Convergence and Divergence in the Interpretation of Quranic Polysemy and Lexical Recurrence

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Abstract. The question of using synonyms in translating the Quran is a thorny issue that led to both different interpretations and different translations of the holy text. No matter how accurate or professional a translator attempts to be, Quranic translation has always been fraught with inaccuracies and the skewing of sensitive theological, cultural and historical connotations owing to the peculiar mechanism of stress, semantico-syntactic ambiguity, prosodic and acoustic features, the mesh of special rhetorical texture and culture-bound references. Consequently, in most of the English interpretations of the Quran, cases of non-equivalence and untranslatability will be more frequent with plenty of scope for ambiguities, obscurities and fuzzy boundaries. The trend has been to accept exegetical translation based on commentary and explanation of the Quranic discourse. Since there is no uniform book of exegesis, translations are considered to be glosses or approximates for non-Arabic speaking Muslims.

This study is mainly concerned with assessing the criteria and strategies used by different Quran translators in selecting synonyms to render Quranic polysemous words. The linguistic-cultural context of the original polysemous ST word will be analyzed and compared with its TT near-synonyms. The study argues that in translating religious texts where synonyms are usually used to convey implicated meanings of ST polysemous words and where we seek to have the same effect on the Target Language receiver as that of the original, the use of functional ideational equivalence is given primacy over formal equivalence.