

Contrastive Analysis of Surah Al-Fatiha and Its English Translations As a Semantic Corpus-Based- Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigated Surah Al-Fatiha and its seven English translations as a corpus-based case study. The researcher analyzed the Arabic Verses and their authentic English translations from seven well-known scholars, including Emily Assami et al. (Sahih International), Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Shakir, Muhammad Sarwar, Mohsin Khan, and Arberry. All Parts of Speeches in two languages were identified and sorted according to the order of the Surah Al-Fatiha verses. Common words were selected in all translations of each verse of the Qur'an.

Keywords: *Quran, Translation, Corpus Study, Semantics*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Arabic language of the Qur'an is an integral aspect of this revealed Book [1]. The holy book of 1.6 billion Muslims, the Quran, has been translated into more than 100 languages. The earliest Persian translation appeared in the 7th century, the Latin translation in 1143, and the English translation in 1649. There have been numerous translations in each language: English translations by George Sale in 1734, Richard Bell in 1937, and Arthur John Arberry in 1955. Orientalists, non-Arabs, and Arab Muslims translated the Quran.

Consequently, English translations vary in style and accuracy. Some translators favored archaic English words and constructions; some used simple modern English; others added commentary. Some translated the meaning of the verses; others gave a word-for-word translation. There are occasional misinterpretations, mistranslations, or even distortions. The Translation of the Quran has always been problematic, as the Quran possesses both an exoteric and an esoteric meaning. The Quran uses rhymed Prose, and the Quranic message is conveyed with various literary structures and devices. In addition, a Quranic word may have a range of versatile and plausible meanings, making an accurate translation even more difficult. To reduce misinterpretations, mistranslations, and distortions of meaning, Islamic organizations such as Al-Azhar, and Quran scholars have set guidelines and policies for selecting Quran translators, evaluating, approving, and publishing those translations [2].

1.1 About the Holy Quran

The Quran is the holy book of 1.6 billion Muslims, living in almost all countries and speaking many languages. Basic beliefs of Islam include the existence of Allah and the Day of Judgment; ethical and legal issues; general rules and guidelines regarding right and wrong; narratives of the early prophets and historical events that took place during the Prophet's times; in addition to verses referring to natural phenomena. The Quranic message is conveyed through various literary styles and devices. The Surah and verses utilize phonetic and thematic structures that assist the readers in recalling the message of the Quranic discourse. The Holy Quran uses "rhyming prose". Rhyme changes from one set of verses to another, marking a change in the topic of the verses. The Quranic discourse is characterized by surface meaning and an underlying meaning, i.e., an exoteric and an esoteric meaning [2]. The holy book consists of 114 chapters, 6236 verses, 157935 words, and 668684 letters. [3].

1.2 The Holy Quran and Its English Translations

According to Professor Reima Al-Jarf, historically, the translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran went through 5 Stages:

Stage 1: The Quran was translated from Arabic into Persian.

Stage 2: The Quran was translated from Arabic into Latin. Stage 3: The Quran was translated from Latin into other European languages.

Stage 4: The Quran was directly translated from Arabic into European languages by non-Muslim Orientalists.

Stage 5: The Quran was translated from Arabic into European languages by Muslims

She stated that English translations of the Holy Quran vary in style and accuracy. Some translators of the Quran preferred using archaic English words and structures. For example, Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall used "ye" (plural you) and "thou" (singular you) instead of modern "you". Some translators used simple modern English; some added commentary; some translated the meanings of the verses; others gave a word-for-word translation [2].

1.3 The Quality of Translations of the Holy Book

English translations of the Quran, in particular, vary in style and accuracy of meaning. Translation of the Quran from Arabic has always been challenging for translators, as the Quran possesses both an exoteric and an esoteric meaning. The Quranic message is conveyed through various literary styles and devices. There are occasional misinterpretations, mistranslations and even distortions in the translation of the Quranic text from Arabic [2]. The Language Research Group at the University of Leeds has chosen 7 authentic translations, and they put all the translations and all Quran verse morphology and syntax on a webpage to be used by all researchers around the world.

2. About the Surah Al-Fatiha

Surah Al-Fatiha is the first surah in the Quran, and it is the most frequently recited surah in prayer. It is an essential pillar of the prayer, and the prayer is not valid without it, whether the worshiper is a follower or an imam, and whether the prayer is performed aloud or silently [4]. It consists of 7 verses, 29 words, and 143 letters.

3. The Aim of the Study

This study aims to compare and contrast 7 authentic English translations of Surah Al-Fatiha based on semantics to find the most common translation.

