The Interplay of Qur'ānic Synonymy and Polysemy with Special Reference to *Al-asfār* and *Al-kutub* (the Books) and their English Translations

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the meanings of the near-synonyms al-asfār and alkutub (the books) and their English translations. It aims at identifying the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms based on different exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, it explains the semantic differences that exist between the Qur'ānic pair and how such semantic differences are reflected in two English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Besides, it highlights the meanings of the polysemous lexical item alkutub (the books) in different Qur'ānic contexts and how the various senses of this lexical item are transferred to English. The study adopts the RC-S approach as a theoretical framework for data analysis. It also employs the qualitative approach for collecting and analyzing the data of the study. The exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān are consulted to identify the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms as well as the meanings of the polysemous lexical item alkutub (the books). The findings reveal that there are some semantic differences between the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms and that such semantic differences are not reflected in the English translations. The findings also show that the polysemous lexical item alkutub (the books) and its singular formal-kitāb (the book) are literally translated in some Qur'ānic contexts. The study provides recommendations for readers as well as translators especially the translators of the Holy Qur'ān.

Keywords: contextual meaning; denotative meaning; near-synonyms; polysemy; synonymy; translation.

INTRODUCTION

Synonymy and polysemy are two fundamental linguistic phenomena that proliferate in natural languages. These phenomena will be discussed in this section under two subheadings: i) synonymy and ii) polysemy and a special focus will be given to their use in the Holy Qur'ān.

SYNONYMY

Synonymy is a universal linguistic phenomenon in semantics. It has been defined by many semanticists as well as linguists (Cruse 2000, Murphy 2003). For example, Murphy (2003) views synonymy as a semantic relation between two or more lexical items which maps to the same meaning or concept. Similarly, it is defined by Cruse (2000) as a semantic relation between lexical items whose semantic similarities are more prominent than their differences. Matulewska (2016) points out that synonymy as a semantic relation binds two terms with the same denotative meaning which belong to the same word category but differ in form. Within this semantic relation, there are different types of synonyms.

Scholars (e.g. Cruse 2000, Murphy 2003) identify different types of synonyms. For example, Murphy (2003) divides synonyms into two types: logical synonyms and context-dependent synonyms. She further divides the logical synonyms into two types: full and sense synonyms. Murphy claims that the context-depend synonyms are all considered to be near-synonyms. Full synonyms are viewed as lexical items which are identical in every sense; this type of synonyms is very rare (Murphy 2003, Dolezal 2013, Wang 2016). Sense synonyms are also viewed as lexical items that have one or more senses in common but differ in others (Murphy 2003). The lexical items 'commence' and 'begin' are examples of this type as they share some senses but differ in terms of whether the word is formal or informal. Since the focus of the present study is on near-synonyms, full and sense synonyms will not be further discussed here.

Near-synonyms are viewed as lexical items which share some but not all shades of meaning (Cruse 2000). In a similar vein, Murphy (2003) maintains that near-synonyms have similar but not identical meanings. Within the domain of lexical semantics, near-synonyms are more common than the other types of synonyms (O'Neill 2018). An example of this type is the pair 'misty' and 'foggy' as mistiness is regarded as a lower degree of fogginess. Besides, Haily and Jung (2015) claim that the lexical items 'pretty' and 'beautiful' do not have the same usage in all contexts and thus they are deemed to be near-synonyms. In fact, near-synonymy is a challenging and interesting topic in lexical semantics research in that distinguishing near-synonyms or similar words in general is difficult even for the native speakers of a language (Wang 2016). This study is concerned with identifying the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how such semantic differences are reflected in the English translations.

The Holy Qur'ān includes some lexical items which appear to have exactly the same meaning but upon deeper semantic analysis, such lexical items convey different meanings. Such lexical items are called Qur'ānic near-synonyms by many Arab scholars (Al-Sowaidi 2011). The Qur'ānic near-synonyms are viewed as lexical items which share some but not all shades of meanings (Bint Al-Shaṭī 1971, Omar 2001). In this regard, Abdul-Raof (2018) contends that "each lexical item in the Holy Qur'ān has its own inherent semantic componential features which can be slightly distinct from another lexical item that has its own innate semantic componential features claiming that the context and semantic componential features are the major factors in the selection of one word rather than the other" (p. 109). Similarly, Al-Shaʿrāwī (1993) points out that each Qur'ānic near-synonym has a special meaning which another Qur'ānic lexical item cannot convey even though the two lexical items resemble each other. For example, the Qur'ānic near-synonyms مطر *maṭar* and غيث *ghaīth* have one English equivalent (i.e. rain). However, such Qur'ānic near-synonyms have semantic differences between them and more importantly they cannot be used interchangeably in the Qur'ānic verses.

