



# **Evaluating the Translation of Synonymy in the Glorious Quran**

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ان المرادفات مصطلح لغوي . ويمكن تعريفها على انها كلمتين او اكثر بنفس المعنى. وتقع ضمن علم المعاني. يمكن للمرادفات ان تحل محل الاخرى في بعض الاحيان ولكن ليس دائما . وقد ينتج عن ذلك خسارة المعنى عن طريق زيادة الترجمة او نقصان الترجمة او الخطا في ترجمة النص الاصلي الى النص المستهدف . وتعتبر من الظواهر الشائعة في ترجمة القران الكريم بسبب عدم وجود المكافات لبعض الكلمات في اللغة المستهدفة. تحاول هذه الدراسة الاجابة على السؤال التالي:

- كيف يمكن للمترجمين الاستفادة من السياق في ترجمة مرادفات متقاربة مختارة في القران؟

تهدف الدراسة الى تقييم ترجمة المرادفات المتقاربة بناء على نموذج تحليل السياق. ان المرادفات المختارة في هذه الدراسة هي الجسد والجسم والبدن.

ستعتمد الدراسات على التراجم الاتية للقران الكريم:

- ترجمة معاني القران الكريم - عبدالله يوسف علي - ٢٠٠٢ .

- ترجمة معاني القران الكريم الى اللغة الانكليزية - الدكتور احمد زكي حماد - ٢٠٠٧ .

- ترجمة معاني القران الكريم للغة الانكليزية - الدكتور محمد محمود غالي - ٢٠٠٨ .

سيكون تحليل الايات القرانية كالآتي:

- استخراج الايات القرانية التي تحتوي على المرادفات المتقاربة للكلمات (الجسد والجسم والبدن) وكتابتها باللغة العربية متبوعة بالتراجم الثلاث.

- شرح المعنى اللغوي لكل من الكلمات اعلاه

- تحليل السياق للمرادفات المتقاربة.

- تقييم مدى ملائمة التراجم الثلاث لمعنى المرادفات الثلاث بناء على نموذج تحليل السياق ومعايير تقييم الترجمة.

اظهرت النتائج ضياعا كاملا او جزئيا للمعنى في التراجم بسبب الخطا في الترجمة او المعنى المعقد للمفردة والثقافة .

## Abstract

Synonymy is a linguistic term that can be defined as two or more words of similar and/or same meaning. It is part of the field of semantics. Synonymous words can sometimes replace each other but not always. Semantic loss, which can be in the form of overtranslation, undertranslation, or mistranslation for the source text, hence forth (ST), may result in an unacceptable translation because of partial or complete loss of meaning in the target text, hence forth (TT). It is a prevailing phenomenon in the translations of the Glorious Quran due to factors such as the lack of equivalent of some words in the target language, hence forth (TL).

The study tries to find out how translators take the context into consideration in their translations in opting near-synonymy in the Glorious Quran.

The study aims at evaluating the translation of near-synonymy based on a suggested model that is depended on context – analysis.

The near-synonymous words chosen for analysis are: Jasad, Jisim and Badan. جسد وجسم وبدن

The study will refer to the following Quranic Translations for analysis:

1. The meaning of the Holy Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2002).
2. The Gracious Quran: A Modern-phrased interpretation in English by Dr. Ahmed Zaki Hammad (2007).
3. Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Quran by Dr. Muhammad Mahmud Ghali (2008).

The analysis of the Quranic Ayas will be as follows:

1. Presenting the aya where any of the near-synonymous occurs (jasad, jisim or badan ) in the ST followed by the translations.
2. Explaining the linguistic meaning of each word.
3. Analyzing the context of these words of near-synonyms in Arabic.
4. Evaluating the appropriateness of the selected translations based on the model of context-analysis.

The results show that translators frequently commit a partial or complete semantic loss of meanings mainly because of mistranslations, semantically complex vocabularies, and variation of culture.

