

## WORDS EXPANSION PHENOMENON IN ARABIC LANGUAGE AND THEIR IMPACT ON TRANSLATIONS OF THE QURAN'S MEANINGS

**Dr. Ayad N. Abdullah,**

Senior Lecture (USIM) [ayad@usim.edu.my](mailto:ayad@usim.edu.my)

**Dr. Mohammad Hikmat Shaker,**

Senior Lecture (USIM) [mshaker@usim.edu.my](mailto:mshaker@usim.edu.my)

**Associate Professor Dr. Bhasah Abu Bakar,**

Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM) [bhasah@usim.edu.my](mailto:bhasah@usim.edu.my)

### Abstract

The holy Qur'an is very rich and filled with various kinds of miracles; rhetorical miracle is only one of these miracles. This appears when the words meaning expands (*itisa'a*) into several meanings. Qur'an traditional "Mufasssireen" unanimously considered that all those meanings are intended meanings in the text of the verses. Elzikhshari (Died 538H) is one of the early "Mufasssireen" who cared for this phenomenon and stated its forms in his interpretation "Al-Kashaf". This paper aims to discuss al (*itisa'a*) phenomenon and its affect on the Qur'an meanings translation into English language. The researchers reviewed many translations of the Quran's Meanings into English; through descriptive analytical method, they compared the translations of many verses with the multi meanings of those words in Arabic. The findings revealed that English translations of the Qur'an meanings did not take into account al (*itisa'a*) words expansion phenomenon, these translations focused on some of the words in the verses where there is widening in the meaning, when translators take one visible meaning of a word without addressing the rest of other meanings which result narrow or limited translations. The researchers recommend that translators need to take care of the words meaning expansion to achieve better translations.

**Keywords:** Qur'an, expansion, (*itisa'a*), meanings, translations

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews one of the Arabic language characteristics; which is the *itisa'a* of the words or the breadth of meanings, where the meaning of a single word expands into several meanings. This feature enables speakers and authors to avoid prolong the speech/ text, when they mention one word or a single phrase rather than prolong the sentence with several words compositions, so no need to combine more words for the required meanings.

In Arabic language there are similar words that give different interpretations, where a single phrase or one word has gathered more than one meaning; like "سائل" that means a 'person who ask', as well as 'liquid'. Another word is "خصم" which means 'discount' and also means 'enemy'. Such words summarize the expression and expand the meaning.

The Noble Quran came in Arabs language. Quran meaning was translated into English language by many scholars, so many times. The best translation of the Qur'an meanings into English language was conducted by "Sahih International" for the Islamic Forum and was published by King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Complex for Printing the Holy Quran in Saudi Arabia. It is a revised translation and error-free "as possible". And also, there are some other reliable translations that can be adopted as well, namely:

- a. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali Hussein al Maghribi.

- b. Mohammed Marmaduke Mohammed Victal (d. 1930); an English Orientalist who converted to Islam, he translated the Holy Quran into English from Arabic origin directly and he called "the meaning of the Holy Qur'an," in 1930, which was well arranged.
- c. Muhammad Asad, a Western Orientalist also converted to Islam, has also translated the Holy Qur'an into English from Arabic origin directly in 1964, and titled the "message of the Koran."

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the holy Qur'an we find some verses with words afford more than one meaning. These words come in the Qur'an in order to collect and express all these meanings in concise word, which means; all these meanings are required and needed in that verse.

The problem is when scholars translate the meanings of Qur'an into English; they do not take into consideration of the word's expands *itisa'a* into several meanings. Therefore, they use to take or pick up the most prominent meaning or the 'famous' one, without dealing with other meanings. In this case, we do not say that these translations were uncompleted, but rather are not perfect.

## 3. OBJECTIVES

- a- To investigate verses; the words expansion that bear several meanings, and to explore its meanings.
- b- To discuss the translations of these words in the selected verses.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

The data collection in this paper will depend on Qur'an translation by "Sahih International" that will be used to pick up the English words. Data collection of Arabic words came in the Koran that has several meanings, through: "Al-Kashaff" (Zmkhcri, 1977), Samarrai, Fadel Saleh (2000) and Samarrai, Mohammed (1428).

The method taken in this paper is a critical approach which uses descriptive and analytical method. The researchers will at first identify words that embraced more than one meaning, and then they check the translations of that verse and criticize whether the translation was complete or partially translated.

