Meanings of the Polysemous Qur'ānic Word *Raḥmah* (Mercy) and its English Translation

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ABSTRACT

The concept of polysemy, where a single word holds multiple meanings based on context, presents unique challenges in translating religious texts like the Holy Qur'ān. This study examines the meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic word *raḥmah (*mercy) and its English translation in the Holy Qur'an. It identifies the contextual meanings of this Qur'ānic word in different Qur'ānic contexts and highlight the semantic differences among its meanings in various Qur'ānic contexts. Then, it examines how the semantic differences among the meanings of this word are reflected in the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. This study adopts the componential analysis proposed by Newmark for data analysis where the meaning of the source language word is compared with the meaning of the target language word i.e. its translation. The findings of the study reveal that *raḥmah* (mercy) is a polysemous word having ten meanings in various contexts in the Holy Qur'ān; these meanings include cordiality, Islam, paradise, rain, blessing, the Holy Qur'ān, livelihood and provision, victory, well-being and prophethood. However, the results show that this polysemous Qur'ānic word is literally translated as 'mercy' which does not reflect the intended meaning in the Qur'ānic verses. While previous studies have highlighted the literal translation of polysemous words in the Qur'ān, this study provides new insights by identifying specific contexts where literal translations fail to capture the deeper theological implications of *'raḥmah*.' It proposes the use of targeted footnotes and parenthetical explanations as a practical solution for translators, offering a more accurate representation of the word's nuanced meanings in different Qur'ānic contexts.

Keywords: Polysemy; Qur'ānic words; translation; componential analysis

INTRODUCTION

Polysemy is defined as a linguistic phenomenon which proliferate in natural languages. Philosophers of language, linguists, and psychologists have long been interested in this linguistic phenomenon because of the challenges it poses for semantic representation theories, language processing, semantic compositionality and communication. Nerlich (2003) states that the term 'polysemy' was first introduced in general linguistics by Bréal to describe single word forms which

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have numerous different meanings. According to him, this linguistic phenomenon was mainly a diachronic phenomenon, arising as a result of semantic change. Words acquire new senses through use, but such new meanings do not replace the old ones. Polysemy, then, arises as a consequence of the parallel existence of old and new senses in a language; it is the 'synchronic side' of lexical semantic change. Based on these views, polysemy has been defined by many linguists and researchers.

It has been defined as a single lexical item with two or multiple meanings (Falkum, 2011). It is also viewed by Dickens et al (2002) as the situation in which a word has more than one distinct and different denotative meaning. It is noticed that Dickins et al (2002) focused on denotative meaning of the polysemous word in their definition of this phenomenon. A standard definition of polysemy is "the association of two or more related senses with a single linguistic form" (Taylor, 2003: 144). An example of polysemy is the lexical item 'run' which has different meanings as in the following clauses: i) 'run a half marathon', ii) 'run late', iii) 'run a shop', iv) 'run on gasoline', v) run on empty', vi) 'run some water' and so forth. The multiple senses a lexical item acquires could be a result of the metaphoric or abstract context in which it is utilized, thus giving it a metaphoric or abstract meaning apart from its original meaning (Sadiq, 2008). Moreover, the multiple senses contained in polysemous words have the same etymological origins and are associated with one another.

It is common knowledge that Arabic is full and rich of the features which make it unique (Nordin, 2023). One of such features is polysemy which is called in Arabic الاشــتقاق اللفظي (al-Īshtīqāq al-Lafḍ ī) (Ali, Brakhw & Nordin, 2014). This linguistic phenomenon also exists extensively in Arabic language and particularly in the Holy Qur'ān. An example of polysemous word is عين *ᶜayn* (eye) which has different meanings based on the context in which it is used. In this regard, Sadiq (2008) claims that this polysemous word (i.e. عين *ᶜayn* eye) has the following senses: 'apartment', 'essence', 'spring', 'completely right', 'the eye of a needle' and 'spy' in different Arabic contexts.