## 1. Synonymy in Linguistics

Semantically speaking, synonymy in English is defined as the linguistic term referring to lexical words or expressions that have similar and/or same meaning. Harris (1973) defines synonymy as 'sameness of meaning of different expression'. There is a dispute among linguists on the identification of synonymy and the degree of similarity and/or sameness between two words to be accounted for as synonymous words. While Taylor (2003) states that he finds synonymy very puzzling and it is as problematic as polysemy is. As synonymous words can be sometimes replaceable or can be used alternatively without affecting the meaning and in this case considered as "Absolute synonymy".

Other linguists, from another angle refuse the existence of this matching and moreover claim that there is no equality in meaning between two words or expressions. Lyons (1986:427) considers context in his definition of synonymy as 'two elements cannot be absolutely synonymous in one context unless they are synonymous in all contexts'.

Arab Linguists, consider synonymy as big debate as regards if Arabic language has identical words in meaning. Arab linguists are divided into two groups: the first group believing in the existence of synonymy and give justifications of incidents with the richness of the bases of the language and making use of the historical development in which obsolete-synonymous words were substituted by new words that hold the same meaning. The second group of linguists believing in the non-existence of synonymy and prefer the subsistence of differences in using these alike words. (Abdellah, 2010:9).

In the Quran interpretation the case of synonymy is very complicated because admitting the existence of synonymy would allow people to understand the text in various ways. The suggested solution for this is by referring to what is called near-synonymy which is defined by Lyons (1981: 50) as "more or less similar, but not identical in meaning.

The term near-synonymy is the most accepted term by most linguists whether Arab or non-Arab.

## 2. Context and translation

The meaning of a linguistic word is decided based on how people depend on a specific situation, a specific time and a specific person who participate in the communication. Van Dijk (1977:191) defines context as "a highly idealized abstraction from a situation and contains ... those facts which systematically determine the appropriateness of conventional utterance". As for the Relevance Theory, Gutt (1998:42) states that context is "a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumption about the world ... it is the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance". These definitions suggest that the term context is a very broad concept. Sperber and Wilson explain that "A context, in this sense, is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterance; expectations about the future, scientific hypothesis or religious beliefs. Anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation".

As a conclusion, it can be said that context can be defined as the necessary information one need to interpret the meaning of a word and/ or a phrase correctly.

Meaning can change depending on the context. When translating a text to a target language with different cultural background from the source language the translator might (quote the original text out of context) so the translator must analyze the structure and meaning of the linguistic expressions before he can give the proper translation.

## 3. Methodology

### A. Limits

This research is limited to the near synonymous words selected for the analysis:

Lexical items: Jasad, Jisim and Badan الجسد والجسم والبدن

### B. Model of Analysis

The translation of the Glorious Quran requires extra attention to the linguistic, historical and cultural contexts more than any other text. The proposed model of analysis is based on two types of contexts:

1. The linguistic context i.e. the vocabulary, the structure of the near synonymy.
2. The cultural context i.e. the situation and overall meaning.

The evaluation of the translations is judged upon the principle that the meaning is realized in the language of the ST and should be rendered in the TT. The translations will be judged according to four categories:

1. Over- translation: when the meaning is extended using the addition technique.
2. Under – translation: when the meaning is reduced or omitted.
3. Miss-translation: when the meaning is deviated from the original.

4. Match – translation: when the meaning is rendered correctly.

### C. Procedures

1. Presenting the aya in which any of the near-synonymy words occurs (Jasad, Jisim and Badan) in Arabic, with these words underlined.
2. Analyzing the linguistic and cultural context of these near synonymous in Arabic.
3. Presenting different translations for the same aya focusing on how these words are translated
4. Assessing the appropriateness of the translation according to the model of analysis.

### D. Limits

The research will be only evaluating the translations of the words under study (Jasad, Jisim and Badan) based on the translations of the three suggested translators. The culture context will be based on the exegete of Tafsir al-Jalalayn.