## 5. ARABIC WORDS EXPANSION

The expansion of the meanings occurred through the following two phenomena: The *itisa'a* and the readings.

### 5.1 In Surah Al-Kawthar (verse 1): stated

(إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ) (الكوثر: 1)

This verse was translated as: Indeed, We have granted you, [O Muhammad], al-Kawthar. The word "الكوثر" translated as al-Kawthar preserved the same Arabic word, no English meaning was provided. This al-Kawthar has three meanings in Arabic: 'a lot', 'a lot of good welfare', and 'a river in paradise, all of these meanings are located in the destination of the verse.

### 5.2 In Surah Al-Qamar (verse 54):

(إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ) (القمر: 54)

In the Holy Qur'an 'God', Allah (SWT) promised to the believers: *Paradise beneath which rivers flow*. This truly came at 37 verses, within 26 Surat<sup>1</sup>. In all these verses the word 'rivers' were plural. However, in one verse in 'Surah Al-qamar' verse 54, it came differently than in the 37<sup>th</sup> verses, the word 'river' came as singular,:

(إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ) (القمر: 54)

This verse was translated: "Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and rivers". Although, the word 'river' came in the text as singular "نهر", but it was translated "rivers", which is a positive sign in the translation. The question here is: why is the word "river" in this verse came as singular?

The word "river" accommodates more than one meaning; it means rivers (Al-Kashaf, 3/186), also said: "river" means amplitude in the housing and living and livelihood (Roh Al-Ma'aani, 2/95) and finally "river" means

1 These Surat and verses are: Al-Baqarah: 25. Ali-Imran: 15, 136,195,198. An-Nisa': 13, 57, 122. Al-Ma'idah: 12, 85,119. Al-A'raf: 43. At-Taubah: 72, 89, 100. Yunus: 9. Ar-Ra'd: 35. Ibrahim: 23. Al-Nahl: 31. Al-Kahf: 31. Taha: 76. Al-Haj: 14, 23. Al-furqan: 10. Al-Ankabut: 58. Az-Zumar: 20. Mohammad: 12. Al-Fath: 5, 17. Al-Hadid: 12. Al-Mujadila: 22. As-Saf: 12. At-Taghabun: 9. At-Tahrim: 8. Al-Buruj:11. Al-Bayyinah: 8.

luminance (Lisan Al-Arab, Nahr, 7/96). Therefore, the word “river” has three meanings; the translator took only the first one meaning.

### 5.3 In Surat Al-Qaṣaṣ (verse: 25):

(فَجَاءَتْهُ إِحْدَاهُمَا تَمْشِي عَلَى اسْتِحْيَاءٍ قَالَتْ إِنَّ أَبِي يَدْعُوكَ لِيَجْزِيَكَ أَجْرَ مَا سَقَيْتَ لَنَا) (القصص: 25)

This verse was translated: “Then one of the two women came to him walking with shyness. She said, “Indeed, my father invites you that he may reward you for having watered for us”.

The word اسْتِحْيَاءٍ that translated ‘shyness’ has two meanings: “Walking with shyness’ and ‘said with shyness”. The translator used the first meaning only.

### 5.4 In Surat Al-Mā'idah (verse: 26):

(قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً يَتِيهُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ) (المائدة: 26)

This verse was translated as: [Allah] said, “Then indeed, it is forbidden to them for forty years [in which] they will wander throughout the land. So do not grieve over the defiantly disobedient people”. The two words ‘forty years’ (أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً) can be related to forbidden and to lost; which means it is forbidden to them for forty years, as well as they lost forty years, both meanings are correct (Al-Kashaff, 1/ 605).

### 5.5 In Surah Taha, (verse 29):

The words of Moses, peace be upon him:

(وَاجْعَلْ لِي وَزِيرًا مِنْ أَهْلِي) (طه: 29)

Was translated as: “And appoint for me a minister from my family”.

The word “wazir, وزير” accommodates more than one meaning; a Minister, helper, and a shelter in the mountain. Therefore, Moses asked Allah:

- To make one of his family member ‘whom he can turn to in his affairs’ and take advantage of his opinion,
- The second he called to make one of his family member ‘who carries weight with him’,
- And the third called him to make someone who assists him in this task.