Al-Sowaidi (2011) confirms that although both lexical items have the core meaning 'rain' in common, the lexical item غيث (*ghaīth*) is always associated with mercy, compassion, and welfare while its near-synonyms مطر (*maṭar*) is always associated with punishment, destruction, and Godly wrath and torment. The semantic differences between these near-synonyms are difficult to understand even for the non-specialist Arabic speakers as such near-synonyms are used interchangeably in Modern Standard Arabic (i.e. the standardized variety of Arabic used in writing and formal speech throughout the Arab world to facilitate communication). In fact, the semantic differences between these Qur'ānic near-synonyms are important to understand the Qur'ānic texts appropriately. If the reader or translator could not realize such semantic differences, the Qur'ānic message might not be appropriately perceived.

Literature reveals that the semantic differences between near-synonyms are context-dependent and consequently the context should be analyzed so as to provide an appropriate

translation for such near-synonyms (Abdullah 2003, Ishrateh 2006, Abdul-Ghafour et al. 2017a). In terms of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms, it is claimed that the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān also play a key role in explaining the semantic differences between them and thus facilitate their translation into other languages. Hence, the selected near-synonyms for this study will be studied in their Qur'ānic contexts and the semantic differences between them will be explained based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Finally, the study will highlight how the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (books) are reflected in the English translation and how the various meanings of the polysemous lexical item الكتب (the books) are considered while translating the Holy Qur'ān into English language.

POLYSEMY

Polysemy is a compound noun which comes from Greek poly 'many' and semy 'to do with meaning as in semantics' (Alnamer 2017). This term was first introduced by the French semanticist Michel Bréal in the Essai de Sémantique in 1897 (ibid). It takes place when a lexical item has various meanings. Falkum (2011) views polysemy as a single lexical item with two or multiple related senses. Such senses are usually derived from its essential meaning while the other meanings are regarded as the extended meanings, some of which are peripheral because they are less frequently used in a natural language (Liu 2013). The lexical item 'head' in these sentences makes the differences between the essential and extended meanings clear to the reader:

    i)   She nodded her head in agreement.
    ii)   She resigned as the head of department.
    iii)   The president sat at the head of the table.

Alnamer (2017) explains that the lexical item 'head' as 'the part of the body on the top of the neck' is the essential meaning while the other meanings of this lexical item as 'the person who is in charge' and 'the most important seat at a table' in the second and third sentences are regarded as the extended meanings of that lexical item.

Sadiq (2008) claims that the various senses a word acquires may be a result of the abstract or metaphoric context in which the word is used, thus giving it an abstract and metaphoric meaning besides its original meaning. In addition, the various meanings included in polyesmous lexical items have the same etymological origins and are associated with one another (ibid). Sadiq (2008) provides the Arabic lexical item عين *ᶜayn* (eye) as an example of the polysemous lexical items which have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. The lexical item, عين *ᶜayn* (eye), has these meanings: spring, spy, the eye of a needle, completely right, essence, apartment, and the very place in the following Arabic expressions عين الماء *ᶜayn almā'*, عين *ᶜayn*, عين الإبرة *ᶜayn al-ibrah*, عين الصواب *ᶜayn al-ṣawāb*, العين موضوع النزاع *al-ᶜayn mawḍuᶜ al-nizāᶜ*, and عين المكان *ᶜayn al-makān* respectively.

In terms of the Qur'ānic polysemy, Abobaker et al (2012) studied the meaning and the translation of the lexical item أمة *ummah* (nation) which has various meanings in the Holy Qur'ān. They maintain that it has nine meanings in the Holy Qur'ān, to mention but a few: a period of time (in surat Yusuf, verse: 45), the leader of the people who teaches or guides the believers to the right path in their religion and life (in surat al-Nahl, verse: 120), and a religion that some people follow (in surat al-Zukhruf, verse: 22). They concluded that the selected translations for their study provide a literal meaning for the lexical item أمة *ummah* (nation). They added that the translators encountered obvious challenges when conveying the intended

meaning of this Qur'ānic polysemous lexical item to English due to the various senses of this Qur'ānic lexical item.

Another example of the Qur'ānic polysemous lexical items is **دعا** *daᶜā* which is used in many Qur'ānic verses with slightly different meanings. This Qur'ānic polysemous lexical item was investigated by Sadiq (2008) who concluded that this Qur'ānic lexical item has various meanings among which invoke (in surat al-ᶜImrān, verse 38), call (in surat al-Anfāl, verse 24) and invite (in surat al-Ahzab, verse 53).