Furthermore, the Holy Qur'ān also include many several polysemous words (Abdussalam, 2008). A total of 470 polysemous words have been identified by Abdussalam (2008) in his famous book "Concordance of Qur'ānic polysemy" regarding polysemy in the Holy Qur'ān. An instance of such polysemous Qur'ānic words is the word كتاب *kītāb* (book) which has several meanings, to mention but a few: 1) the Bible 2) the Holy Qur'an 3) preserved tablets 4) record 5) writing and so forth (Abdul-Ghafour et al., 2019).

Another example of the polysemous lexical items in the Holy Qur'ān is دعا *daᶜa* (called) which is utilised in several Qur'ānic verses with slightly different meanings. In fact, such lexical item i.e. دعا *da'a* (called) was studied by Sadiq (2008) who explained that this Qur'ānic word has different meanings in various contexts; for instance, it means invoke (*sura*h al-ᶜImrān, verse 38), call (in verse 24; *surah* al-Anfāl) and invite (in verse 53; *surah* al-Aḥzāb). Therefore, translators of the Holy Qur'an need to be aware of the polysemous Qur'ānic words and select the suitable meaning for the polysemous words based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān when they translate such words from Arabic to English.

In fact, the notion of Qur'ānic polysemy has recently attracted the researchers' attention. For example, Abobaker et al (2012) investigated the translation of the Qur'ānic word أمة *ummah* (nation) that has different senses in various Qur'ānic verses. Their study revealed that this polysemous word has nine senses in the Holy Qur'ān including: a religion that some people follow (verse: 22; *surah* al-Zukhruf), the leader of the people who guides or teaches the believers to the right path in their life and religion (verse: 120; *surah* al-Nahl) and a period of time (verse: 45;

surah Yusuf). The study concluded that the investigated translations rendered this polysemous word literally as nation and thus the intended meaning in the Holy Qur'ān is not reflected in the translation of the Qur'ānic verses.

The present study scrutinises the contextual meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic word رحمة *raḥmah* (mercy) based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, it analyses the translation of this polysemous Qur'ānic word in terms of how the different meanings of this word are reflected in the English translation of the Holy Qur'ān. Finally, it highlights the challenges encountered by translators while translating this polysemous word in the Holy Qur'ān. Investigating the meanings of this polysemous word and its English translations in the Holy Qur'ān might present insight into the Qur'ānic texts and an illustration to the reader as well as the translators that the various meanings of the polysemous words in the Holy Qur'ān need careful consideration while translating the Holy Qur'ān.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study adopts the componential analysis for analysing the selected data of the study i.e. رحمة *raḥmah* (mercy), its meanings in various Qur'ānic verses and its English translation. Newmark (1988) differentiated between Componential Analysis (henceforth CA) in translation as well as in linguistics. According to him, CA in linguistics is concerned with analyzing and splitting up the different meanings of a lexical item into meaning constituents that could or could not be universals. However, CA in translation is mainly concerned with comparing a source Qur'ānic word with a target language word that has a similar sense, which is an obvious one to one equivalent by showing first their common and subsequently their opposing meaning constituents.

Newmark (1988) applauded that the Qur'ānic word has a more specific sense than the target language word, and that the translator should add one or more target language meaning constituents to the equivalent word so as to create a closer approximation of meaning. The translator usually examines a word contextually, thereby limiting its target meaning constituents (Newmark, 1988). It is noticed that CA is helpful in translating and assessing the translation of conceptual words and words that denotes "combinations of actions and qualities, that appear to show up a lexical gap in the target language" (ibid: 117). It is argued that CA is helpful in highlighting the semantic differences between words which are distinguished from one another by a contrastive analysis. For example, the word يقين *yaqīn* (belief) is polysemous having several meanings, to mention but a few, belief and firm, death and so forth. When this polysemous word denotes belief and firm, it should be translated as firm belief.

This model is adopted in this study for the analysis of the contextual meanings of the selected polysemous Qur'ānic word i.e. *raḥmah* (mercy) in terms of their denotation (i.e. the primary referential meaning of a given word) and connotation (i.e. the additional meanings that a word or phrase has beyond its central meaning) and then explain how the translated polysemous word has the same meanings of the original Qur'ānic polysemous word. The contextual meanings of the chosen Qur'ānic word are explained and discussed in the light of the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. However, the comparison between the meanings of both the target and source language words will be carried out through the contrastive analysis of the meaning components of the original Qur'ānic polysemous word and its English translation. Such a comparison will make it possible for the researcher to highlight the challenges the translators encountered while translating this Qur'ānic polysemous word from English to Arabic.