3.1. Methodology

The current research is a descriptive study based on two corpora of Quran verses and their English translations. The researcher investigates the Quran verses and their English translations to find the most common translation for Surah Al-Fatiha in the holy Quran based on Semantics.

3.1.1. Materials and Procedures

The researcher used online materials that are available at the Language Research Group at the University of Leeds website [5]. All verses in The Holy Quran have been shown as Arabic grammar, syntax and morphology for each word in the Holy Quran. As it is shown in Figure 1, syntax, morphology and the translation of each word are given, and that data is being used by all members to conduct research on the Holy Quran Corpus. Moreover, seven authentic English translations are available too. Figure 2. The researcher collected different translations for each surah of the Qur'an in a special table. Table 1 shows gathered translations and their equivalent Quranic verse.

Chapter (1) sūrat I-fāṭihah (The Opening)		
Translation	Arabic word	Syntax and morphology
(1:1:1) bis'mi In (the) name	بِسْمِ N P	P – prefixed preposition bi N – genitive masculine noun جار ومجرور
(1:1:2) I-lah (of) Allah,	اللَّهِ PN	PN – genitive proper noun → Allah لفظ الجلالة مجرور
(1:1:3) I-rahmāni the Most Gracious,	الرَّحْمَنِ ADJ	ADJ – genitive masculine singular adjective صفة مجرورة
(1:1:4) I-rahīm the Most Merciful.	الرَّحِيمِ ADJ	ADJ – genitive masculine singular adjective صفة مجرورة

Fig. 1. Language Research Group at the University of Leeds Online Corpus Data Including Translation, Arabic Word, Syntax, and Morphology [5]

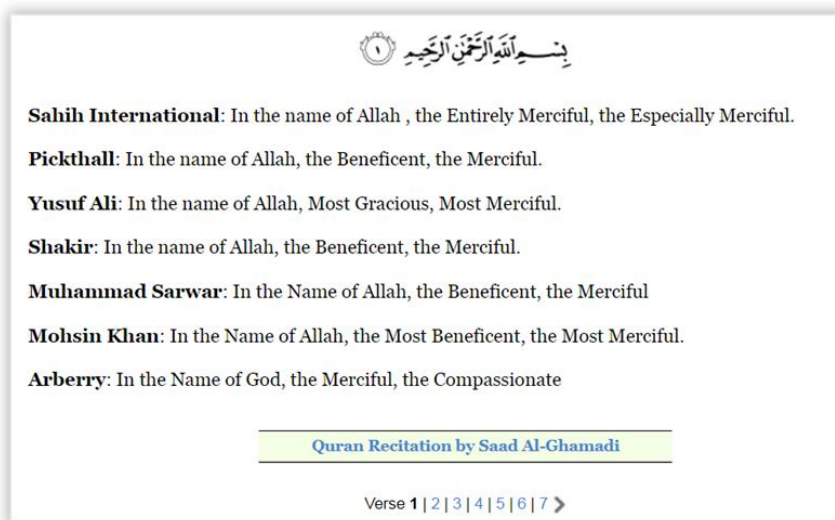


Fig.2. Seven Different English Translations for Surah Al-Fatiha[5]

Table 1. The different translations for Quranic verse "مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ"

Translator	Translation
Emily Assami(Sahih International)	Sovereign of the Day of Recompense
Pickthall	Master of the Day of Judgment
Yusuf Ali	Master of the Day of Judgment
Shakir	Master of the Day of Judgment
Muhammad Sarwar	and Master of the Day of Judgment
Arberry	The Master of the Day of Doom
Mohsin Khan	The Only Owner (and the Only Ruling Judge) of the Day of Recompense (i.e. the Day of Resurrection

4.Results

Verse1:

For "بِسْمِ" all the translators chose "In the name of" whereas for the word "الله" six of them chose "Allah" except for Arberry who picked the word "God". For "الرَّحْمَنِ" four of them chose "The Beneficent," Emily Assami chose "The Entirely Merciful", Yusuf Ali chose "Most Gracious," and Arberry picked "The Merciful". For "الرَّحِيمِ" six of them except for Arberry chose "the Merciful", he picked "The Compassionate". So the most common translation can be:

"In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful"

Verse2:

For "الحمد لله", Picktall and Yusif Ali chose "Praise be to Allah", Emily Assami chose "Praise is to Allah", Shakir chose "All praise is due to Allah", Muhammad Sarwar chose "All praise belongs to God", Mohsin Khan's words were "All the Praises and Thanks be to Allah", and Arberry differently chose "Praise belongs to God". It seems that there are many differences in the translation of this part of the verse, however, they all agreed on the word "Praise". For "رب العالمين" six of them used "Lord" or "The Lord" as "رب", but Yusif Ali Chose different words as "the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds" for "رب العالمين". For "العالمين" four of them chose "the worlds" including Yusif Ali. Muhammad Sarwar and Arberry picked

The Universe” and “All Beings,” respectively; however, Mohsin Khan’s translation was totally different from the all of them, as it was “The Lord of the ‘Alamin (Mankind, Jinns and All That Exists). So, the most agreed translation among them is:” Praise be to Allah Lord of the Worlds”.