Therefore, Moses asked Allah SWT all these connotations of the term. These three meanings for “wazir” were translated into English in one word ‘helper’, similar to “معيناً” in “Tafsir Ibn Ashour”, and معيناً in Tafsir Tabari: *And grant me a helper from my family.* (Taha: 29).

### 5.6 Example from Surah Yusuf (verse 85):

(قَالُوا يَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهَذَا حَكْمٌ وَلَا نُفْيُوكَ مِنْهَا قُلْ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُكُمْ أَنْ كُنتُمْ بَرِيًّا) (يوسف: 85).

This verse was translated as follows:

“They said, By Allah, you will not cease remembering Joseph until you become fatally ill or become of those who perish”<sup>2</sup>.

The word نَفَّوْا was translated as *not cease*, whereas it has three meanings: forget, silenced and put down the fire.

“حَرَضًا”: has the meanings of: a person who is about to die, and: a person who is neither dead to be forgot nor alive to deal with him.

Thus, the intended meanings are: they swear by God that he still remember Joseph; do not forget his memory, never silent for years, does not put down the fire of his memory, until you almost die or become between life and death.

### 5.7 In Surat Al-Balad (verse: 11):

(فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ) (البلد: 11)

This verse was translated as: “But he has not broken through the difficult pass”.

The word (فلا) was translated *not*, this word has four meanings that can be reflected upon the verse: he did not crosses into the difficult pass, he will not crosses the difficult pass, Wishing him not to cross the difficult pass, and finally is an exclamation will he crosses the difficult pass?!

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.islambasics.com/view.php?bkID=120&chapter=12>

### 5.8 In Surat Al-Qiyāmah (verse: 12):

(إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يُؤْمِنُ الْمُسْتَقَرُّ) (القيامة: 12)

Was translated as: "To your Lord, that Day, is the [place of] permanence".

The world (الْمُسْتَقَرُّ) was translated as *permanence*, this word has three meanings; the first meaning is stability, second is the place (Heaven or Hell) and the last one is the time of the permanence.

### 5.9 In Surat Yā-Sīn (verse: 2):

(وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ) (يس: 2)

The verse was translated as: "By the wise Qur'an". Whereas, in addition to the word 'wise', "الحكيم"; has several meanings; tight, dominant and sage (Samarrai, Fadel Saleh 2000: 172).

## 6 THE SEVEN READINGS OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

Reading "Al-qira'at" is the science concerned in how to pronounce the words of the Qur'an, and to facilitate the utterance. Talk about the Koranic readings linked to the first phase which receives the Prophet, peace be upon him verses of the Book, and then communicated to the Companions. Verses and hadith emphasizes an important thing, which is that; the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was responsible to inform the Qur'an to the people as he heard, without any change. Thus companions received the Koran from the Messenger of Allah very proficiency and control. The difference in the readings is a difference in variety but not the different contrast or contradiction, the difference in audio terms and not in the meanings understandable. Differed in pronunciation of words and meaning shall not lead to contrast and contradiction. The seven readers are: Nafea- Ibn Kathir- Hafsa Abu Aamru- Ibn Aa'mir- Aa'sim- Hamzah- Al Kasai. All these readings are correct; none of them is contradictory to another. Moreover, a translator should realize that some reading give a new meanings worthy of attention during the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an. Below are some examples:

### 6.1 The First Example: (Surat Al-Fatihah: 4)

(مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ) (الفاتحة: 4)

Was translated as: (Sovereign of the Day of Recompense).

The word "مَالِكِ" has two readings:

"مَالِكِ"; in the reading of "Hafsa" that means the 'owner', and "مَلِكِ" in the reading of "Nafea" which means 'King'; is more general than the word مَالِكِ in his hand the commands and prohibitions and everything. Both meanings involved befit God Almighty (Zaqzouq, Mahmoud, 2004. P: 42).

### 6.2 The Second Example: (Surat Al-Isra: 102)

(قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِصَافِرٍ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا فِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُورًا) (سورة الإسراء: 102)

Was translated as: [Moses] said, "You have already known that none has sent down these [signs] except the Lord of the heavens and the earth as evidence, and indeed I think, O Pharaoh, that you are destroyed" (Surat Al-Isra: 102). Due to this translation, "علمت" was translated "You have already known".