The current study investigates the meaning and the translation of two lexical items **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (the books). This Qur'ānic pair exhibits two semantic relations: synonymy and polysemy. On the one hand, there exist some semantic differences between the two lexical items and more importantly the lexical item **الكتب** *al-kutub* (the books) and its singular form **الكتاب** *al-kitāb* (the book) are polysemous having various meanings, on the other. This study analyzes the contextual meanings of the two selected lexical items based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān, highlights the meanings of the polysemous lexical item **الكتب** *al-kutub* (the books) as well as its singular form **الكتاب** *al-kitāb* (the book), and discusses how the meanings of **الكتب** *al-kutub* (the books) are transferred to English and how the semantic differences between the two near-synonyms **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (the books) are reflected in two English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. The present study provides an insight into the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms as well as the meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical items and how such semantic differences should be taken into account while translating the Qur'ānic texts.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study investigates two lexical items, **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (the books) in the Holy Qur'ān. These two Qur'ānic lexical items exhibit two semantic relations: synonymy and polysemy. Literature reveals that these two semantic features usually pose challenges for the translators of the Holy Qur'ān. For instance, the Qur'ānic near-synonyms have special features which make their translation into English highly problematic. In this regard, Ali (1938) claims that the Qur'ānic vocabulary is so rich that it gives different words for similar ideas and things which have only one equivalent in English. Furthermore, it is argued that although some lexical items are interchangeably used in Modern Standard Arabic, they are used differently in the Holy Qur'ān (Al-Sowaidi 2011). An example of such lexical items is the Qur'ānic near-synonyms **مطر** (*maṭar*) and **غيث** (*ghaīth*) which have been already explained in the introduction. Al-Sowaidi (2011) maintains that although there are semanitc differences between these lexical items, such semantic differences are not reflected in English while translating the Qur'ānic verses.

Moreover, Abū ᶜUdah (1985) differentiates between two other Qur'ānic near-synonyms **حلف** *ḥalafa* and **اقسم** *'aqsama* (swore) claiming that **حلف** (*ḥalafa*) means untruthfully swore and is used to implicate a false oath while **اقسم** (*'aqsama*) means truthfully swore and implies a true oath in the Holy Qur'ān. However, English does not have equivalents for such lexical items and provides only one general equivalent for both lexical items (i.e. swear). More recently, Abdul-Ghafour *et al* (2017a) investigated the semantic differences between **العفو** *al-ᶜafwa* and **المغفرة** *al-maghfirah* (forgiveness) claiming that although both near-synonyms share the core meaning 'forgiveness', **العفو** *al-ᶜafwa* might be associated with rebuke and blame while **المغفرة** *al-maghfirah* (forgiveness) is associated with the veil, encasement and concealment of the sin. However, such semantic differences are not reflected in the English translation.

Researchers (Abdul-Raof 2001, Al-Sowaidi 2011, Issa 2011, Hassan 2014, Abdul-Ghafour et al 2017b) point out that the translators of the Holy Qur'ān encounter challenges while translating the Qur'ānic near-synonyms into English and in most cases the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are not reflected in the English translation. In fact, the semantic differences between Qur'ānic near-synonyms are vital to understand the Qur'ānic texts. If such semantic differences are not reflected in the English translation, the Qur'ānic text will be misinterpreted.

Literature also reveals that the Holy Qur'ān includes some polysemous lexical items which have various meanings depending on the contexts in which they are used. Researchers (Sadiq 2010, Abobaker et al. 2012) investigated some Qur'ānic polysemous lexical items which have been discussed in the introduction. They claim that the translators of the Holy Qur'ān encountered some difficulties in translating the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical items into English and that the translators provided literal translations for such Qur'ānic lexical items. Besides, Sharifabad et al (2012) investigated the linguistic ambiguities in the Holy Qur'an and concluded that polysemy is one of the important factors that pose a challenge for the translators of the Holy Qur'an.

This study is an endeavor to identify the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic lexical items الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) in the Holy Qur'ān making use of different exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, it explains the meaning of the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical item الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) and highlights the semantic differences between the two lexical items الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) in terms of denotative meanings and how such semantic differences are reflected in the English translations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the Books).
2. To compare the meaning of the selected pair الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the Books).
3. To identify the meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical item الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) and how such meanings are reflected in the English translations?
4. To investigate how the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) are reflected in the English translations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the Relation by Contrast Approach to Synonyms (RC-S) by Murphy (2003) as a theoretical framework for the analysis of data. The RC-S approach explains synonymy in terms of the minimal differences which exist between the synonymous pairs. Murphy maintains that in any set of different word forms with similar denotations, there could be a slight semantic difference in denotative and/or expressive meaning between the lexical items. Therefore, the semantic differences between the pairs of synonyms can be explained in the light of the proposed parameters:

DENOTATIVE MEANING

Denotation refers to "the relationship between sense and reference, and the sense of a word is the set of conditions on the word's reference (Murphy 2003, p. 148). In fact, Hatim and Mason (1997) make a distinction between two types of meaning: denotative and connotative meanings. They claim that denotation covers the primary referential meanings of a given lexical item while connotation refers to the additional meanings which a lexical item acquires beyond its primary, referential meaning; for instance, the lexical item 'notorious' means 'famous' but with negative connotations. The connotative meaning is also called expressive meaning by Murphy (2003) and will be discussed in the next section.

