qad jā'atkum bayyinatun ˆmin rabbikum* (there has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord). (7:73). This means that it is a great sign.

4. Increase and Multiplication which are achieved through increase in quantity, e.g. *inna lanaa l'ajəran* (indeed there will be a good reward for us). (7:113) This means that it is a big reward. It may mean a great reward too.

5. Decrease which denotes decrease in quantity, e.g. *[innahum <u>unaasun</u> yataṭaharuun]* (these are indeed <u>few men</u> who want to be pure) (7:82).

6. Increase and Aggrandizement together which are achieved through increase in quantity and importance as well, *faqad kudhibat <u>rusulunˆmin qabəlik</u>* (messengers were belied before you) (35:4). This means that these messengers are many and of great importance.

ii. Purposes of the Indefinite Predicates:

1. Non-restriction and Non-identification (unfamiliarity), e.g. *zaydun kaatibun* (Zayd is a writer). This is just for informing that Zayd is a writer not to restrict writing to him nor to indicate that he is the one who is known for his writings.

2. Aggrandizement and Glorification, e.g. *hudanˆ lilmuttaqiin* (a guidance to those who are the pious believers). (2:2) This means it is a great guidance.

3. Generality. This denotes totality and entirety; with no part left out. This is generally achieved in negative contexts, e.g. *wamaa kaanuu <u>mu'miniin</u>* (they were not believers) (7:72).

4. Disdain, despising and Affront. This indicates lack of respect that one shows to someone or something, e.g. *ataᶜlamuuna anna ṣaaliħan <u>mursalunˆminˆ rabbih</u>*

(Do you know that Salih is an Envoy from his Lord?). (7:75).

Rashed (2007, pp. 39-83) writes that the indefinite Arabic noun phrases may indicate generality in negative contexts (negation), negative plurals, and negative commands. However, according to Rashed, indefinite nouns may indicate particularization in affirmative contexts, except for the affirmative commands, conditional contexts, denial interrogatives, general modified nouns, requests, and infinitives. That is, with these exceptions, indefinite nouns may indicate generality or entirety.

3. Uses of the Indefinite Articles in English:

There are two main uses of the indefinite article 'a/an'. Sweet (1898, p. 62) for example, distinguishes between the 'introductory article,' which 'singles out the idea expressed by its own,' and the 'absolute article,' which 'has the purely indefinite sense of 'any'. Sweet gives: *once upon a time*

there was a king as an example of the first type and *the earth is like a ball*, as an example of the second type. The second use has become known as the 'generic' use of the indefinite article.

In English, the indefinite article, generally, comes before singular noun phrases as said before. Therefore, the noun phrases modified by this article show two features: indefiniteness and singularity. That is because these nouns are unidentified single individuals, at least for the hearer. When a singular countable noun is introduced for the first time in a discourse, the indefinite article is used. Then, one purpose of the indefinite article is to introduce a discourse reference, such as the following example:

I have a car.

Here in this example, the word 'car' is a singular countable noun, and is introduced for the first time in this text. It is unidentified for the hearer. It is an indefinite NP.

The uses of the indefinite article in English are presented below in detail according to Al-Johani (1982, pp. 97-105):

I. *Introductory Indefinite Article*: (a/an) is used in order to introduce a singular count noun which has not been previously mentioned in the prior discourse or which is not situationally identifiable such as: 'There was a president named Muhammad Naguib'.

II. *Indefinite Article to Class-membership*: (a/an) is used before a singular count noun which is used as a representative member of a class. This use includes, as Reeves (1977, p. 2) remarks, three subgroups:

1) When the noun represents a group or class:

E.g. a car can be useful.

2) When the noun is a complement:

E.g. Betty is a doctor.

3) When the noun is a class noun defined by an adjective:

E.g. Oliver is becoming a big boy.

What seems to distinguish these subgroups is the position or the modification of the indefinite noun phrase.

III. *Indefinite Article with Numbers*: (a/an) is used with certain numeral expressions such as a couple, a hundred, a lot of, etc.

IV. *Indefinite Article with Expressions Denoting Quantity*: before expressions of price, speed, etc. Here it has the meaning of each or every, and sometimes replaced by per, e.g. thirty pounds a packet.

V. *Indefinite Article with Emphatic Nouns*: when the idea of the noun is emphasized, (a/an) may express an emotional appeal such as appreciation, regret, etc., e.g., what a loss.

