

Issues in Translating Collocations of the Holy Qur'an

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Abstract

This paper discusses the most serious problems faced by translators while translating collocations in the Holy Qur'an. It is proposed that collocations present a main obstacle for translators specially when rendering collocations in the Holy Qur'an. For clarifying this idea, the researcher selected some examples of three English translations namely, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: Text and Explanatory Translation* by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Holy Qur'an: Text and Translation & Commentary* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and *The Quran Interpreted: A Translation* by Arthur John Arberry. This selection is to compare these translations of each collocation to see which translator is most approximate to the Qur'anic text of the collocation. A number of sound and authentic Qur'anic exegeses are consulted, in addition to some famous and important dictionaries to explore the translator's need to depend upon such interpretations when translating - the meanings particularly - collocations of the Qur'an into English. The conclusion made in this paper shows that (i) translators faced difficulties in rendering lexical collocations, (ii) translators of the Qur'an should carefully understand the nature of lexical collocation, (iii) should comprehend the differences between the beliefs and concepts of Arabic and English ones, and (iv) should always take the context into consideration by avoiding literal translation.

Key words: Translation, collocations, the Holy Qur'an.

1. Introduction

Collocation is a linguistic phenomenon found in different languages. Each language has special ways in dealing with its own collocations. Collocation is basically a lexical relation

between words which combine orderly with other particular words to shape one semantic unit. However, this combination of words is not subject to rules but to certain constraints that determine the way they can be combined to convey meaning. The meaning resulting from collocation is not simply a matter of associations of ideas but, according to Palmer (1986:79), is “idiosyncratic” and cannot be predictable from the meaning of the associated words. Palmer gives the example of “blond” as an adjective referring to colour. It is highly restricted in its distribution. “Blond” is associated with hair and not with door even if the colour of the door is “blond”. Therefore, there is blond hair but not blond door.

Collocations in language as well as in translation are important. The necessary role of collocations in a language creates Linguists' interest in the translation of collocations. On the one hand, language proficiency can be shown through the ability of producing and using agreeable and suitable collocations. Hence, they are “crucial to the interpretations of a text” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:287).

Newmark (1988) and Abu-Ssyadeh (2007) have acknowledged that collocations have a significant role in language as well as in translation. In this respect, Newmark (1988:213) says that collocations are “nerves of the text and lexis are the flesh”. In a similar way, Abu-Ssyadeh (2007:70) mentions that the “interest” and “awareness” of study in the collocations’ area are due to the important role played by collocations as “central to the process of foreign language learning and translation”.

However, translators encounter an enormous difficulty while translating collocations in general and Arabic collocations in particular. A group of linguists (e.g. Baker, 1992; Bahumaid, 2006) have stated that translators have been facing different problems in translating collocations. Newmark (1988) has declared that the translator has to deal with several problems of various types in translating collocations.

Like others, Baker (1992) relates these issues to the relative changes of the linguistic and cultural between the SL and the TL. Namely, lexemes vary in their collocability according to the differences between languages. So what collocates in one language may not inevitably collocate in another. Moreover, specific paradigms of collocations reflect preference of the certain language. Baker (1992:52) proves this by giving the example of the verb “drink” which in English collocates naturally with liquids like “juice and milk”, but does not collocate with “soup”. Yet, what collocates with “soup” in Arabic is the verb “drink”.

Collocations have the features of being “largely arbitrary and independent of meaning” (Baker, 1992: 48). The most important point about collocational meaning is that each lexeme makes an independent contribution to the meaning of the whole collocation. This recognizes the fact that lexemes have meanings that range from normal to special or from restricted to idiomatic. For example, the central and most frequent meaning for the adjective "white" is found in “white snow” or “white paint” (Dweik, B., & Abu Shakra, M. 2011).

Obviously, “white lie” (harmless) or “white night” (sleepless) is so different from the major meaning of “white”. Then, collocations could create a tremendous problem in translation, in particular if the translator lacks the capacity to recognise and realize such collocational types, with their “figurative and unique meanings as different from the sum of meaning of individual words” (Baker, 1992: 53).

Translating Arabic collocations into English is considered as a difficult task and gets further aggravated while rendering the collocations of the Holy Qur’an. Most of the problems faced are due to the specificity of particular lexical items, which are steadfast in the structure of the language and are deeply immersed in Arabic culture.