## 4. Translation of Near-Synonymy in the Quran

### A. Translation of 'jasad'

{ وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَدًا لَّا يَأْكُلُونَ الطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ } الانبياء (٨) •

#### 1. Linguistics Context:

جسد the body, with the limbs or members, (or whole person) of a human being, and of a jinnee, and of an angel, it is thus applied only to the body of a rational animal. ; to no body that is nourished with food except that of a human being; but to the body of every rational creature that neither eats nor drinks. <sup>1</sup>

#### 2. Cultural Context:

God did not make messengers of bodies that did not eat food; and they were not immortal in this world. <sup>2</sup>

#### 3. Translation Evaluation:

##### Ali

“Nor did we give them bodies that ate no food, nor were they exempt from death” (miss- translation)

Justification: the meaning is substituted.

##### Hammad

“Neither did We create them as mere bodies without spirits that did not eat food. Nor were they immortals” (over translation)

Justification: there is addition (without spirits).

##### Ghali

“And in no way did We make them (corporeal) forms that would not eat food, and in no way were they eternally (abiding)” (match- translation)

Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

{ وَاتَّخَذَ قَوْمُ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ خُلَيْبِهِمْ عَجَلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خَوَارٌ ؕ أَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمْ وَلَا يَهْدِيهِمْ سَبِيلًا اتَّخَذُوهُ وَكَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ } الاعراف (١٤٨) •

#### 1. Linguistics Context:

جسد the body, with the limbs or members, (or whole person) of a human being, and of a jinnee, and of an angel, it is thus applied only to the body of a rational animal. ; to no body that is nourished with food except that of a human being; but to the body of every rational creature that neither eats nor drinks. <sup>3</sup>

#### 2. Cultural Context:

The people of Moses made of their ornaments a calf which the Samaritan had made for them; a mere living body 'jasadan' is an apposition for 'ijlan 'a calf' after Moses had left for the communion with God. <sup>4</sup>

#### 3. Translation Evaluation:

##### Ali

“The people of Moses made, in his absence, out of their ornaments, the image of calf, [for worship]: it seemed to low: did they not see that it could neither speak to them, nor show them the way? They took it for worship and they did wrong”. (miss- translation)

Justification: the meaning is deviated from the ST.

##### Hammad

“Still, the people of Moses, after his departure to Mount Tur, made from their ornaments a Golden Calf to worship – a mere spiritless body that with the blowing wind made a sound of a low. Did they not consider that it could not even speak to them, nor guide them in any way? They took it as god, and thus they were wrongdoers, godless in heart”. (overtranslation)

Justification: the meaning is extended using addition (Golden Calf; a mere spiritless body)

**Ghali**

“And the people of Musa took to themselves even after him, of their (diverse) ornaments, a corporeal Calf that had a lowing (voice). Did they not see that it did not speak to them nor did it guide them upon any way? They took it to themselves and were an unjust (people)”. (Match translation) Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

• {فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عَجَلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خَوَارٌ فَقَالُوا هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَنَسِيَ} سورة طه (٨٨)

• Linguistics Context:

جسد the body, with the limbs or members, (or whole person) of a human being, and of a jinnee, and of an angel, it is thus applied only to the body of a rational animal. ; to no body that is nourished with food except that of a human being; but to the body of every rational creature that neither eats nor drinks. <sup>5</sup>

• Cultural Context:

The Samaritan made to the people of Moses a calf that he made from the melted jewelry — a mere body of flesh and blood. The calf made a heard sound; it was changed into such a state because of the dust from Gabriel’s steed, which create life in whatever thing it is put in. After he had formed it, he put the dust in its mouth. And the Samaritan and his followers said ‘This is our God and the God of Moses’ so Moses forgot his God here and start out in search of Him.<sup>6</sup>

• Translation Evaluation:

**Ali**

"Then he brought out [of the fire] before the [people] the image of a calf: It seemed to low: so they said: This is your god, and the god of Moses, but [Moses] has forgotten!" (misstranslation) Justification: the meaning is deviated from ST.