VI. *Indefinite Article with Few and Little*: 'A' is used with few and little to indicate what the speaker considers to be a small number or small amount. When few and little are used without the article, they would have an almost negative meaning.

VII. *Indefinite Article with Mass Nouns*: this is not often used. It is done when mass nouns are differentiated by a following modifier. Consider the following example: 'This is an honesty which I respect'.

VIII. *Indefinite Article vs. One*: the indefinite article is used sometimes instead of one, e.g., 'I bought a book'.

However, (a/an) and one are not always interchangeable. A book means 'any book' but one book means 'no more than one'.

IX. *Indefinite Article with Proper Nouns*: this is an exception not the rule. Generally, proper nouns take no determiner, and are always definite, e.g., 'A Mr. Johnson came to see you'. This means that the speaker does not know Mr. Johnson.

X. *Stressed Indefinite Article*. This is done through pronunciation, e.g., 'this is a solution not the solution of the problem'.

XI. *Generic Use of the Indefinite Article:*

A generic term is a noun or noun phrase that refers to a whole class, or any member of a class as a representative of its class. Generic noun phrases, as noted by Lyons, are to be characterized as non-specific. Lyons (1999, p. 179) writes about generic noun phrases: 'Generic noun phrases are those in which reference is made to an entire class or perhaps more accurately, which are to express

generalizations about a class as a whole – the class in question being that consisting of all the entities satisfying the description inherent in the noun or nominal.'

Later Lyons (1999, pp. 179-89) admits words such as 'all, every, each, any, etc.' as direct determiners to refer generically to objects. However, he follows his discussion by stating a difference between using articles generically and the use of words such as 'all…' He believes that generics admit exceptions while such words do not. He states:

> Of course a straightforward way to refer to the whole class is by means of a determiner such as *all, every, each, any,* which approximate to universal quantification. In fact the term 'generic' is not used of these because of semantic differences; .., a single exception would usually invalidate a statement with *all* etc., whereas generics admit exceptions, since they express general tendencies. (Lyons, 1999, p. 179)

An indefinite noun phrase is interpreted generically in case it refers to an entire class. The indefinite article can be used in order to emphasize the whole or an example as a representative of a whole. This is what is called generic use of the article. Therefore, the indefinite article when used in a generic sense indicates that the unit singled out is taken to represent the whole genus. Lyons argues that plural and mass generics are typically indefinite in English. However, the indefinite singular noun may be used generically. The indefinite article with generic singular can be smoothly replaced by any. E.g. a (any) lion is a dangerous animal.

XII. *Miscellaneous Uses of Indefinite Articles*:

Examples such as: I got a little confused; this is a time when every penny helps; he has a fever; I heard a knocking at the door; and he is grave as a judge.

Al-Johani (1982, p. 107) sums up the functions of the indefinite article in English and states three functions: 1) to denote one particular individual with its specific characteristics, i.e., 'a certain one', 2) to denote one or another of the class presented, and 3) to represent a class whose characteristics are embodied in this specimen, i.e., the generic use.

4. The Selected Translations

Four English translations of the meanings of the Qur'an are selected for the comparative discussion in this study:

1. Arberry, A. J. 1956. *The Koran Interpreted.* London: George Allen and Anwin.

2. Asad, Muhammad. 1980. *The Message of The Qur'an: Translated and Explained.* Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus.

3. Al-Hilali, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din and Khan, Muhammad Muhsin. 1996. *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language.* Al-Madinah, K.S.A.: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an.

4. Ghali, Muhammad Mahmud. 3rd ed., 2003. *Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Qur'an.* Cairo: Dar An-Nashr for Universities.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The following examples are qur'anic verses extracted from sura 2 (Al-Baqara) and sura 7 (Al-A'raaf).

5.1. Unidentified Quality / Indeterminacy

2:179, Arabic text: وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

Transliteration: *wa lakum fiˆilqiṣaaṣi ḥayaatunˆya uliˆil'albaab(i)*

Arberry (AA): In retaliation there is <u>life</u> for you, men possessed of minds;

Asad (MA): for, in [the law of] just retribution, O you who are endowed with insight, there is <u>life</u> for you,

Al-Hilali & Khan (H&K): And there is <u>(a saving of) life</u> for you in Al-Qisas (the Law of Equality in punishment), O men of understanding,

Ghali (MG): And in retaliation there is <u>life</u> for you, O (men) endowed with intellects,

     The following table represents the indefinite noun and its four translations.

