

QUR'ANIC COLLOCATIONS: A PROBLEM IN TRANSLATION[Ⓞ]

Kholood Al-Sofi, Prof.Dr. Marlyna Maros, Dr.Kaseh Abu Baker¹

ABSTRACT

Collocations is simply words come together habitually to produce natural language. This gathering is based on collocational restrictions that differ from language to another. Arabic and English languages come from different families. Accordingly, what may be an acceptable collocation in Arabic may not be accepted in English. This study sheds light on the problems that may emerge when translating collocations from Arabic, specifically Qur'an, into English. There have been rare studies that investigated collocations in Qur'an with reference translation. Collocation represents a significant essential area in Arabic and English. In addition, knowing what goes naturally with what is an important role in determining meanings of expressions. Furthermore, what goes together in Arabic is not necessarily the same in English. Accordingly, translators face various problems when they render collocational combinations. These problems start with the challenge of recognizing such combinations in source language, then as finding the comparable equivalents in the TL in addition to the cultural aspect of some expressions. In this paper, the researcher discusses the problems that translators face when rendering Qur'anic collocations into English. To achieve the aim, the researcher chose cultural and figurative collocations, they are called marked collocations, in the Qur'an and compare their translations in two translations. This comparative study will uncover the problems of transferring collocations from Qur'an into English and the suggested solutions for overcoming such difficulties.

Keywords: *Quranic Collocation, translation, marked collocation, translation.*

[Ⓞ] This article was submitted on: 06/05/2014 and accepted for publication on: 24/08/2014.

¹ A Ph.D candidate, National University of Malaysia, Email: kkalsofi@gmail.com

1 INTRODUCTION

Words that occur together frequently derive their meaning from the relationship between them and other certain words they appear with. Larson states, 'Collocation is concerned with how words go together, i.e. which words may occur in constructions with which other words' (Larson, 1984: 141). Bahumaid defines collocations as 'a phenomenon in language whereby a lexical item tends to keep company with other words'. He adds that this company 'binds words together with varying degrees of strength' (Bahumaid, 2006). For example, the noun *salary* calls up the adjectives *fat*, we say *fat salary*, while in Arabic the noun (ratib) *salary* calls up different adjective (kabeer) *big*.

Collocation is categorized into grammatical collocation and lexical collocation. Grammatical collocation is made up of focal word such as a noun or a verb and a preposition, an infinitive or a clause. A lexical collocation, on the other hand, could be made up of nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs. The focus in this paper is on the latter section, the lexical collocations.

The selectional restrictions of collocations are different from language to another. Accordingly, patterns of collocability between Arabic and English are different. For example, in Qur'an, the word "نقض" and "عهد" form a collocation. However, in seeking the equivalent collocation in English, a different verb is used to collocate with *promise*, which is *break*.

Baker (1992) classifies collocations into marked collocations and unmarked collocations. Marked collocations are unusual and do not reflect meanings of the components. They have a special meaning, which is different and more expressive than the unmarked ones. They are marked due to figurative images and rhetorical purposes they have. In the case of literary texts, marked collocations play a vital role in the texture and style of the text. Some of the marked collocations can be translated into marked collocations, unmarked collocations, lexical items, expressions or sometimes explanations based on existence or non-existence equivalents in the target language (TL).

2 QUR'ANIC COLLOCATIONS: A PROBLEM IN TRANSLATION

According to Dweik and Abu Shakra 'The difficult task of translating Arabic collocations into English is further aggravated when the translation of collocations deals with religious texts' (Dweik & Abu Shakra, 2011). They add that this difficulty comes mostly from 'the specificity of certain lexical items, which are rooted in the structure of the language and are deeply immersed in Arabic culture' (Dweik & Abu Shakra, 2011).