**Hammad**

“Then he brought forth for them the image of a Golden Calf – a mere spiritless body that with the wind made a sound of a low. And they said to each other: this is your god and the god of Moses”. (misstranslation)

Justification: the meaning is deviated from ST.

**Ghali**

“Then he brought out for them a corporeal calf that had a lowing (voice); so they said, “this is your god, and the god of Musa, yet he has forgotten”. (Match translation )

Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

• {وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَانَ وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَىٰ كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَدًا ثُمَّ أَنَابَ} سورة ص (٣٤)

• Linguistics Context:

جسد the body, with the limbs or members, (or whole person) of a human being, and of a jinnee, and of an angel, it is thus applied only to the body of a rational animal. ; to no body that is nourished with food except that of a human being; but to the body of every rational creature that neither eats nor drinks. <sup>7</sup>

• Cultural Context:

We tested Solomon by taking his kingdom from him because he had married a woman merely out of his desire for her. She used to worship statues in his home without his knowledge. Now, The control of his kingdom lay in his ring. Once he needed to take it out to relieve himself and he removed it out and left it with this woman; but a jinn disguised in the form of Solomon came to her and seized it from her. Then God casted upon his throne a dead body (The jinn known as Sakhr); The jinn sat upon Solomon’s throne. When Solomon came out of his palace and saw the jinn sitting in his throne he said to the people ‘I am Solomon not him!’ But they did not recognize him. Then Solomon repented and returned to his kingdom, after many days he had managed to obtain the ring. He wore it and sat upon his throne again.<sup>8</sup>

• Translation Evaluation:

**Ali**

“And We did try Solomon: We placed on his throne a body [without life]; but he did turn [to Us in true devotion]:” (misstranslation). Justification: the meaning is deviated from ST.

“and very truly, We put Solomon to the test when We cast upon his royal seat a mere body. Thereafter, he became ever-penitent”. (overtranslation). Justification: the meaning is extended using addition (mere).

#### Ghali

“And indeed We already tempted Sulayman, and We cast upon his chair a corporeal (form); thereafter he turned penitent”. (Match translation)  
Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

#### B. The translation of ‘jisim’

• { وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنْتَى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ } البقرة (٢٤٧)

#### 1. Linguistics Context:

جسم it signifies the whole body with limbs and members of a man and of a beast, a camel and the like. And of any other specious of large make.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2. Cultural Context:

The prophet told them that ‘God has chosen him (Saul) to be the king and has increased him broadly in body and amply in knowledge at that time he was the most knowledgeable and handsome of all the Children of Israel and the most perfect of character’.<sup>10</sup>

#### 3. Translation Evaluation:

##### Ali

“He said: Allah hath chosen him above you, And hath gifted him Abundantly with knowledge And bodily powers”. (undertranslation) Justification: the meaning is not rendered fully due to reduction and omission.

##### Hammad

“He said: indeed, God has chosen him over you and has increased him amply in knowledge and in stature”. (Match translation) Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

##### Ghali

“Allah has elected him above you and has increased him sizably in knowledge and figure”. (Match translation) Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

• { وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ خَشَبٌ مُسْتَنْدَةٌ يَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرْهُمْ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ } المنافقون (٤)

#### 1. Linguistics Context:

جسم it signifies the whole body with limbs and members of a man and of a beast, a camel and the like. And of any other specious of large make.<sup>11</sup>

#### 2. Cultural Context:

When you see them, you admire their figures because of their fairness; and when they speak, you listen to them because of their eloquent speech. Yet they are like blocks of timber read that have been propped-up set resting against a wall.<sup>12</sup>

#### Translation Evaluation:

##### Ali

“When thou lookest at them, their exteriors please thee; and when they speak, thou listenest to their words. They are as [worthless as hollow] pieces of timber propped up, [unable to stand on their own]. They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. The curse of Allah be on them! How are they deluded [away from the Truth]!” (misstranslation) Justification: the meaning is deviated from ST.