N. of verse	179
The Arabic source	حَيَاةٌ
Arberry	Life
Asad	Life
Hilali & Khan	(a saving of) life
Ghali	Life

a. Syntactic Analysis (including the lexical linguistic units):

In this verse, the word [*ħayaatun*] is indefinite, singular and postponed subject of predicate in the nominative case. It is marked by the existence of nunation instead of the nominative mark '-u'. Accordingly, the definite article 'al-' is not found.

b. Semantic Analysis:

Interpretation (content): According to *the interpretation of Al-Zamakhshary* (1430 AH, p. 111), the verse is about retaliation (*Al-Qisaas*). There is a saving of life in this requital. In the past, people used to kill more than one for a killed person (sometimes the real killer is not included). The Law of Equality in punishment prevents this. This gives lives to innocent people. In addition, the would-be killer would refrain [from such action] if he knew that he would be killed [through retaliation]. He would have thereby given life to himself and to the one whom he had intended to kill. Therefore, retaliation gives a specific type of life which is generated out of prevention/refrain from doing the act of killing. Such type of life is not familiar before, i.e. before the revelation of this verse.

Commentary: According to the explanation stated above, the word [*ħayaatun*] is indefinite to indicate the unfamiliar type of life which is retained out of retaliation. It is not used generally, i.e. it is not the normal life. It perhaps has another denotation that is greatness (a great life may be retained out of adopting the Law of Equality). Al-Zamakhshary (1430 AH, p. 111) asserts that it is a great life through this law; in the retaliation of Islam there may be a life for the would-be killed person, a life for the would-be killer, a life for the innocent people previously used to be killed, and a great life for a community.

c. Functional Analysis:

I. The translation brief: The addressees are Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers. The verse is directed to those men of understanding. The motive for production or reception of the source text is to inform about the advantages of the Law of Retribution.

II. Source-text analysis: Presupposition: The previous knowledge that Allāh has told His believers of the prescription of *Al-Qisas* (the Law of Retribution) in case of murder. *'O you who believe! Al-Qisas (the Law of Equality in punishment) is prescribed for you in case of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female.'*(2:178, Al-Hilali, & Khan. 1996)

Suprasegmental features: The nunation in the word, *ħayaatun,* is followed by */y/* sound. They are assimilated and this is called *idghaam*.

III. The functional hierarchy of translation problems: Three of the four translations do not use indefinite article, however, H&K use '*a saving of*' between brackets. They, seemingly, use the word '*life*' generally. Or they perhaps imagine that the indefinite article would impose the meaning of one life. However, it would indicate the meaning of an unfamiliar type of life as said before.

Finding: A preferred translation would be '*[a type of] life*' or just '*a life*' to indicate a life of a type which is not known before.

5.2. Increase in Quantity and Aggrandizement Together

7:113, Arabic text: وَجَاءَ السَّحَرَةُ فِرْعَوْنَ قَالُوا إِنَّ لَنَا لَأَجْرًا إِن كُنَّا نَحْنُ الْغَالِبِينَ

Transliteration: *wa jā'aˆ assaħaratu firˤawna qaaluu inna lanaa la'ajəran in kunnaa naħnu ˆ ulghaalibiin*

Arberry (AA): And the sorcerers came to Pharaoh, saying, 'We shall surely have <u>a wage,</u> if we should be the victors?'

Asad (MA): And the sorcerers came unto Pharaoh [and] said: "Verily, we ought to have <u>a great reward</u> if it is we who prevail."

Al-Hilali & Khan (H&K): And so the sorcerers came to Fir'aun (Pharaoh). They said: "Indeed there will be <u>a (good) reward</u> for us if we are the victors."

Ghali (MG): And the sorcerers came to Firaawn; they said, "Surely we will indeed have <u>a reward</u> in case we ourselves, are the over comers."

The following table represents the indefinite noun and its four translations.