Dealing with religious books is more difficult than any other texts due to the sensitive meanings and cultural messages they carry. It is challengeable to find the equivalent that has the same effect and meaning unless the concept itself is existed in English and the expression has a similar equivalence with similar form or different form. Abdelwali has attributed the problems in translating the Holy Quran to the fact that 'Quranic features are alien to the linguistic norms of other languages' (Abdelwali, 2002). Accordingly, Qur'anic collocations 'create a tremendous challenge to translators' (Ghazala, 2004). This issue becomes more challengeable when 'source and receptor languages represent very different cultures' (Nida, 1964: 168).

Baker defines culture - specific collocations as 'collocations that reflect the cultural setting in which they occur' (Baker, 1992: 59). These cultural collocations cause a big problem when rendering them into English. Qur'an includes a large number of cultural-specific words, collocations and phrases. Translating these combinations is a challengeable task for translators. They adopt different strategies in order to overcome these problems.

In the following section these problems will be clarified in order to understand the nature of collocation and its importance in translation.

2.1 Statement of the problem

The main concept of collocation is the frequent co-occurrence of lexical items in similar or different contexts. Different languages have different ways of collocability. What goes as a collocation in Arabic may not be a collocation in English or even not existed as a concept. Alrosan supports this view and states, 'The main complicated area in translating SL collocation is translator's failure of selecting the convenient TL equivalent which may not be a collocation' (Alrosan, 2000: 81). For that he considers collocation as 'the corner stone in translation' (Alrosan, 2000: 81). Based on that, it could be said that transferring collocation from Arabic into English could be a word, collocation or even explanation. Thus, it is not an easy task to find the convenient equivalent which could cover the meaning of the TL collocation and at the same time be natural and accepted for target audience. Bahumaid clarifies this point by saying 'Collocability is a matter of more or less. In other words, what constitutes an acceptable collocation for one native speaker may not be so for another (Bahumaid, 2006: 136).

When rendering a collocation from one language into another, first, this collocation should be recognized in source text as one meaningful unit rather than separated words with different meanings. Hatim and Munday

postulate that translating collocations starts by recognizing them in the SL and then rendering them conveniently (Hatim&Munday, 2004: 249). The comparable equivalent of collocations in TL reflects translators' ability of capturing the whole meaning of SL text. Newmark believes that transferring collocations from language to another is 'a continual struggle to find appropriate collocations' (Newmark, 1988: 213).

Qur'an is collocationally rich. Some of these collocations are deeply cultural. If the SL culture and TL culture are different 'there will be instances when the source text will contain collocations which convey what to the target read will be unfamiliar associations of ideas' (Baker, 1992: 59). In the same line, Farghal & Shannaq (1999) refer the difficulty of translating collocations, specifically in religious texts, to the fact that they 'carry unique linguistic and semantic features that are culturally specific, yet so comprehensive in meaning that equivalents in TL do not exist' (Farghal&Shunnaq, 1999).

According to Baker such collocations are difficult to be translated and may cause problems when rendering them from language to another because they are 'uniquely restricted to each other' (Baker, 1992: 61). This restriction is different from common collocational restrictions. In other words, the restriction of cultural or figurative collocations is violated for connotative and rhetorical purposes. Thus, the more restricted and cultural a collocation is, the more difficult the translation is. This restriction means that meanings of collocations depart partially or totally from the dictionary meaning of the components. Translating collocation is more problematic and challengeable when the total meaning of the combination is different form the meaning of the components. Rendering these collocations implies, as Baker states 'a certain amount of loss, addition, or skewing of meaning' (Baker, 1992: 57).

Al Sughair considers collocation as one of the problems that translators face. He adds to Baker's problems misinterpreting collocations. He states 'many collocations are sometimes misrepresented to the target audience due to a failure to recognize their linguistic, stylistic, and cultural aspects' (Sughair, 2007: 1).

Based on what has been mentioned above, the main concern of this paper is to investigate the different problems of translating Qur'anic lexical collocations into English and the solutions that could be suggested to overcome these problems.

2.2 Questions of the study

1. What are the problems when translating collocations from Qur’an into English?
2. What are the suggestions to overcome these problems?