1. Translation of Collocation

Translators have to give the suitable attention to collocations since they have their significance in both SL and TL. Samdja, et al. (1995: 33) suggest three main reasons for the

significance of providing a rendering for collocations. First, they are ambiguous structures which cannot be rendered on a word by word base. Second, collocations are realm dependent. In each realm, there occurs a diversity of phrases that have certain meanings, and translations should place only in the given realm. Finally, consistencies between collocations in bilingual dictionaries are mostly unexplored. Larson (1984:146) discusses the collocational clashes describing the errors of lexical collocations committed by people who are not native speakers of a language. He differentiates between collocational clashes and cultural clashes stating that the former should not be affected by the latter. He adds that the translator must be aware of the hidden pitfall of collocational clashes. Baker (1992:54-59) states that some pitfalls and problems in translating collocations belong to the engrossing effect of the SL text pattern, mistranslating the meaning of the SL collocation, the tension between accuracy and originality, and the existence of specific cultural collocations. Sarikas (2006: 39) proclaims that the translator should be smart enough to realize the word relations and grammatical orders of the SL while rendering collocations into the TL since each language has specific words and structures which are peculiarly organized,. Otherwise, a loss of meaning in rendering collocations would take place.

2. Translation of Collocation in the Glorious Qur'an

Translators of the Holy Qur'an encounter various problems and the most problematic one is how to deal with collocations. Armstrong (2005:97) declares that despite selection of the constraints and restriction that prevent words co-occurring in ways that produce nonsense, the restriction of collocation operates to produce to a great extent arbitrary variance between near-synonyms. The difference between near-synonyms will be exposed through the context in which they appear. As Baker (1992:47; quoted in Armstrong 2005:97) indicates that collocation has relation with arbitrary restrictions which do not obey logically the propositional meaning of the word. The translators' difficulty does not lie in recognizing an SL collocation; only in finding an acceptable TL equivalent which leads to an appropriate translation.

In this paper three translations of the Holy Qur'an are chosen in order to analyze the way translators have rendered the Qur'anic verses that contain collocations. The translations selected are those of Pickthall (1938), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2007), and Arberry (1988). This paper is confined to the analysis of the Qur'anic verses that contain collocations of the type (Verb + Noun), even though many types of collocations are available.

Under the type Verb + Noun collocation, many examples could be found in the verses of the Glorious Qur'an. But in this paper only five collocations have been taken for analysis. These collocations are: "يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ", "اسْتَوْفَدْنَا نَارًا", "يَضْرِبُ مَثَلًا", "يَشْرَحُ صَدْرَهُ", and "حَوْلَانَاهُ نِعْمَةً", respectively. Three different Qur'anic verses are considered for each collocation.

SL (1):

{الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ} (3) سورة البقرة

Transliteration: Allatheena yu'minoona bi alghaybi wa yuqeemoona alssalata wa mimma

Gloss : who believe in unseen and perform the prayer and Out of
Razaqna hum yunfiqoona.
what We have provided them they spend.

TL Texts:

1- Pickthall (1938:1)

Who believe in the unseen, and **establish worship**, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them.

2- Ali (2007:5)

Who believe in the Unseen, are **steadfast in prayer**, and spend out of what We have provided for them.

3- Arberry (1988:19)

who believe in the Unseen, and **perform the prayer**, and expend of that We have provided them.

Discussion

This verse clarifies that the most essential quality of the God-fearing believers is their conscious, active moral unity that enriches their souls with profound belief in the imperceptible, dedication to their religious obligations... Such are the ingredients that make the Muslim faith a complete whole and distinguishes believers from unbelievers (Qutb, 2004, vol. 1: 28).

Ibn Kathir (2009:168/1); al-Fīrūzabādī (2013: 3); and al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūfī (2007: 3) state that the word **يُقِيمُونَ** has a specific functional meaning which refers to maintaining the prayer by performing it at its exact times and giving its obligations perfectly.

Pickthall and Arberry render the collocation literally, maintaining the syntactic structure of the collocation but they did not maintain the meaning of the collocation. To maintain the meaning of the SL collocation, each verb should be preceded by an adjective to avoid the ambiguity of the collocation. The adjective 'regular' should be accompanied by the verb 'establish', and the adjective 'ritual' should be added to the verb 'perform (Baalbaki, 1995:144). The use of the word 'regular' emphasizes that prayer should be kept up continuously, while the use of 'ritual' indicates that the intended prayer in this combination is not the words that someone says or thinks when they are praying, but it is a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of action types of behaviour regularly and invariably performed according to a prescribed order.