EXPRESSIVE ELEMENTS OF MEANING

Expressive meaning comprises connotative meaning, affective meaning, and other social information which gives denotatively similar words different significance without affecting their contributions to sentential truth-conditions (Murphy 2003). These types of meanings can be explained as follows:

a. Connotation is viewed as "the additional meanings that a word or phrase has beyond its central meaning" (Richards & Schmidt 2002, p. 108). It involves associations which do not directly affect the conditions on reference, but which may give some slant to the description (Murphy 2003).
b. Affect is a non-denotative meaning that is concerned with the speaker's attitude toward the subject at hand (Murphy 2003).
c. Social information: Other aspects of social meaning comprise register, jargon, dialect, and other sub-varieties of a language or vocabulary (Murphy 2003).

Although many scholars have contributed to the literature on denotation, such as Newmark (1988), Larson (1984) and Hatim and Mason (1997), this study adopts the RC-S approach by Murphy (2003) because it provides a framework for explaining the semantic differences between the near-synonyms. In the light of the RC-S approach, the denotative meaning of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms will be analyzed based on their Qur'ānic context and the meanings of the polysemous lexical item الكتب *alkutub* (the Books) as well as the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms will be highlighted. Finally, the study will discuss how the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic pair are reflected in the English translations.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the meanings of the Qur'ānic pair الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) as well as its singular form الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book). This Qur'ānic pair is particularly selected for several reasons. First, the Qur'ānic lexical item الأسفار *al-asfār* is obsolete and is no longer used in the Modern Standard Arabic and thus the semantic differences between the two lexical items, الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (the books), are subtle and difficult to understand even for the non-specialist native speakers of Arabic. Second, these two near-synonyms occur frequently in the Holy Qur'an as they occur 261 times based on *Al-Maᶜānī* website. Third, this Qur'ānic pair exhibits two semantic relations: synonymy and polysemy and thus the two lexical items pose more challenges to the translators of the Holy Qur'ān. Fourth, both near-synonyms exhibit two semantic relations and thus they could serve the purpose of the study.

Moreover, this study adopts two English translations of the Holy Qurān, namely, Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). Thomas Ballantyne Irving was an American Muslim author, professor and scholar. He wrote the first American English translation of the Qur'ān which was published in 1985. However, Arthur John Arberry was a non-Muslim American scholar and the writer of The Koran Interpreted which was first published in 1955. In fact, the translations of Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003) are adopted in this study for several reasons. First, both translators belong to different religious backgrounds as Irving is a Muslim while Arberry is a non-Muslim. Therefore, the study examines how two translators with different religious backgrounds understand and transfer the meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Second, both translators adopt different approaches of translation while translating the Holy Qur'ān. Irving (2002) adopts a communicative approach (i.e. a translation approach which introduces the Holy Qur'ān in a communicative contemporary English) whereas Arberry (2003) employs a literal approach (i.e. an approach to translation that allows the source language to have dominance over the target language) in his translation. Therefore, the study examines how translators adopting two different translation approaches consider and reflect the semantic differences between the pair of Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Moreover, the translation of the Holy Qur'ān by Arberry is considered as the most reliable translation undertaken by a non-Muslim native speaker of English in that his translation was addressed to the English readers living and born in the west (Al-Azzam 2005). Besides, the translation of the Holy Qur'ān by Irving is also written in modern English. Irving utilized the simplest word available so that its message can be easily understood by the Muslim child and the interested non-Muslims.

The current study is mainly based on several exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān and commentary books. The exegeses of Al-Sha°rāwī (1991) and Ibn °Āshūr (1984) are selected due to the fact that the exegetes worked on explaining the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. These particular exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān explain the semantic differences between the pairs of near-synonyms as well as the meanings of the polysemous lexical items and consequently facilitate the data analysis. Other exegeses like Al-Alūsī (1995), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūṭī (2003), Al-Qurṭubī (2006) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) are also consulted in that they are considered prominent as claimed by (Abdul-Raof 2001). Because these exegeses are regarded prominent, they are dependable since they can provide the precise meanings of the Qur'ānic lexical items as well as verses and consequently they are helpful in explaining the context of these verses which need a considerable attention as sacred texts.