2.3 Methodology

This paper adopts the descriptive qualitative method. It spots light on difficulties and problems of translating collocations supported by examples from Qur’an and their translations into English. The researcher will follow the following steps

1. A number of Qur’anic collocations with cultural dimensions are selected.
2. The English equivalents are identified in two interpretations of Qur’an by Hilali and Khan and Abdel-Haleem.
3. The equivalents used by these translators are examined and analyzed.
4. By comparing the two translations, the extent to which the equivalents were effective would be identified.
5. The last step is to suggest some solutions for the problems that these comparative study clarified.

3 PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING QUR’ANIC COLLOCATIONS

3.1 Recognizing collocations

One of the most important factors for successful translation is to recognize the meaningful expression units in the SL. According to Larson, ‘Knowing which words go together is an important part of understanding the meaning of a text and translating it well’ (Larson, 1984: 141). Collocations with cultural and rhetorical meanings should be given more attention, since translating them literally may not be effective due to the figurative images and idiomatic meanings they have. For example, the word “*dar*”, isolated from context, means *home*. However, when it co-occurs with “*salam*” *peace*, the meaning of the combination is *paradise*. Another example is “*habl*” which means *rope*. But when it collocates in the Qur’an with *Allah*, the meaning becomes *the Qur’an*.

| Qur’anic coll | Hilali & Khan | Haleem |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| (6:127) دار السلام | home of peace (paradise) | home of peace |
| (3:103) حبل الله | The rope of Allah (This Qur’an) | God’s rope |

(Table 1: Dar & habl)

In the above two examples, it is very important to recognize the expressions as meaningful units and recognize their connotative meanings as well. It is noticed that the two translators rendered the collocations literally. However, Hilali and Khan explained the contextual meaning of collocations in parenthesis as ‘paradise’ in the first collocation and ‘the Qur’an’ in the second. Such examples, sometimes, when no equivalence is available in the target language, may need more information and hints when rendering them. Haleem’s literal translation may need explanation due to the connotative meaning these expressions have.

3.2 Carrying over the SL collocation

One of the problems that translators may face when rendering collocations from Arabic into English is carrying over the SL collocation Barnwell (Barnwell, 1980: 56). The result that comes up of this carrying over is unnatural and ambiguous equivalents. Baker in her theory of translation above word level mentions that the engrossing effect of source text patterning is one of the problems of translating collocations. This is due to the different restrictions that differ from one language to another. Cruse defines them as ‘semantic co-occurrence restrictions which are logically necessary’ (Cruse, 1986: 278). They specify the semantic properties that lexical items must have in order to co-occur (Brown&Miller, 1985). In other words, the acceptance of certain lexical items to be together is different especially with languages from different origins such as Arabic and English. In addition, some collocations do not have TL collocations as equivalents. The equivalent could be a word or explanation when the lack of concepts is faced.

The following examples will clarify this problem.

| Qur’anic coll | Hilali & Khan | Abdel-Haleem |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| (30:12) تقوم الساعة | the Hour will be established, | the Hour arrives |
| (16:28) ألقوا السلم | Make submission | Show submission |

(Table 2: taqum & alqu)

The two verbs in the two examples above are used figuratively. “*taqūm*” means stand, but when it collocates with *hour* (the day of judgment), it means *to be established*. “*alqū*” in the second verse means throw, but when it comes with *submission*, it means *offer*. The two translators looked for the

natural verbs in English that go with *hour* and *submission*. The two translators translated *the hour* literally and then found the verbs that go with it. However, *Hour* in such verses should be explained as *the day of judgment*, especially that it has different meanings in the Qur'an such as *period of time* or *death*. Then, translating the verb into *establish* or *arrive* with the meaning of the hour reflects the intended meaning. Like the first collocation, ألقوا (literally throw) in the second example is translated into *make* or *show*. Both verb go with *submission* and transfer the meaning of the collocation.