Furthermore, Newmark's (1988) approach to translation differentiates between denotation, the direct, literal meaning of a word, and connotation, which involves secondary, often culturally specific meanings. This distinction is critical in translating texts where words carry varied meanings in different contexts, a common feature in the Qur'ān. In the study on the polysemous Qur'ānic word "*raḥmah*" (mercy), Newmark's (1988) framework can be leveraged to analyze how different translations handle these layers of meaning. The method involves breaking down the meanings of "*raḥmah*" identified in various Qur'ānic verses into their denotative (direct) and connotative (cultural or implied) components. For instance, while "*raḥmah*" is literally translated as "mercy," its contextual uses might imply other meanings such as "blessing," "providence," or "divine favour" depending on the verse as revealed in the data analysis below. This method allows for a structured comparison of how the word's meaning in the source text aligns or diverges from that in the translated text. By applying Newmark's (1988) approach, your study effectively maps out how each identified meaning of "*raḥmah*" aligns with or diverges from its translation, providing a systematic way to assess the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of the translation. This not only highlights the challenges in translating polysemous words but also suggests more nuanced translation strategies, such as using footnotes or additional glosses to convey the broader spectrum of meanings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature shows that the Holy Qur'ān includes some words that have different meanings based on the context in which they are employed. Researchers (e.g. Abobaker et al, 2012; Sadiq, 2008; Ali, 2019) studied some Qur'ānic polysemous words, claiming that the translators faced some challenges while rendering the meanings of the selected polysemous Qur'ānic words into English. Moreover, Sharifabad et al (2012), Musahar et al. (2019) and Abdul-Ghafour et al. (2019) revealed that one of challenges facing the translators of the Holy Qur'ān is the use of polysemous words because of their multiple meanings. According to these studies, inexperienced translators find it hard to choose the right meaning for any given polysemious word when translating the Holy Qur'ān from Arabic into English.

A close look at the relevant literature has shown that some researchers (e.g. Sadiq, 2010; Abdelaal & Abdelaal, 2020) have examined the semantic, stylistic and cultural challenges encountered while translating some polysemous words in the Holy Qur'ān, claiming that that the translators faced semantic problems during the translation of the polysemous words of the Qur'ān. Moreover, Ali, Brakhw and Nordin (2014) and Omer & Ali, 2024) scrutinized the translation strategies employed by the translators while translating the some polysemous words of the Holy Qur'ān, claiming that the translators employed the literal translation strategy while translating the Qur'ānic polysemous words into English (i.e. English) and consequently, the renditions of the selected Qur'ānic polysemous words were not adequate.

Other studies also investigated the translation of the polysemous words in the Holy Qur'ān such as Abobaker et al (2012) and Sharifabad et al (2012); Aldhafeeri, 2022); these studies revealed that the polysemous words pose a challenge to the translators of the Holy Qur'ān. It is noticed that the previous studies on Qur'ānic polysemous words were mainly concerned with the assessment of the translation of the polysemous words in the Holy Qur'ān as well as the translation strategies adopted by the translators. However, the present study is mainly concerned with the contextual meanings of the selected polysemous word in the Holy Qur'ān and then the comparison between the meaning components of the original polysemous Qur'ānic word as well as its English

translations. In other words, the present study will go deep in the semantics of the Qur'ānic polysemous word than the previous studies

Although a few studies have investigated the translation of the polysemous Qur'ān words, they were more concerned with the assessment of the translation of such polysemous words. This study is mainly concerned with the contextual meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic word (i.e. *raḥmah* =mercy) being selected for this study, the semantic differences among the meanings of this word in terms of denotative and connotative meanings and finally the challenges encountered by the translators while translating such polysemous words.

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology adopted in the present study. It highlights the study design, the corpus of the study, the data selection, the selected translations, methods of data analysis and the study procedures.