Another point in Pickthall's translation of this collocation is concerned about the word الصلاة Prayer is unsuitable. Obviously, the translator has translated it as *worship* that includes almost everything in any ritualistic activities *such* as prayers, fasting, charity, etc.

Ali changes the structural unit replacing the verb يُقِيمُونَ by the adjective “steadfast” that is completely different from the meaning of the verb since the meaning of steadfast is ‘unwavering or determined in purpose’.

All translators fail to render the SL (يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ) collocation in consistency with the TL collocations. However, Arberry's collocation choice seems to be the best.

SL (2):

{مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ} (17) سورة البقرة

Transliteration: Mathalu hum ka mathali allathee istawqada naran fa lamma adaat ma hawla

Gloss : .parable their like a parable who kindled a fire so when it lighted what around
 hu thahaba Allahu binoorihim wa taraka hum fee thulumatin la yubsiroona.
 him took away Allah their light and left them in darkness do not they see.

TL Texts

1- Pickthall (1938:1)

Their likeness is as the likeness of one who **kindleth fire**, and when it sheddeth its light around him Allah taketh away their light and leaveth them in darkness, where they cannot see.

2- Ali (2007:6)

Their similitude is that of a man who **kindled a fire**; when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see.

3- Arberry (1988:20)

The likeness of them is as the likeness of a man who **kindled a fire**, and when it lit all about him God took away their light, and left them in darkness unseeing.

Discussion

This verse suggests the role played by the hypocrites in undermining the Muslim community during those formative years, and how they instigated trouble and instability in that community. It is also an indication of how far-reaching a role hypocrites can play in any Muslim

community, and that there is a need to expose their activities and maleficent scheming against the Muslims (Qutb, 2004 , vol. 1: 36).

Al-Fīrūzabādī (2013: 5) and Ibn Kathir (2009:181/1) say that what is meant by this collocation is a person who lights a fire in the darkness.

All the translators render the collocation literally, maintaining the form and the meaning of the original collocation. Baalbaki (1995:209); Ghazala (2007:571); and Benson (1997:98) state that the noun ‘fire’ collocates with the verb ‘kindle’.

Accordingly, all translators, except Pickthall who uses a very old-fashioned word *kindleth*, which is hardly known to people, succeed to appropriately render the SL collocation “اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا” in consistency with the TL collocations.

One point should be noted here. That is, the three translators write the word *fire* with the indefinite article except Pickthall who writes this word with an initial small letter and without an article. Whenever the word "fire" is used to refer to anything other than Hell, it should begin with a small letter and be used with an article. Thus, Ali’s and Arberry’s translations are more appropriate than Pickthall’s.

SL (3)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ
مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ { (26) سورة البقرة

Transliteration: Inna Allaha la yastahyee an yadriba mathalan ma baAAoodatan fa ma

Gloss : Indeed Allah not is ashamed to set forth a parable of a mosquito and even

Fawqa ha fa amma allatheena amanoo fayaAAalamoona anna hu

more than that and as for who believe so they know that it is

al haqqu min rabbi him wa amma allatheena kafaroo fa yaqooloona

the truth from Lord their and as for those who disbelieve so they say

ma tha arada Allahu bi hatha mathalan yudillu bi hi katheeran

what with did intend Allah by this parable He misleads by it many
wa yahdee bi hi katheeran wa ma yudillu bi hi illa al
and He guides by it many and not He misleads by it except the
fasiqeena.
disobedient.

TL Texts

1- Pickthall (1938:2)

Lo! Allah disdaineth not to coin the similitude even of a gnat. Those who believe know that it is the truth from their Lord; but those who disbelieve say: What doth Allah wish (to teach) by such a similitude? He misleadeth many thereby, and He guideth many thereby; and He misleadeth thereby only miscreants.

2- Ali (2007:6)

Allah disdains not to use the similitude of things, lowest as well as highest. Those who believe know that it is truth from their Lord; but those who reject Faith say: "What means Allah by this similitude?" By it He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path; but He causes not to stray, except those who forsake [the path].

3- Arberry (1988:21)

God is not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat, or aught above it. As for the believers, they know it is the truth from their Lord; but as for unbelievers, they say, 'What did God desire by this for a similitude?' Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many; and thereby He leads none astray save the ungodly.