PROCEDURES

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher went through many steps. First of all, the Qur'ānic verses in which the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms are used were identified and presented with their English translations by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). Then, the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms were identified based on their exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān and the semantic differences that exist between them were also explained based on various modern and classical exegeses, commentary books, different linguists' views, English dictionaries, classical Arabic dictionaries, Arabic-English lexicons, etc. The meanings of the polysemous lexical item الكتب *alkutub* (the books) were also identified based on the contexts in which they are used. Finally, the study discussed how the semantic differences between the selected Qur'ānic lexical items are reflected into the English translations of the Qur'ān and how the meanings of the polysemous lexical item are transferred to English while translating the Qur'ānic texts.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This section presents the analysis of the selected pair of Qur'ānic near-synonyms, namely, **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books). This pair of Qur'ānic near-synonyms exhibits two semantic relations: synonymy and polysemy. As explained in the methodology, these two near-synonyms occur 261 times in the Holy Qur'ān. However, the researchers selected one Qur'ānic verse in which the lexical item **الأسفار** *al-asfār* (books) occurs in the Holy Qur'ān because this lexical item occurs once in the Holy Qur'ān. Although the other near-synonym **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books) and its singular form **الكتاب** *al-kitāb* (the book) occur 260 times in the Holy Qur'ān, six verses in which this lexical item occurs are selected because this lexical item has various meanings in such Qur'ānic verses. In this section, the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic pair are identified and the semantic differences that exist between them are discussed based on the RC-S approach by Murphy (2003). The meanings of the polysemous lexical item **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books) are also highlighted. Finally, this section discusses the English translations of the verses in which the near-synonyms are used. In particular, it focuses on how the semantic differences between **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books) are reflected in the two English translations and how the meanings of the polysemous lexical item are transferred to English by the translators.

THE CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS OF *AL-ASFĀR* AND *AL-KUTUB* (THE BOOKS)

The contextual analysis of **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books) reveals that there exist some semantic differences between these Qur'ānic lexical items in terms of denotative meaning. It is also noticed that the Qur'ānic lexical item **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books) is polysemous having many denotations. This section discusses the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic pair based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Here is the contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses in which **الأسفار** *al-asfār* and **الكتب** *al-kutub* (books) are used:

TABLE 1. The meaning of الأسفار *al-asfār* (books)

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
1- قال تعالى ''مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَاةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا'' (الجمعة: ٥)	"The likeness of those who have been loaded with the Torah then they have not carried it, is as the likeness of an ass carrying <u>books</u>" (Al-Jumᶜah: 5)	"Those who are laden with the Old Testament, yet do not carry it out may be compared to a donkey who is carrying <u>scriptures</u>" (Al-Jumᶜah: 5)

This verse describes those whom Torah was revealed to but they did not act upon what they were commanded to do. It is interpreted by Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūtī (2003), and Al-Qurtubī (2006) as follows: the description or the likeness of those who were entrusted with the Old Testament; those who were commanded to implement it but they did not act upon what they were commanded to do in terms of the Prophet Mohammed's description in Torah is as the likeness of a donkey carrying huge tomes which it does not get benefits from. Moreover, Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Qurtubī (2006) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) explain that the lexical item **الأسفار** (*al-asfār*) is the plural form of **سِفر** (*sifr*) and denotes huge tomes. Al-Qurtubī (2006) also adds that they are called **أَسْفَار** *asfār* (huge tomes) because they **يسفر عن المعنى** *yusfir ᶜan al-maᶜna* (reveal the meaning) when they are referred to. He illustrates that this verse warns Jews and commands them to learn and understand what is in Torah; otherwise they will be like a donkey carrying huge tomes. In addition to what has been said by the exegetes in terms of the meaning of **الأسفار** (*al-asfār*) in the Holy Qur'ān, Abdur-Rahim (2008) confirms that this Qur'ānic lexical item denotes large books or tomes. The next verse

will be analyzed in order to understand the meaning of the other Qur'ānic near-synonym الكتب *al-kutub* (books) and how it is different from الأسفار *al-asfār* (huge tomes).

TABLE 2. The meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) as a generic noun

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
2- قال تعالى،"كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنْذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِيمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ..." (البقرة: ٢١٣)	"The people were one nation; then God sent forth the Prophets, good tidings to bear and warning, and He sent down with them <u>the Book</u> with the truth, that He might decide between the people touching their differences" (Al-Baqarah: 213)	"Mankind was [once] one nation, so God dispatched prophets as heralds and warners. He sent <u>the Book</u> down along with them to bring the Truth, so as to decide among mankind concerning whatever they had been disagreeing about" (Al-Baqarah: 213)

This verse states that people in the past were one nation but when they disagreed, Allah sent to them Prophets and also Holy Books to help the Prophets decide among those people. It is interpreted by the exegetes Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūṭī (2003) as follows: People were one nation in terms of faith (i.e. they were all believers) in the era of Abraham and Noah but then fell into disagreement; some of them believed while others disbelieved. According to them, the verse states that God then dispatched Prophets and Messengers as bearers of good tidings (i.e. of Paradise) for those who believed and as warners (i.e. from Fire) for those who disbelieved. He also revealed with them the Holy Books with the truth expositing what is false and what is true so that every Prophet would judge by His Book between people in terms of their differences in religion.