STUDY DESIGN

The study employs a qualitative research design, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the semantic nuances of the polysemous Qur'ānic word *raḥmah* (mercy) and its translation. This approach is particularly useful for examining complex textual data and helps to achieve the study's objectives by focusing on the meanings conveyed in various contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

DATA COLLECTION

This study will analyze the contextual meanings of one polysemous Qur'ānic word, namely, *raḥmah* (mercy) and its English translation. This word is specifically selected for this study because it occurs frequently in the Holy Qur'ān. It has 268 occurrences in the Holy Qur'ān based on islamweb.net. The study focuses on analyzing the contextual meanings of the word *raḥmah* (mercy), which is specifically selected due to its frequent occurrence in the Holy Qur'ān, appearing 268 times as identified through the database of islamweb.net. The selection of this word is based on its semantic richness and variability in meaning, which make it a representative case for studying polysemy in religious texts. The data includes verses from the Holy Qur'ān where *raḥmah* appears, as well as their English translations by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

THE SELECTED TRANSLATION AND EXEGESES OF THE QUR'ĀN

The present study adopts the translation of Ali (2006). This translation is adopted due to its authoritative status and extensive use in academic settings. Ali's (2006) translation is renowned for balancing literal and spiritual interpretations, supported by detailed footnotes that help convey the deeper meanings of complex terms as in this case is *raḥmah* (mercy). This makes it ideal for examining the nuances of polysemy in the Qur'ānic text. Additionally, the translation's widespread recognition and accessibility ensure that the study's findings have broader relevance for both scholars and general readers, making it a valuable reference point for assessing the challenges and strategies in Qur'ānic translation. His translation is also considered sincere and honest (Jassem, 2001). In terms of the exegeses, the researcher selected Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-

Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) due to their unique contributions to understanding the linguistic and contextual nuances of Qur'ānic terms like *raḥmah*. Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis is one of the earliest and most comprehensive works, providing a foundational analysis of Qur'ānic language based on classical Arabic. It offers detailed linguistic interpretations that are invaluable for understanding the historical use of polysemous terms. Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī's *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* is known for its concise yet precise explanations, making it particularly useful for grasping the broader semantic range of *raḥmah* in various contexts. Al-Zamakhsharī's *exegesis* is celebrated for its emphasis on the rhetorical and linguistic aspects of the Qur'ān, offering insights into how different meanings of polysemous words are constructed through context. Finally, Al-Shaᶜrāwī's exegesis provides a modern linguistic perspective, connecting classical interpretations with contemporary linguistic understanding. These exegeses were chosen because they collectively offer a balanced perspective, integrating classical, linguistic, and rhetorical approaches that are essential for a thorough analysis of the polysemous nature of *raḥmah* in the Holy Qur'ān.

METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data is analyzed qualitatively using qualitative content analysis as it is a flexible method for the analysis of data. Such a technique is deemed one of the techniques that assist in making valid and reliable inferences for texts to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). Furtheremore, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) contended that qualitative content analysis is a flexible method which is commonly employed for the analysis of textual data. This technique has been considerably employed in qualitative studies (Dörnyei, 2007). In particular, it has been extensively utilized by many researchers in the Qur'ānic studies including Abdul-Raof (2001), Al-Uwa (2006), Issa (2011), Abdul-Ghafour et al (2019) and so forth.

Newmark's (1988) componential analysis model was also adopted for data analysis. After the collecting the translations of the Qur'ānic verses in which the selected polysemous Qur'ānic word is used, the contextual meaning of this polysemous word is firstly explained based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, a contrastive analysis of the meaning components of the Qur'ānic polysemous word in different contexts will be made. After that, a contrastive analysis of the meaning components of the selected polysemous word as well as their English translations were conducted. Finally, the challenges faced by the translators were highlighted and discussed.

FINDINGS

This section provides the obtained findings of the study. It also presents the analysis of the contextual meanings of the selected Qur'ānic polysemous word i.e. *raḥmah* (mercy) as well as a comparison between the meaning of this Qur'ānic word and its English translations.

CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS OF *RAḤMAH* (MERCY)

The contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses where the word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used has shown that it has ten different meanings in the Holy Qur'ān. These meanings are explained in the contexts in the following Qur'ānic verses:

1. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'cordiality'

Table (1) below presents the Qur'ānic verse in which the word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used to mean 'cordiality' as well as its English translation by Ali (2006) as follows:

TABLE 1. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'cordiality'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: ‏"ثُمَّ قَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم بِرُسُـلِنَا وَقَفَّيْنَا بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنجِيلَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ رَأْفَةً وَرَحْمَةً" الحديد (27)	"Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our apostles: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy" (*Surah al-Ḥadīd*: 27)

This verse is explained in the exegeses of Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) as follows: then We cause Jesus, Mary's son, to follow the other messengers (the messengers who were sent before the Prophet Mohammed) and revealed upon him, i.e. Jesus, the Gospel, and placed kindness and mercy (i.e. cordiality) in the heart of those who followed him. It is noticed that the contextual meaning of the *raḥmah* (mercy) in this Qur'ānic verse is 'cordiality'.

In the translation of the Qur'ānic word "*raḥmah*" (mercy) in *surah al-Hadīd* (27), it is noticed that there is a distinction between denotation and connotation as described in Newmark (1988) approach. Denotatively, "*raḥmah*" translates directly to "mercy," capturing the primary, universal meaning of compassion and forgiveness. However, connotatively, in this specific context, "*raḥmah*" implies "cordiality"—a nuanced sense of friendly, respectful warmth among followers of Jesus, as indicated in Islamic exegeses. The English translation "mercy," while accurate in a broad sense, may not fully convey this nuanced emotional and social interaction implied by "cordiality." This analysis underscores the need for translations that consider both the literal and contextual meanings to fully express the emotional and cultural depths of polysemous words, potentially benefiting from additional explanatory footnotes for clarity in scholarly translations.

2. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'Islam'

The following table presents the Qur'ānic verse in which the word *raḥmah* (mercy) is employed to mean 'Islam' as well the English translation of the Qur'ānic verse by Ali (2006).

TABLE 2. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'Islam'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: ‏"ولو شـاء الله لجعلهم أمة واحدة ولكن يدخل من يشاء في رحمته" الشورى (8)	"If God had so willed, He could have made them a single people; but He admits whom He will to His Mercy" (*Surah al-Shūrā:* 8)

In the translation of the Qur'ānic term "*raḥmah*" (mercy) as it appears in *surah al-Shūrā* (8), where it connotatively denotes 'Islam,' the challenges of capturing deep cultural and religious nuances in translation become apparent. In this verse, "*raḥmah*" is not merely about kindness or forgiveness; it specifically refers to the inclusion into the Islamic faith, as indicated by the exegetes Al-Sha‘rāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009). They interpret "*raḥmah*" as Allah's divine favor of granting someone entry into Islam, a concept that the direct translation to "mercy" only partially communicates. This example highlights the limitations of literal translations in conveying the full spiritual and communal implications embedded within

a polysemous word, suggesting a need for additional translation techniques, such as paraphrasing or footnotes, to fully express such culturally and religiously significant concepts.

3. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'paradise'

Table (3) below provides the Qur'ānic verse in which the Qur'ānic word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used to mean 'paradise' and its English translation by Ali (2006).

TABLE 3. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'paradise'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation by
قـال تعـالى: ''أمـا الـذين آمنوا بـالله واعتصـموا به فسيدخلهم في رحمة منه'' النساء (175)	"Then those who believe in God, and hold fast to Him,- soon will He admit them to mercy and grace from Himself" (*Surah al-Nisā*: 175)

In *surah al-Nisā* (175), the term "*raḥmah*" (mercy) is used connotatively to signify 'Paradise,' reflecting the depth of its contextual usage beyond the literal meaning of mercy or compassion. According to Islamic exegetes like Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), this verse implies that believers who steadfastly adhere to their faith are promised entry into paradise, here metaphorically referred to as "His mercy." However, the translation by Ali (2006) as "mercy and grace" may not fully convey the specific promise of Paradise, highlighting the complexity and the need for translators to capture both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of such theologically significant terms. This instance underscores the challenge in translating Qur'ānic text where spiritual rewards are articulated through everyday language, requiring a nuanced approach to fully reflect the intended divine assurances.

4. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'rain'

Table (4) below presents the Qur'ānic verse in which *raḥmah* (mercy) means 'rain' and also provides the English translation of the Qur'ānic verse by Ali (2006).

TABLE 4. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'rain'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: ''وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ مِن بَعْدِ مَا قَنَطُوا وَيَنشُرُ رَحْمَتَهُ وَهُوَ الْوَلِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ'' الشورى (28)	"He is the One that sends down rain (even) after (men) have given up all hope, and scatters His Mercy (far and wide). And He is the Protector, Worthy of all Praise" (*Surah al-Shūrā*: 28)

In *surah al-Shūrā* (28), the term "*raḥmah*" (mercy) is uniquely employed to denote 'rain,' showcasing its polysemous nature within the Qur'ānic context. According to the interpretations by Islamic scholars such as Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), "*raḥmah*" here symbolizes the divine act of sending rain after a period of despair, emphasizing rain as a form of Allah's mercy on Earth. The translation by Ali (2006) captures this metaphorical usage by describing how Allah "scatters His Mercy (far and wide)" in the form of rain, illustrating how divine benevolence manifests in life-sustaining rainfall. This translation reflects the broader theological concept that divine mercy can be manifested through natural phenomena, enriching the literal translation with a deeper, spiritual significance.

5. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'blessing'

Table (5) below provides the Qur'ānic verse in which the polysemous word *raḥmah* (mercy) is employed to mean 'blessing' and its English translation by Ali (2006).

TABLE 5. Meaning of *raḥḥmah* (mercy) as 'blessing'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: "ولولا فضــل الله عليكم ورحمته في الدنيا والآخرة لمسكم في ما أفضتم" النور (14)	"Were it not for the grace and mercy of God on you, in this world and the Hereafter, a grievous penalty would have seized you in that ye rushed glibly into this affair" (*Surah al-Nūr*: 14)

In surah *al-Nūr* (14), "*raḥmah*" (mercy) is contextually translated as 'blessing,' reflecting its polysemous capacity within the Qur'ānic discourse. The verse articulates a scenario where divine mercy, or "*raḥmah*," acts as a protective and beneficent force that averts severe punishment due to wrongful actions, specifically during the incident involving the slander of Aisha, the Prophet Muhammad's wife. Exegetes such as Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) emphasize that here "*raḥmah*" symbolizes not just general mercy but a specific form of divine favour or blessing that safeguards the believers in both worldly life and the hereafter. Ali (2006)'s translation captures this interpretation by linking mercy directly with Allah's grace, highlighting its function as a divine gift that prevents potential calamities—a nuanced depiction that enriches understanding of the term's spiritual significance in Islamic teachings.

6. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'the Holy Qur'an'

The table below presents the Qur'ānic verse in which *raḥmah* (mercy) means 'the Holy Qur'ān' and also provides the English translation of the Qur'ānic verse by Ali (2006).

TABLE 6. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'the Holy Qur'ān'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: "قل بفضــل الله وبرحمته فبذلك فليفرحوا" يونس (58)	"Say: In the bounty of God. And in His Mercy,- in that let them rejoice: that is better than the (wealth) they hoard" (*Surah Yunis*: 58)

In *surah Yunis* (58), the word "raḥmah" (mercy) is interpreted to mean 'the Holy Qur'ān,' indicating a symbolic representation of divine mercy. According to Islamic exegetes like Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), this verse highlights that the Qur'ān itself is a form of Allah's mercy bestowed upon believers, offering guidance and spiritual wealth that surpasses material possessions. The English translation by Ali (2006) phrases it as "In the bounty of Allah. And in His Mercy," where "His Mercy" is an allusion to the Qur'ān, inviting the faithful to find joy in this divine gift. This interpretation suggests that the Qur'ān, as a merciful gift, plays a central role in the spiritual life of Muslims, providing a path to enlightenment and salvation that is considered more valuable than worldly riches.

7. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'livelihood'

Table (7) below provides the Qur'ānic verse in which the Qur'ānic word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used to mean 'livelihood' and its English translation by Ali (2006).