Discussion

This verse suggests that the unbelievers who were trying to exploit such use of parables to raise doubts about the Qur'an's divine origin, claim that God would not speak about such

insignificant creatures as spiders and flies. They thus hoped to undermine the authority and authenticity of the Qur'an. This verse serves to refute that argument and explain the wisdom underlying the use of such parables, while warning unbelievers against taking up such a line of argument and reassuring believers that they will strengthen their faith. Besides, parables are used to explain and illustrate concepts and ideas, and the size or shape of their subjects is irrelevant; in no case should they be slighted or scoffed at (Qutb, 2004, vol. 1: 41).

Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī (2007: 6); al-Fīrūzabādī (2013: 5); and Ibn Kathir (2009:206/1) state that the word يَضْرِبُ which formally denotes “coining and striking” functionally means "mention" or “use” in this collocation.

When this collocation is taken literally, it means that a simile is struck or coined concretely. The verb ‘coin’ is used to refer to ‘making pieces of money from metal, and the verb strike is used to refer to ‘hitting forcibly and deliberately with one's hand or a weapon’ (Longman English Dictionary Online).

Because of the resulting incongruity, the recipient is likely to assume that the word يَضْرِبُ ‘coin’ or ‘strike’ is used here to refer to hit against something. Rather, it must be used to refer to an abstract object since it is followed by the word مَثَلًا (a similitude).

Pickthall and Arberry render the collocation literally, maintaining the form of the original collocation but producing unsuitable translation, while Ali renders it conceptually, maintaining the form as well as the meaning of the Arabic collocation perfectly.

According to Baalbaki (1995:710) rendering the collocation يَضْرِبُ مَثَلًا as ‘give an example’ is much more appropriate.

SL (4)

{فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا كَأَنَّمَا يَصَّعْدُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَذَلِكَ يَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ
الرَّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ } (125) سورة الأنعام

Transliteration: Fa man

yuridi Allahu an yahdiya hu yashrah sadrahu

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Hilal Alshaje'a, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Issues in Translating Collocations of the Holy Qur'an

Gloss : And whom so ever Wills Allah That He guides him He expands his breast
 lil-islami wa man yurid an yudillahu yajAAal
 for Islam and whom so ever He wills that He lets him go astray He makes
 sadrahu dayyiqan harajan kaannama yassaadu fee alssama-I kathalika
 his breast closed constricted as if he is climbing to the heaven thus
 yajAAalu Allahu alrrijsa a'ala allatheena la yu'minoona.

Sets Allah the impurity over those who do not believe.

TL Texts

1- Pickthall (1938:43)

And whomsoever it is Allah's will to guide, He expandeth his bosom unto the Surrender, and whomsoever it is His will to send astray, He maketh his bosom close and narrow as if he were engaged in sheer ascent. Thus Allah layeth ignominy upon those who believe not.

2- Ali (2007:68)

Those whom Allah [in His plan] willeth to guide,- He openeth their breast to Islam; those whom He willeth to leave straying,- He maketh their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies: thus doth Allah [heap] the penalty on those who refuse to believe.

3- Arberry (1988:92)

Whomsoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam; whomsoever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow, tight, as if he were climbing to heaven. So God lays abomination upon those who believe not.

Discussion

God has set in operation a law that ensures guidance for everyone who wishes to be guided and who takes the necessary action to achieve that guidance. All this remains within the limits of choice given to human beings by way of a test. Within this law, when God guides a person who is eager to receive the concept of surrendering himself to God with willingness and

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Hilal Alshaje'a, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Issues in Translating Collocations of the Holy Qur'an

reassurance. Again, in accordance with God's law that He leaves anyone who turns his back on guidance and closes his mind to it to his own devices. This verse describes a mental state in terms of a physical condition which combines difficult breathing, stress and the exhaustion which accompanies climbing up stage after stage into the skies. The very word chosen here to denote 'climbing up' imparts a sense of difficulty and strenuous physical effort. Thus, the whole scene is in perfect harmony both with the physical condition and the verbal expression describing it (Qutb, 2004 , vol. 5: 259-60).

Al-Fīrūzabādī (2013:150); al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī (2007:151); and Ibn Kathir (2009:334/3) all state that the word يَشْرَحُ in this collocation means 'expand'. Thus, the collocation functionally means 'expand the heart' and not 'open the heart'.