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) asserts that the lexical item الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) in this verse refers to the Torah according to which the Prophet judges between the people in terms of their disagreement. On the contrary, Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) and Al-Baghawī (1999) state that the lexical item الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) generally refers to the Holy Books which were revealed upon the Prophets (i.e. the scriptures). Similarly, Ibn Al-Jawzī (2002) points out that الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) is a generic noun which refers to all Books revealed upon Prophets. He also maintains that some exegetes argue that it is the Torah. Moreover, Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) contends that this verse was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed to motivate him and the believers to be patient with the disbelievers and their harassment by providing an example of the nations in the former times. The next verse will be analyzed in order to better understand the meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) in the Holy Qur'ān.

TABLE 3. The meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) as the Holy Qur'ān

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
3- قال تعالى : "وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ مُصَدِّقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلِتُنْذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَى وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَهُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ" (الأنعام: 92)	"This is <u>a Book</u> We have sent down, blessed and confirming that which was before it, and for thee to warn the Mother of Cities and those about her; and those who believe in the world to come believe in it, and watch over their prayers" (Al-Anᶜām:92)	"This is a blessed <u>Book</u> We have sent down to confirm whatever came before it, so you may warn the Mother of Towns and anyone around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it and attend to their prayer" (Al-Anᶜām: 92)

This verse states that the Holy Qur'ān confirms the earlier Scriptures like Torah and Bible. Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūṭī (2003) point out that this verse states that the Holy Qur'ān is a blessed Scripture that God has revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed confirming the earlier Scriptures which were revealed before it.

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) also confirms that الكِتَابُ *al-kitāb* (the book) is one of the names of the Holy Qur'ān. In fact, there is a consensus among the exegetes that the lexical item كِتَابٌ *kitāb* (book) in this verse signifies the Holy Qur'ān and the adjective مُبَارَكٌ *mubārakun* (blessed)

describes الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) i.e. the Holy Qur'ān. Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991) argues that the verse مصدقا لما بين يديه *musadiqan lima bayna yadayhi* (confirming that which was before it) refers to the original Scriptures الإنجيل *al-'injīl* (the Bible) and التوراة *al-tawrāh* (the Torah). In other words, the Holy Qur'ān does not contradict those Scriptures. The next verse will be analyzed because it contributes to a better understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ānic lexical item الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book). In the next verse, this lexical item has a meaning different from its denotative meaning in the previous two verses.

TABLE 4. The meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) as the term of waiting

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
4- قال تعالى: "وَلَا تَعْزِمُوا عُقْدَةَ النِّكَاحِ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْكِتَابُ أَجَلَهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ" (البقرة: 235)	"And do not resolve on the knot of marriage until <u>the book</u> has reached its term; and know that God knows what is in your hearts, so be fearful of Him; and know that God is All-forgiving, All-clement" (Al-Baqarah: 235)	"Do not tie the marriage knot until <u>the decree</u> has become final; know that God knows whatever is on your minds, so be careful with Him! Know that God is Forgiving, Lenient". (Al-Baqarah: 235)

This verse states that people are not allowed to make a marriage until the prescribed period is over. Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984), Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūtī (2003) contend that this verse concerns the prohibition of consummation of the marriage before the end of the prescribed period. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) points out that the period prescribed is four months and ten days and thus the marriage cannot be consummated unless this prescribed period has been completed. Furthermore, Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) and Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991) assert that ولا تعزموا عقدة النكاح *wala taᶜzimū ᶜuqdata alnnikāḥi* "And do not resolve on the knot of marriage" implicates the forbiddance of consummation of marriage before the completion of the prescribed period. The next verse will be analyzed because it contributes to a better understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ānic word الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book). In the next verse, this lexical item has a meaning different from its denotative meaning in the previous three verses.

TABLE 5. The meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) as God's legislation

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
5- قال تعالى: "وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ إِلَّا مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأُحِلَّ لَكُمْ مَا وَرَاءَ ذَلِكُمْ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَافِحِينَ..." (النساء: 24)	"And wedded women, save what your right hands own, So God <u>prescribes</u> for you. Lawful for you, beyond all that, is that you may seek, using your wealth, in wedlock and not in license" (Al-Nisā: 24)	"Nor [should you marry] any [already] married women, except the ones under your control. [Such is] God's <u>legislation</u> as it applies to you. Anything beyond that is lawful for you, provided you court them by means of your wealth, marrying them properly, rather than taking them on as mistresses" (Al-Nisā: 24)

This verse states that people are not allowed to marry married women and this is prescribed by God. Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984), Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūtī (2003) point out that this verse is concerned with the prohibition of marrying women who have spouses unless they leave their spouses save the captive (i.e. captured slave girls). The verse states that this is what Allah has prescribed for people.