Sometimes, translators may not find English collocations as equivalents for Arabic collocations, so they resort to different methods to cover the meanings of these collocations. Baker maintained that 'A language may express a given meaning by means of a single word, another may express it by means of a transparent fixed expression. A third may express it by means of an idiom' (Baker, 1992: 68). The following example shows this difference.

| Qur'anic collocation | Hilali & Khan | Abdel-Haleem |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| (16:106) شرح صدرًا | open their breasts | open their hearts to |

(Table3: Sadr)

The above collocation is mentioned in the context of Allah's threaten for those who calls people to convert other religions than Islam. Hilali and Khan transferred the meaning literally as *open breasts*. This translation has the meaning of physical open as in medical operations. Haleem found the comparable idiomatic equivalent which covers the meaning of the collocation. *Open heart to* means *to make the heart ready to accept something*. Thus, if the equivalent, word, collocation, idiom or phrase, is available in the TL, translators have to look for it. Sometimes, translating literally, such in Hilali and Khan's translation, imposes unclear combinations in the TL.

4 LITERAL TRANSLATION

Larson (1984) states, 'knowing which words go together is an important part of understanding the meaning of a text and translating it well' (Larson, 1984: 141). Translating collocations can be a simple task if all the elements reflect their literal meanings; however, it can be difficult, if they have idiomatic or figurative meanings. Hatim and Munday postulate that translating collocations starts by recognizing them in the SL and then rendering them conveniently (Hatim &Munday, 2004: 249). In this way translators will stay away from the

literal translation of collocations and will produce meanings according to the new relationship between words. These new or secondary meanings cannot be translated word-for-word into TL. For example, the verb جعل, in the Qur'an, means *make*. However, when it occurs with fingers, mountain, helper, it means respectively *put*, *place* and *appoint*. There are other Qur'anic collocations that have meanings totally different from the individual meanings of the components. For example, (قدم صدق) Qadama Şidqin *a good reward of good deeds*. Qadam in Arabic means *foot* but when it is collocated with sidqin *honesty*, new meaning arises, which is *a good reward*. Another example is (دائرة السوء) Dā'iratu As-Saw'I *disaster of evil*. Dā'ira in Arabic means *circle* but when it collocates with As-Saw'I, the meaning of the combination becomes *harm and evil*.

| Qur'anic collocation | Hilali & Khan | Abdel-Haleem |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| (10:2) قدم صدق | The rewards of the good deeds | A sure footing |
| (10:2) دائرة السوء | Calamity of evil | Fortune |

(Table 4: Qadama Sidq&Da'irah al-su')

It is noticed in the above translations that literal translation sometimes mislead target readers and cause confusion, as in Haleem's translation for the first collocation. He chose to transfer literally as *A sure footing* and did not transfer the meaning of the expression. Hilali and Khan transferred the sense of the collocation. Unlike the first collocation which is totally idiomatic, the second one is partially idiomatic. *السوء evil* keeps its literal meaning when it collocates with *دائرة circle*. Both translators transferred the intended meaning of the second collocation. While Hilali and Khan transferred the collocation into an expression, Haleem chose one word as equivalence for the collocation. In the two cases, they rendered the intended meaning.

4.1 lack of equivalence

One of the biggest problems that translators encounter when transferring collocations from Qur'an into English is the lack for the equivalence in the TL. Catford states 'The central problem of translation practice is that of finding a TL translation equivalent' (Catford, 1965: 21). This lack of equivalent is one of the lexical difficulties that translators attempt hard to overcome. Qur'an is rich with such expressions that cause difficulty in translation because of their religious and cultural speciality in Qur'an and their non-existence in English.

Some of Qur'anic collocations do not have equivalents in English due to the deep cultural meanings of such expressions. Bassnett explained why such cultural specific collocations may not be existed in the target language by stating that 'cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL culture of a relevant situational feature for the SL text' (Bassnett McGuire, 1980: 32). Accordingly, giving explanation or more information, when translating, is very important to uncover the cultural meaning and make it clear to target receptors. The following examples are culturally specific and rendering them into English is challengeable.