Pickthall and Arberry render this collocation conceptually, maintaining the structural pattern and the exact meaning of the original collocation by using the verb "expand" which is used to render the SL verb " يَشْرَحُ ". Thus, the renderings are appropriate. The resultant construction is intelligible and smooth because the context excludes the literal reading. However, Pickthall's use of archaic language, *expandeth*, may hinder comprehension. Ali maintains the shape of the Qur'anic collocation but he shows inconsistency in his rendering. Lea (2002:537) states that the verb "open" only collocates with the concrete nouns such as door, window, box, etc. which has nothing to do with the SL collocation. Additionally, the intended meaning of the original collocation has never been met. Even if the possessive singular pronoun 'his' in the SL text is replaced by the plural one 'their' in TL text Therefore, the translation of Ali is not adopted.

All translators use *breast* as the object of the verb except Pickthall who uses the word *bosom* which refers to 'the chest or breast of a person, especially the female breasts' (**The Free Dictionary**). It is therefore semantically inappropriate as a reference to someone's chest. *Breast*,

on the other hand, is appropriate since it can be used to mean ‘the front part of the body from the neck to the abdomen’ (Ibid).

SL (5)

{فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلْنَاهُ نِعْمَةً مِّنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ بَلْ هِيَ فِتْنَةٌ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ} (49)
سورة الزمر

Transliteration: Fa-itha massa al-insana durrun daa'ana thumma itha

Gloss : So when touches man harm he calls to us then

Khawwalnahu nia'amatan minna qala innama ooteetuhu

We have granted him a favour from us he says only I was given this

a'ala ilmin bal hiya fitnatun walakinna aktharahum la

because of knowledge nay it is only a trial but most of them not

yaa'alamoona.

Know.

TL Texts

1- Pickthall (1938:149)

Now when hurt toucheth a man he crieth unto Us, and afterward when We have **granted him a boon** from Us, he saith: Only by force of knowledge I obtained it. Nay, but it is a test. But most of them know not.

2- Ali (2007:238)

Now, when trouble touches man, he cries to Us: But when We **bestow a favour upon him** as from Ourselves, he says, "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge [I have]!" Nay, but this is but a trial, but most of them understand not.

3- Arberry (1988:278)

When some affliction visits a man, he calls unto Us; then, when We **confer on him a blessing** from Us, he says, 'I was given it only because of a knowledge.' Nay, it is a trial, but most of them do not know it.

Discussion

This verse describes man if he does not accept the truth and turn back to his true Lord, following the path leading to Him and remaining on that path in all situations of strength or weakness. Affliction purges human nature of the desires and ambitions that blur its vision. It removes from it all alien influences that place a barrier between it and the truth. Therefore, when afflicted, it can easily recognize God and turn to Him alone. Yet when the testing times are over, and human nature again finds itself in easy and comfortable circumstances, man forgets what he said only a short while earlier. His nature is again turned away from the truth under the influence of his desires (Qutb, 2004, vol. 14: 356).

Ibn Kathir (2009:105/7); al-Fīrūzabādī (2013: 536); and al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī (2007: 542) identify the collocation حَوْلْنَا نِعْمَةً 'granting man a favour'.

Ali and Arberry render the collocation into the same collocation, changing the structure of the collocation due to the difference between the syntax of the SL and TL. Pickthall maintains the form of the Qur'anic collocation by choosing the transitive verb 'grant' that can be used with two objects without inserting a pronoun in the middle.

In rendering the SL collocation حَوْلْنَا نِعْمَةً the translators have used different verbs with different nouns. They have used the verbs 'grant', 'bestow', and 'confer' with the nouns 'boon', 'favour', and 'blessing' respectively.

Pickthall and Arberry show inconsistency in their renderings. Pickthall uses the verb 'grant' with the noun 'boon', but Lea (2002:296) states that the verb 'grant' does not collocate with the noun 'boon'. As for Arberry, who tries to collocate the verb 'confer' with the noun 'blessing', he commits a mistake since (Ghazala:170) maintains that the noun 'blessing' could

only be collocated with the verb 'bestow'. So, Pickthall's and Arberrey's translations are inappropriate.

Ali uses the verb 'bestow' with the noun 'favour' which collocates with each other (Lea, 2002:296). Therefore, Ali is the only translator who renders the collocation correctly.

4- Conclusion

Collocation is a linguistic phenomenon worthy of being researched in rendering any text from Arabic into English and vice versa.

Analyzing the translations of the Holy Qur'an by Pickthall, Ali, and Arberry respectively, it is found that their translations did not adequately reflect the awareness of Qur'anic collocations. As far as collocation is concerned, translating Qur'anic verses should be given appropriate attention. Taking this attention into consideration plays a major role in achieving better understanding on the part of the TL reader.

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