

**Bridging the Linguistic and Cultural Gap between Arabic and English:**

**Polysemy and Culture-Specific Expressions in Qur'ān Translation**

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**The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.**

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## Abstract

The present project investigates two problematic issues in Qur'ān translation: polysemy (see Chapters One, Three, and Four) and culture-specific expressions (see Chapter Five). In the treatment of the former, the current research adopts theories of context and culture in translation and related fields, such as anthropology and linguistics (see 2.5). In treating the latter, approaches to 'culture' and 'function' in translation studies are adopted (see 5.2). The central argument postulated is that the cultural dimension involved in the use of polysemy and culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān requires expanding the scope of analysis to include not only the linguistic but the cultural aspects as well (see 1.4.2.2; see also 1.2.3).

The current research has four main original contributions. First, it is original to examine polysemy and culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān from a translation perspective. To carry out this task, a contextual view of meaning, which embraces both the language and culture of the Qur'ān, has been adopted. Central to this type of analysis are: (i) theories of context in anthropology, linguistics and translation (cf. Malinowski 1923/1949; Firth 1964; Halliday 1978; Halliday and Hasan 1989, Gee 1999/2011; Baker 2006, House 2006, Paltridge 2006/2011, Keating and Duranti 2011), (ii) the 'cultural turn' in translation studies (cf. Katan 1998/2009; Sturge 1998/2009; Katan 1999/2004; Appiah 2000; Hermans 2003; Faiq 2004; Abdul-Raof 2005; Snell-Hornby 2006; Katan 2009; House 2009; Hatim 2009; Bassnett 2011(a) and (iii) approaches to culture and function in translation (cf. Holz-Mänttari 1984; Reiss and Vermeer 1984/2013; Vermeer 1989/2000) (see Chapter Two; see also 5.2). Second, the linguistic and cultural layers of meaning involved in the translation into English of polysemy in the Qur'ān have been analyzed in the light of Nida and Taber's 'contextual consistency' (Nida and Taber 1969/1982: 15; see 2.6). These aspects of meaning are intended to be a guide for the future translators of the Qur'ān in their never-ending attempts to resolve the linguistic as well as cultural ambiguity involved in the translation into English of polysemy in the Qur'ān. Third, seven linguistic as well as cultural tools of textual analysis involved in the translation into English of polysemy in the Qur'ān have been suggested. These tools are: (i) the collocational relations and oppositeness, (ii) general meaning and anaphoric signals, (iii) cataphoric signals, (iv)

grammatical aspects, (v) metaphoric interpretation, (vi) 'context of situation' and (v) 'context of culture' (see 4.5; see also 4.7). The ultimate goal is to raise the future Qur'ān translators' awareness of the correlation between language and culture in Qur'ān translation (see 4.4; see also 4.6). Fourth, the cultural implications involved in the translation into English of culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān have been investigated in the light of Hall and Trager's 'technical' level of culture (Hall 1959) (see 5.4). The point at which polysemy and culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān intersect is the correlation between translation and culture (see 1.4.4).

The research data on polysemy was collected both from the Qur'ān itself and from six Qur'ān dictionaries, where polysemy is a central issue: Ibn al-<sup>ḥ</sup>Imād (1977), Ibn al-Jawzī (1979), Al-Dāmaghānī (1983), Al-Zarkashī (1988), Al-Sayūṭī (1999) and Ibn Sulaymān (2001). The research data on culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān was collected from the Qur'ān itself, with particular emphasis on the categories of culture proposed by Newmark (1988) and Katan (1999/2004) (see 5.5). The research has shown that polysemy in the Qur'ān expands to communicate five layers of meaning: (i) the metaphoric meaning, (ii) the collocated and situational meaning, (iii) the emotive meaning, (iv) the general meaning, and (v) the cultural meaning (see 4.3). It has also been found that 'technical' culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān cover ten semantic fields: (i) theological expressions, (ii) social customs, (iii) family expressions, (iv) behaviour expressions, (v) Qur'ān legal terms, (vi) material culture, (vii) nature expressions, (viii) culture-specific times, (ix) culture-specific figures, and (x) culture-specific emotions (see 5.6). These categories have closely been analyzed with one central argument in mind: appreciating the language and culture of the Qur'ān is the key to decode the cultural implications involved in the treatment of culture-specific expressions in the Qur'ān.

## Arabic Transliteration System

The goal in this part is to account for the system of transliteration followed in the present research. The term ‘transliteration’ can be defined as ‘an orthography using carefully substituted orthographical symbols in a one-to-one, fully reversible mapping with that language’s customary orthography’ (Habash 2010: 20). In transliterating all Arabic expressions referred to in the present research, The Library of Congress Transliteration System has been adopted. In this system Arabic letters and sounds are represented by Latin characters, with or without a diacritical mark (see below).