The following expressions are cultural-specific in Qur'an and translating them sometime needs more explanations or information.

| Qur'anic coll | Hilali & Khan | Abdel-Haleem |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| المشعر الحرام (2:198) | Mash'ar- il-Haram | The sacred place (footnote: this is one of the sites of the pilgrimage between Arafat and Mina- a plain called Muzdalifa) |
| أصحاب الميمنة (56: 8) | Those on the Right Hand (those who will be given their Records in their right hands) | Those on the Right |

(Table 5: al-mash'ar al-haram&tashab al-maimanah)

The above two examples are purely cultural. They have no direct equivalents in English. Accordingly, the two translators employed different strategies to transfer their meanings. In the first verse, Hilali and Khan chose to mention the Arabic collocation as it is in English without explaining the meaning. Whereas, Haleem paraphrased the meaning as *the sacred place* and then explained the meaning of these place in parenthesis. On the other hand, Hilali and khan explained the meaning of those on the right hand, while Haleem translated the meaning literally. As a matter of fact, such specific-cultural collocations need more explanation or cultural information. Such strategies could help to overcome cultural obstacles in translation and keep the communication channel between the SL message and target readers.

5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the researcher attempted to give a clear picture of the most important problems that translators may face when rendering Qur'anic collocations into English. The most important problems of translating cultural collocations are carrying over source language text, literal meaning, recognizing collocations and cultural specific meanings. These problems were clarified by giving cultural collocations from Qur'an and compare their equivalents in two

translations. It is not easy to overcome such problems; however, it is required that translators understand the message in the SL with its linguistic and cultural dimensions. Then, they have to find the comparable expression that reflects the meaning by choosing convenient strategies that cover these implied meanings. It is not required to render an SL collocation by a TL collocation than rendering the meaning of these collocations into an acceptable and understood equivalence. Accordingly, and in most cases when the cultural equivalence is not existed, it is suggested that translators support their translations with hints or information or sometimes more explanations. Such method may guarantee the communicative channel between the source text and the target readers. At the same time, translators should be committed to the Qur'anic text as possible and try to transfer their beautiful and semantic features. Furthermore, these solutions could be applied to those examples which are totally idiomatic or figurative that those which are partially literal.

Collocation comes in different types and semantic patterns, more studies in this field are required especially with reference to translation since collocation is considered with a great significance in uncovering meanings and semantic features of the Source language text.

6 REFERENCES:

- Abdelwali, M. (2002). The loss in the translation of the Quran. *Translation Journal*, 11, (2), 1-15. Retrieved Oct.6, 2007 from: <http://accurapid.com/journal/40quran.htm>.
- Alrosan, H. (2000). *The subtitles of H. Dabbour: a translational dilemma*. Sharjah: Uniteds Arab Emirates.
- Bahumaid, S. (2006). Collocation in English-Arabic translation. *Babel*. 52, 132-151.
- Baker, M. (1992). *In other words*. London. Routledge.
- Bassnett McGuire, S. (1980). *Translation studies*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Brown, E. & Miller. J. (1985). *Syntax: a linguistic introduction to sentence structure*. London: Hutchinson.
- Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Cruse, D.A. (1986). *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dweik, B& Abu Shakra, M. (2011). Problems in translating collocations in religious texts from arabic into english. *The Linguistics Journal.Middle Jordan*.5(1). (on line). <http://www.linguistics-journal.com/June-2011-bd.pdf>.
- Farghal, M., & Shunnaq, A. (1999). *Translation with reference to English & Arabic: A practical guide*. Jordan: Dar Al-Hilal for Translation.
- Hatim, B &Munday, J. (2004). *Translation: An advanced book*. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Larson, Mildred L. (1984). *Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*. Lanham. University Press of America. Inc.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of translation*. London: Prentice Hall
- Nida, E.A. (1964). *Toward a science of translating*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Sughair, Y. (2007). *The translation of lexical collocations in literary texts*. Sharjah, UAE.

<https://dspace.aus.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11073/4052/29.2322011.21%20Yusra%20Al-Saghir.pdf?sequence=1>.