Verse3:

Like verse one, for”الرَّحْمَنُ” four of them chose “The Beneficent”, Emily Assami chose” The Entirely Merciful”, Yusuf Ali chose “Most Gracious”, and Arberry picked “The Merciful”. For “الرَّحِيمِ” six of them except for Arberry chose “the Merciful”, he picked “The Compassionate”. So the most common translation can be:

”The Beneficent, The Merciful”

Verse4:

For”مَالِكِ”, five of them chose “Master”, whereas, Emily Assami chose “Sovereign “and Mohsin Khan chose “The Only Owner (and The Only Ruling Judge), it should be mentioned that Arberry was among five translators who chose “Master”. For”يَوْمِ الدِّينِ” four of them chose” the Day of Judgment” while Emily Assami chose “the Day of Recompense”, Mohsin Khan chose “the Day of Recompense (i.e. the Day of Resurrection)”, and Arberry chose “the Day of Doom”. So the most agreed translation can be:” Master of the Day of Judgment”.

Verse5:

For”إِيَّاكَ” four of them used “Thee” whereas Emily Assami chose “It is you”, Muhammad Sarwar and Mohsin Khan chose “(Lord) You Alone “and “You (Alone)” respectively. Among those who used” Thee”, Pickthall used “Thee(Alone)”. For”نَعْبُدُ”, five of them including Emily Assami, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Sarwar, and Mohsin Khan used “We Worship” although, Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Sarwar used “do” their translations too.

For”وَأِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ” four of them used word “Help” in their translations, except for Yusuf Ali who chose “Aid”, Muhammad Sarwar who picked “Assistance”, and Arberry who picked “Succor”. For”وَأِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ” almost all of them used different translations except for word “Help”. Emily Assami, Pickthall, and Mohsin Khan used “we ask for help” in their translations, so it can be said that the most common agreed translation for the verse 6 is:

“Thee do we worship and You we ask for help”.

Verse 6:

For”اهْدِنَا”, Emily Assami, Muhammad Sarwar, Mohsin Khan, and Arberry used “Guide us” while Pickthall and Yusuf Ali used “Show us”, and Shakir used “Keep us”. For”الصِّرَاطَ” all of them used “Path” except for Yusuf Ali and Mohsin Khan who chose “Way”. For”الْمُسْتَقِيمَ” all of them used “Straight” except for Shakir and Muhammad Sarwar who used “right”. So the most agreed translation can be:

“Guide us to the straight path”

Verse7:

This is the longest verse in the Surah. For”صِرَاطَ” all of them used “The Path” except for Yusuf Ali and Mohsin Khan who used “The Way”. For”الَّذِينَ” all of them used “Those” and “Whom” in their translations. For”أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ” Four of them including Emily Assami, Yusuf Ali, Shakir, and Mohsin Khan used “Bestowed” while Pickthall and Arberry used “Hast”, and Muhammad Sarwar used “Granted “moreover, Emily Assami, Pickthall and Shakir used “Favor(s)” or “Favored” while Yusuf Ali and Mohsin Khan used “Grace”. Muhammad Sarwar and Arberry used “Blessing” and “Bless” respectively.

For”غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ”, Emily Assami, Pickthall, Muhammad Sarwar, and Mohsin Khan used “Anger” in their translations while Yusuf Ali, Shakir and Arberry used “Wrath “and “Wrathful”. For “وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ” all of them used “Astray”. The word is the only word that all of them were agreed to use it in the translations of verse 7. It should be added that all of them used “to be astray” or “to go astray” So the most common translation can be:

“The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray”.

5.Limitations of the Study

This study has its limitations, like all case studies. The first limitation is that this study was conducted on only one surah of the Quran. The second limitation is that this study has selected only 7 authentic

translations, while the number of translations of the Qur'an in English is much more. The third limitation is that this study only considered meaning and did not consider other categories like syntax, morphology etc.

6. Conclusions

Finding the most common translation for the Surah Al-Fatiha is possible, although determining a standard for the Qur'anic translation in general and the Fatiha surah in particular requires extensive linguistic studies in both Arabic and English languages.

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