The Library of Congress Transliteration System seems to be the most common system of Arabic transliteration. It is often described as ‘the system which is much used’ (Ambros 2004: 7). This system has been followed in many widely-known Islamic publications, e.g. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam (Campo, ed. 1954/2009)*, *Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (Martin, ed. 2003), *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’ānic Usage* (Badawi and Abdel-Haleem 2008). It represents Arabic letters and sounds in an easy manner. The following remarks have been taken into consideration in transliterating the Arabic expressions used in the current research:

(a) Arabic has two inflectional categories: ‘case’ and ‘mood’ (Ryding 2005: 56). These are represented by short vowel suffixes, known as ‘case’ when applied to nouns and adjectives and as ‘mood’ when applied to verbs (ibid). In this context, Arabic ‘case’ and ‘mood’ endings attached to nouns, adjectives and verbs referred to in the current research have been added. In other words, the short vowel suffixes: the nominative - ḥālat al-raf<sup>c</sup>: /-u/, the accusative - ḥālat an-naṣb: /-a/ and the genitive - ḥālat al-jarr: /-i/ have been added to the Arabic transliterated nouns, adjectives and verbs as used in their linguistic contexts;

(b) In citing nouns in isolation, the expression has been transliterated in its pausal form, e.g. (raḥmah, not raḥmatun, raḥmatan, or raḥmatin and ar-raḥmah, not ar-raḥmatu, ar-raḥmata, or ar-raḥmati);

(c) In citing expressions other than nouns, final vowels are not suppressed, e.g. (kutiba, not kutib; qara’a, not qara’);

(d) Arabic has a grammatical marker known as (at-tanwīn – nunation). The term ‘tanwīn’ is derived from the name of the letter ن in Arabic. It is marked by the suffix /n/ which is pronounced, though not written, at the end of nouns and adjectives in Arabic. ‘[t]anwīn’ in Arabic corresponds to the indefinite articles ‘a’ and ‘an’ in English (Ryding 2005: 42-43). This grammatical phenomenon takes three forms: the nominative - ḥālat ar-raḥ: /-un/, the accusative - ḥālat an-naṣb: /-an/ and the genitive - ḥālat al-jarr: /-in/ (Brustad et al 2004: 141). In this context, the phenomenon of ‘tanwīn’ in Arabic has also been added to the Arabic transliterated nouns and adjectives referred to in the present research;

(e) The definite article ‘al - /al/’ in Arabic has two pronunciation rules. On the one hand, in case ‘al - /al/’ is followed by what is commonly known as ‘the sun letters’: (د , ث , ت , ذ , ر , ز , س , ش , ص , ض , ط , ظ , ل , ن , /l/), /l/ is not pronounced, e.g. (ash-shams – the sun). On the other hand, if ‘al - /al/’ is followed by what is commonly known as ‘the moon letters’: (أ , ب , ج , ح , خ , ع , ف , غ , ق , ك , م , ن , هـ , و , ي , /a/), the ‘l’ sound is pronounced, e.g. (al-qamar – the moon) (ibid: 122). These phonetic rules have also been followed in transliterating the Arabic nouns referred to in the present research;

(f) Arabic has the phonemic characteristic of doubling consonants as a sign of emphasis. This phenomenon is commonly known in Arabic as (shaddah – ّ). In case some transliterated expressions have this phonemic quality, the doubled sound has been transliterated twice, e.g. (darrasa – he taught; tazawwaja – he got married);

(g) The glottal stop, i.e. (Hamzah - ء) has been transliterated as (‘) except when initial. In this case, it is transliterated as (a), e.g. al-ladhīna; fa’in; rajā’;

(h) The so-called (tā’ marbūṭah), which only occurs at the end of nouns and adjectives in Arabic to indicate the feminine gender, has been transliterated as ‘h’, e.g. (ustādhah – a female teacher) (ibid: 67);

(i) The connector ‘wa – and’, which is used in Arabic to communicate the meaning of addition, has been connected to the following word, e.g. ‘wa-laḥad not wa laḥad’, ‘wa-yazīdu not wa yazīdu’;

(j) To help the reader pronounce the transliterated words the same way the native speaker of Arabic does, transliterated words have been connected, e.g. 'wa-shāqqū ar-rasūla min ba<sup>c</sup>di mā tabayyana *lahumul-hudā'*;

(k) The following table explains The Library of Congress Arabic Transliteration System for both consonants and vowels:

## I. Arabic Letters

Arabic Letter	Transliteration
ء	'
أ	a
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	c

غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
هـ	h
و	w
ي	y

## II. Arabic Short-Long Vowels

Arabic	Transliteration
َ	a
آ	ā

Arabic	Transliteration
ُ	u
و	ū
ِ	i
ي	ī

## III. Arabic Diphthongs

Arabic	Transliteration
وَ	aw
يَ	ay

يِّ

iyy (final form ī)

وِّ

uww (final form ū)

#### IV. Arabic Nunation

Arabic	Transliteration
ـَ	-an
ـِ	-un
ـِ	-in

To sum up, the system of transliteration followed throughout the present research is mainly based on the phonological shape of the expression as used in its linguistic context. However, in transliterating the expression under discussion in isolation, the orthographical rather than the phonological shape of the word is often used.

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