In addition, Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984), Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) explain that كتاب الله عليكم *kitāba Allahi ᶜalaykum* means that Allah has prescribed that for you. They also claim that كتاب الله عليكم *kitāba Allahi ᶜalaykum* might mean that you must observe what has been prescribed for you. The next verse will be analyzed because it contributes to a better understanding of the meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book). In the next verse, this lexical item has a meaning different from its denotative meaning in the previous four verses.

TABLE 6. The meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) as a decree

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
6- قال تعالى: ‏‏‏ ‏‏"وَمَا أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ إِلَّا وَلَهَا كِتَابٌ مَعْلُومٌ ، مَا تَسْبِقُ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلَهَا وَمَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ"‏ (الحجر: 4-5)	"Never a city have We destroyed, but it had a known <u>decree</u>, and no nation outstrips its term, nor do they put it back" (Al-Hijr: 4-5)	"We have never wiped out any town unless it had [received] a known <u>term</u>; no nation can forestall its deadline, nor will they ever postpone it" (Al-Hijr: 4-5).

This verse states that God did not destroy any town unless that town had received a known term. It is interpreted by Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984), Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūtī (2003) as follows: God did not destroy any town except there is an appointed time for their destruction; no community perishes or is destroyed before the predetermined term and no community can seek to delay the time of destruction. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) illustrates that كِتابٌ مَعْلُومٌ *kitāb maᶜlūm* denotes the predetermined decree or term. Similarly, Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) explains that كِتابٌ مَعْلُومٌ *kitāb maᶜlum* refers to what is prescribed in اللوح المحفوظ *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* (the Preserved Tablet). Furthermore, Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) claims that الكتاب *al-kitāb* in this verse denotes predestination and it is described as a book because it does not undergo changes.

Additionally, Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) contends that this verse was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed to inform the infidels that it is the way of God to respite infidels so that they would be aware of His punishment. Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991) also asserts that this verse was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed to remind the infidels about the destroyed nations who disbelieved in God. The next verse will be analyzed because it contributes to a better understanding of the meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book). In the next verse, this lexical item has a meaning different from its denotative meaning in the previous five verses.

TABLE 7. The meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) as the record

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
7- قال تعالى: ‏‏"فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَيَقُولُ هَاؤُمُ اقْرَءُوا كِتَابِيَهْ"‏ (الحاقة: 19)	"Then as for him who is given his <u>book</u> in his right hand, he shall say, Here, take and read my <u>book</u>!" (Al-Haqqah: 19)	"Anyone who is given his <u>book</u> in his right hand will say: Here, read my <u>book</u>!" (Al-Haqqah: 19)

This verse describes what those who receive their records of deeds with the right hand say in the Hereafter. Al-Maḥalī and Al-Suyūtī (2003) and Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) explain that this verse states that anyone in the Hereafter is given his record of deeds in his right hand will say to those around him "Here take and read my book". In fact, there is a consensus among the exegetes that the lexical item كتابه *kitābuh* (his book) in this verse denotes the record of deeds. Ibn Kathīr (1999) asserts that this verse describes how happy and proud the one who is given his record in the right hand when s/he says: "come and see what is in my book of reward and bestowal of honour". Ibn ᶜAshūr (1984) also adds that the one who is given his record in the right hand is regarded as glad tidings to that person.

THE SEMANTIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *AL-ASFĀR* AND *AL-KUTUB* (BOOKS) BASED ON RC-S APPROACH

The contextual analysis of the meanings of the Qur'ānic pair الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (books) reveals that there exist some semantic differences between the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms. It is also noticed that the lexical item الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) is polysemous having many denotations. In this regard, Murphy (2003) argues that in any set of different word forms having the same denotation, there exist slight differences in denotative and/or

expressive meaning. These semantic differences are explained here in the light of the RC-S approach by Murphy (2003) and the denotative meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical item are identified based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān.

As noticed in the contextual analysis, there exist some differences between the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms in terms of the denotative meaning. The lexical item الأسفار *al-asfār* denotes huge tomes while الكتب *al-kutub* (books) is used to denote many things in the Holy Qur'ān. For instance, it is used in the second verse (Al-Baqarah: 213) to denote the Torah (the Old Testament) or the Holy Books in general based on different interpretations of the exegetes. In the third verse (Al-Anᶜām: 92), it is used to refer to the Holy Qur'ān. In the fourth (Al-Baqarah: 235) and fifth verses (Al-Nisā: 24), it is used to denote the prescribed period and God's Prescription respectively. It is also used in the sixth verse (Al-Hajr: 4-5) to signify decree or term. Finally, this lexical item signifies the record of someone's deed in the Hereafter based on the exegeses of the seventh verse (Al-Hāqqah: 19). It is shown that the lexical item الأسفار *al-asfār* (books) has one meaning (i.e. huge tomes) while the lexical item الكتب *al-kutub* (books) is polysemous having many denotations.