##### Hammad

“Now when you see them, their physical appearance pleases you. And when they speak, you hear their lofty words. Yet it is as if they are propped up logs! Inwardly, they think that every shout of forewarning is against them. They are the enemy. So beware of them! May God strike them down!” (overtranslation)

Justification: the meaning is extended by addition (appearance)

##### Ghali

“And when you see them, you admire their figures; and in case they speak, you hear their speech as if they were propped-up timbers. They reckon every shout is against them. They are the enemy, so beware of them. Allah assail them! However are they diverged (from the truth)!” (Match translation) Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly

### C. Translation of ‘Badan’

• {فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِبَدَنِكَ لِتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلَقَكَ آيَةً وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا لَغَافِلُونَ} يونس (٩٢)

#### 1. Linguistics Context:

بدن the body without the head and the arms and legs; or body without the arms and legs: or from the shoulders-joint to the posteriors.<sup>13</sup>

#### 2. Cultural Context:

God says today We shall save Pharaoh and We shall bring him out of the sea in his body i.e. in his lifeless corpse so that he is a sign/ lesson for those after him. They might come to know Pharaoh’s servitude and do not commit deeds like his. Ibn ‘Abbās says that some of the Children of Israel doubted the death of Pharaoh and so God brought him out of the sea so that they see him.<sup>14</sup>

#### 3. Translation Evaluation:

##### Ali

"This day shall We save thee in the body, that thou mayest be a sign to those who come after thee! but verily, many among mankind are heedless of Our Signs!" (Match translation) Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

##### Hammad

“Rather, today, We shall deliver you preserving you in your body only so that you will become a sign for those who come after you that God is exalted in His power. For, indeed, many of the people are heedless of our signs”. (over -translation) Justification: the meaning is extended using addition (only).

##### Ghali

“So today We will (safely) deliver you with your body that you may be a sign to those ones succeeding you; and surely many among mankind are indeed heedless of our ayat.” (Match translation) Justification: the meaning is rendered correctly.

### Evaluation of the Translations

Ayas	Ali	Hammad	Ghali
1	Miss – translation	Over – translation	Match – translation
2	Miss – translation	Over- translation	Match – translation
3	Miss – translation	Miss – translation	Match – translation
4	Miss – translation	Over – translation	Match – translation
5	Under – translation	Match - translation	Match – translation
6	Miss – translation	Over – translation	Match – translation
7	Match – translation	Over – translation	Match – translation

### Conclusions

1. Near synonymy is proved to be context – dependent based on the model of analysis
2. Throughout the evaluation of the three translations of the sample near- synonymy in the Quran , it is noticed that some translators do not differentiate the meaning of the words ‘jasad’ and ‘jisim’ (Ali and Hammad)
3. Ghali was the most successful translator in conveying the adequate meaning based on the proposed model
4. Hammad used over- translation through techniques of extending the text by addition in most of the cases.
5. Ali provided miss-translations in most of the translations.

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) page 423.

<sup>2</sup> Tafsir al-Jalalayn, trans. Feras Hamza.

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<sup>3</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) page 423.

<sup>4</sup> Tafsir al-Jalalayn, trans. Feras Hamza

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<sup>5</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) page 423

<sup>6</sup> Tafsir al-Jalalayn, trans. Feras Hamza

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<sup>7</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) page 423

<sup>8</sup> Tafsir al-Jalalayn, trans. Feras Hamza

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<sup>9</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) page 425

<sup>10</sup> Tafsir al-Jalalayn, trans. Feras Hamza

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<sup>11</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) 425

<sup>12</sup> Tafsir al-Jalalayn, trans. Feras Hamza

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<sup>13</sup> Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane London: (Willams & Norgate 1863) page 169

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