N. of verse	113
The Arabic source	لَأَجْرًا
Arberry	a wage
Asad	a great reward
Hilali & Khan	a (good) reward
Ghali	a reward

a. Syntactic Analysis (including the lexical linguistic units):

In this verse, the word [*la'jəran*] is indefinite singular subject of *inna* in the accusative case. It is marked by nunation in the source text. Therefore, the definite article is not present.

b. Semantic Analysis:

Interpretation (content): The verse is about the sorcerers and Pharaoh. They came to him saying: 'Surely, there will be a great wage for us if we are the victors?' The context is about the challenge between Moses and the sorcerers of Pharaoh. Those asked Pharaoh a reward which is big and great if they are the victors.

Commentary: According to the explanation stated above, the word [*la'ajəran*] is indefinite as it denotes increase in quantity and greatness in value.

c. Functional Analysis:

I. The translation brief: There are two levels of addressing; Allāh addresses Muhammad (PBUH) and the sorcerers address Pharaoh. The motive for the production or reception of the source text is to indicate the great value of this challenge through having a promise from Pharaoh of a big and great reward.

II. Source-text analysis: Presuppositions are: the previous knowledge that the people of Pharaoh have said to him that Moses is, indeed, a well-versed sorcerer, and that he ought to send callers to the cities to bring to him all well-versed sorcerers. *'The chiefs of the people of Firaun (Pharaoh) said: "This is indeed a well-versed sorcerer; "He wants to get you out of your land, so*

what do you advise?" They said: "Put him and his brother off (for a time), and send callers (men) to the cities to collect (and) "That they bring up to you all well-versed sorcerers.' (7:109-12, Al-Hilali, & Khan. 1996)

Suprasegmental features: Nunation is not assimilated to the following /i/ sound in continuous speech. There is a *qalqala* to which I refer as /ə/. This is something, like the schwa in English, which said with the following Arabic sounds when they are in jussive (*q, ṭ, b, j,* and *d*).

III. The functional hierarchy of translation problems: The four translators use the indefinite article '*a*' in rendering this noun. Arberry and Ghali use '*a wage*' and '*a reward*' respectively. Yet, they do not render the purpose of indefiniteness. H&K use the adjective '*good*' which is not enough to indicate the value of the reward which the sorcerers wish to take. Asad uses the adjectival phrase '*a great reward*'. The word '*great*' may include both functions: great in value and in amount. Therefore, using indefiniteness alone to render the Arabic purposes into English is not enough in this case. Proper adjective may be required.

Finding: A preferred translation would be 'a *[great] + Noun*'.

6. Findings and Results

The study shows that indefinite nouns are usually rendered into English as indefinites when they denote unidentified quality and glorification/aggrandizement. It has also been found out that using English indefinite article alone does not, in some cases, convey the Arabic denotation of indefiniteness, i.e., additional English words may be used in order to indicate the purpose of Arabic indefiniteness, especially when the functions of an Arabic indefinite noun are various. The findings indicate that even in cases of similarities of the uses and manifestations of in/definiteness in Arabic and English, still some of the English translations do not denote the proper functions. This is, partly, due to the large number of functions and purposes.

In addition, it is, partly, due to the inability of the English indefinite to indicate the same functions of the Arabic indefinites. Most times where some functions are not rendered properly through English indefiniteness, other linguistic items (words, adjectives, functional words etc…) are

used between brackets. In addition, the study presents an example of unsuccessful ways in rendering indefinite nouns from Arabic into English which is the way of rendering the indefinite noun '*ħayaatun'* as bare noun in which the bare noun indicates general use. This indefinite noun denotes unidentified quality of life (however great) that would be a result out of retaliation.

Transliteration Conventions:

The following convention is used in transliterating Arabic words in this article:

Arabic symbols 1	ء	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع
English equivalent symbols 1	'	B	t	th	j	ḥ	kh	d	dh	r	Z	s	sh	ṣ	ḍ	ṭ	ẓ	c
Arabic symbols 2	غ	ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	هـ	و	ي	ـَ	ـِ	ـُ	آ	و~	ي~	او	اي
English equivalent symbols 2	gh	f	q	k	l	m	n	h	w	y	A	i	u	ā	ō	ē	aw	ay

Long vowels and geminate consonants are indicated by doubling the relevant symbols.

ˆ is used to denote Arabic assimilation.

Notes

This article is a part of my Ph. D. dissertation titled '*Evaluating the Rendering of Definiteness and Indefiniteness in Al-Baqara and Al-A'raf into English: A Syntactic and Semantic Study*' which has been submitted to the department of English, faculty of Arts, Helwan University, 2015.

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