THE TRANSLATIONS OF *AL-ASFĀR* AND *AL-KUTUB* (BOOKS)

The contextual analysis shows that there exist some semantic differences between الأسفار *al-asfār* and الكتب *al-kutub* (books) in terms of denotation. The lexical item الأسفار (*al-asfār*) denotes large heavy books while the other lexical item الكتب *al-kutub* (books) is ploysemous having many denotations which are explained in the previous section. Consequently, such semantic differences between these words should be reflected in the English translation and the meaning of the polysemous lexical item الكتب *al-kutub* (books) should be also conveyed based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān.

While translating the lexical item الأسفار (*al-asfār*), Arberry (2003) rendered this lexical item as 'books' and thus the differences in denotative meaning between الأسفار (*al-asfār*) and الكتب (*al-kutub*) are not reflected in the English translation. Irving (2002) also translated the lexical item الأسفار (*al-asfār*) as 'Scriptures'. In English, the lexical item 'Scriptures' means i) The Bible ii) The Holy books of a particular religion (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). Based on Irving's translation, the meaning of the first verse will be "as the likeness of a donkey carrying Holy Books". Since الأسفار (*al-asfār*) means large heavy books, it would have been better had the translators rendered this Qur'ānic word as 'huge tomes'. In fact, this translation is provided by Ali and also this Qur'ānic lexical item is rendered as large Books in the Dictionary of Islamic Terms by (Al-Khudrawi, 2004). The researchers' view is that the rendition, huge tomes, is more appropriate as it reflects the denotative meaning of the Qur'ānic lexical item الأسفار (*al-asfār*).

Coming back to the meaning of الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) or its plural form الكتب *al-kutub* (the books), it is found that this lexical item is ployemous and is used in the second verse (Al-Baqarah: 213) as a generic noun referring to all Holy Books which were revealed upon Prophets. Both translators rendered this word 'the book' which reflects the denotative meaning of the word. Similarly, the lexical item كتاب (book) in the third verse (Al-Anᶜām: 92) signifies the Holy Qur'ān and thus it is translated appropriately as 'a book' by both translators.

In the fourth verse (Al-Baqarah: 235), the lexical item الكتاب (*al-kitāb*) signifies the prescribed period (four months and ten days). Translating this lexical item by Arberry (2003) as 'the book' is literal and does not reflect the denotative meaning of the Qur'ānic lexical item. This might be attributed to the fact that Arberry (2003) adopted a literal approach to Qur'ān translation. In addition, Irving (2002) provided another rendition of الكتاب (*al-kitāb*) in the fourth verse (Al-Baqarah: 235) as 'decree'. In English, the lexical item 'decree' means i) an official order or decision ii) a judgment in a court of law (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). Both renderings of this lexical item as 'decree' and 'book' do

not reflect the denotative meaning of this Qur'ānic word. In fact, many translators provide faithful translations of this lexical item, for example 'the term prescribed' by Khan, Ali and Pickthal or 'term of waiting' by Asad. Such translations would be more faithful and accurate. In the sixth verse (Al-Hijr: 4), the lexical item كتاب *kitāb* (book) denotes decree or term. It is appropriately rendered as 'decree' by Arberry (2003) and as 'term' by Irving (2002). In the seventh verse (Al-Hāqah: 19), there is a consensus among exegetes that the lexical item كتابه *kitābah* (his book) signifies the record of deeds. However, both translators rendered this lexical item as 'his book'. This translation is literal and thus translating this lexical item as 'his record' would be more faithful and accurate. This translation, his record, is provided by Khan, Ali, Pickthal and Asad.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that there are semantic differences between the Qur'ānic pair in terms of denotative meaning. However, such semantic differences are not reflected in the English translations. Therefore, the current study highly recommends that the translators of the Holy Qur'ān should look for the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms whenever they encounter lexical items with similar meanings and make sure that such semantic differences are reflected in their translations. It is also found the lexical item الكتاب *al-kitāb* (the book) or its plural form الكتب *al-kutub* (the books) are polysemous having several denotations based on the context in which they are used. The context where the Qur'ānic lexical items are used plays a key role in making the meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical items as well as the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic lexical items clear to the reader. Therefore, the translators should conduct a contextual analysis of the verses that they intend to translate because such an analysis would be helpful in identifying the semantic differences between the near-synonyms as well as the meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic lexical items. Whenever the readers or translators of the Holy Qur'ān encounter a lexical item with polysemous meanings, they should consult as many exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān as possible and choose the agreed meaning among many prominent exegetes. Finally, literature reveals that few researchers have touched upon the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how the semantic near-synonyms between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected in the English translation. Consequently, future studies should investigate the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and their English translations due to the importance of the Holy Qur'ān to all Muslims all over the globe.

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