The verb "علمت know" has two readings, the first reading "علمت" that means that Moses addressed the Pharaoh, which means you have learned O Pharaoh (Al-Shirazi); according to this reading the above translation was conducted: "You know". Due to the second reading that was read by "Alkasai": "علمت" (Ibn al-Jazari, :309) which means that Moses spoke about himself, an answer the Pharaoh who said ([Pharaoh] said, "Indeed, your 'messenger' who has been sent to you is mad.) (Ash-Shu'arā': 27). Under this reading "علمت" should be translated (I learned, or I know). Therefore, the word "علمت" means "You know" and "I know" and must be translated accordingly.

### 6.3 The Third Example: (Surat 'Ibrāhīm: 46)

(وَقَدْ مَكَرُوا مَكْرَهُمْ وَعِنْدَ اللَّهِ مَكْرُهُمْ وَإِن كَانَ مَكْرُهُمْ لِتَزُولَ مِنْهُ الْجِبَالُ) (إبراهيم: 46)

The translation of the verse was as follows:

*And they had planned their plan, but with Allah is [recorded] their plan, even if their plan had been [sufficient] to do away with the mountains]*

The verb "لتزول" has two readings, depending on the type of word "إن". First when إن used for denial, the verb "لتزول" came as in the above verse: this is unanimously approved by the majority of readers; then the mountains become a metaphor, which means here the demise of the religion of Islam and solid things such as miracles (Ibn al-Jazari, c 2300). To this reading the verse means "*their plan had not been sufficient to do away with the religion*".

The second reading: read by Al kasai "التزول", in case "إن" was diluted. Then the meaning in that case is the real mountains; "Their cunning was (big enough) to demise of the mountains".

#### 6.4 The Fourth Example: (Surat Al-An'am, verse: 61)

(وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ حَفَظَةً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَكُمْ الْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا وَهُمْ لَا يُفِرُّونَ) (الأنعام: 61).

This verse was translated as: *And He is the subjugator over His servants, and He sends over you guardian-angels until, when death comes to one of you, our messengers take him, and they do not fail [in their duties].* In this text the verb "يُفِرُّونَ" was translated 'fail'.

In fact there are two readings of the word "يُفِرُّونَ": the majority of scholars read "يُفِرُّونَ" that means the angels do not fail as ordered to do, do not overlook not hesitate. Second reading "يُفِرُّونَ" Means they do not increase (Al-Burhan 2/55). The two readings indicate that angels do what they are ordered to do, without an increase or decrease. Therefore, (they do not fail) is rather; (they do not increase or decrease).

### 7 CONCLUSION

This paper introduced one of the important characteristic of Arabic language, which is the expanding in meaning that translate into the existence of more than one meaning per word. This phenomenon was investigated in the Qur'anic text in several verses, and was compared with selected translation. The findings revealed that translators of the Qur'anic meanings took one meaning closed to their understanding and leave the rest of the meanings without mentioning them, as shown in many examples. The researchers conclude that even translators who accomplished a sober translation have missed such cases. The findings also revealed that some reading produced several meaning per word that translators should take care of to make it a complete understanding.

### REFERENCES

- Samarrai, Fadel Saleh 2000. *Arabic sentence and meaning*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm
- Samarrai, Mohammed. Words' breadth in meaning and compositions, at Al-Kashaff interpretation. Umm Al-Qura University, Journal of Science Sharia Arabic language and Literature; Vol. 19, No. 4. 1428. P: 344-394.
- Al-Farra, Abu Zakaria Yahya ibn Ziyad. 1955. *The meanings of the Qur'an*. Reviewed by Dr. Abdel Fattah Shelby. Cairo: The Egyptian National Library of authoring and translation Press.
- Al-Fayroozabaadi, Mujid Adin. 1978. *Alk Muhit Dictionary*. Beirut: Dar Alfkir.
- Asbahaani, Raghieb. 1999. *Vocabulary words of the Koran*. Reviewed by: Mohammad Khalil Itani, Beirut: Dar knowledge. Second Edition.
- Ibn Manzoor, Lisan Arab. Beirut: Dar Revival Arab Heritage
- Elzikhshari, Mahmoud Abu al-Qasim ibn Umar. 1977. *Al-Kashaff on the Tnzil Realities*. Beirut: Dar Alfkir.