TABLE 7. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'livelihood'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قَال تعَـالى: ‏‏‏''قُلْ لَوْ أَنْتُمْ تَمْلِكُونَ خَزَائِنَ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّي'' الاسراء (100)	"Say: If ye had control of the Treasures of the Mercy of my Lord, behold, ye would keep them back, for fear of spending them: for man is (every) niggardly!" (*Surah Al-Isrā*: 100)

In *surah Al-Isrā* (100), the term "*raḥmah*" (mercy) is contextually understood to signify 'livelihood' or divine provision. Islamic scholars such as Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) interpret this verse to illustrate a scenario where the treasures of Allah's mercy, referred to as provisions or sustenance from Allah, are a metaphorical expression for livelihood. The translation by Ali (2006) frames these provisions as "Treasures of the Mercy of my Lord," suggesting that if humans had control over these divine gifts, their inherent greed would lead them to withhold these resources, underlining the theme of human nature's tendency towards stinginess. This interpretation enriches our understanding of "*raḥmah*" in this verse not just as spiritual mercy, but as tangible, necessary sustenance bestowed by Allah, which humans would likely hoard if given the power, highlighting a moral lesson on generosity and trust in divine provision.

8. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'victory'

Table (8) below provides the Qur'ānic verse in which the Qur'ānic word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used to mean 'victory' as well as its English translation by Ali (2006).

TABLE 8. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'victory'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: ''قل من ذا الذي يعصـــمكم من الله إن أراد بكم ســـوءا أو أراد بكم رحمة'' الاحزاب (17)	"Say: Who is it that can screen you from God if it be His wish to give you punishment or to give you Mercy? Nor will they find for themselves, besides God, any protector or helper" (*Surah al-Aḥzab*: 17)

In *surah al-Aḥzab* (17), the term "*raḥmah*" (mercy) intriguingly translates to 'victory,' illustrating its diverse semantic range within the Qur'ānic text. The verse poses a rhetorical question about who could protect one from Allah's will, whether it leads to punishment or mercy, with "mercy" in this context interpreted by Islamic scholars like Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) as a divine grant of victory. This interpretation suggests that victory here is viewed as an act of divine mercy, a favour bestowed by Allah that shields the faithful from harm and leads to triumph in their endeavours. Ali's translation underscores this by equating mercy directly with divine intervention that results in protection and victory, enhancing the understanding that in the spiritual context of the Qur'ān, mercy can also mean the granting of success or triumph against adversity.

9. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'well-being'

Table (9) below presents the Qur'ānic verse in which the Qur'ānic polysemous *raḥmah* (mercy) is employed to mean 'well-being' and the English translation of the Qur'ānic verse by Ali (2006).

TABLE 9. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'well-being'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: ‬''أَوْ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ'' الزمر (38)	"Or if He wills some Grace for me" (*Surah al-Zumar:* 38)

In *surah Al-Zumar* (38), "*raḥmah*" (mercy) is contextually interpreted to mean 'well-being,' highlighting its polysemous nature within Qur'ānic discourse. This interpretation is supported by Islamic scholars such as Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī (2003) Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), who explain that in this verse, divine mercy manifests as personal well-being or grace bestowed by Allah. The English translation by Ali (2006), which renders it as "some Grace for me," attempts to convey this nuanced understanding of "*raḥmah*" as a form of divine favour that enhances one's state of life, underscoring the protective and beneficent aspects of Allah's mercy. This usage of "*raḥmah*" as well-being emphasizes the comprehensive and benevolent nature of divine mercy in ensuring the holistic welfare of individuals.

10. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'prophethood'

Table (10) below presents the Qur'ānic verse in which *raḥmah* (mercy) means 'prophethood' and also provides the English translation of the Qur'ānic verse by Ali (2006).

TABLE 10. Meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) as 'prophethood'

The Qur'ānic verse	English translation
قال تعالى: ''قَالَ يَقَوْمِ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّى وَءَاتَنِى رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِندِهِ'' هود (28)	"He said: O my people! See ye if (it be that) I have a Clear Sign from my Lord, and that He hath sent Mercy unto me from His own presence" (*Surah Hūd*: 28)

In *surah Hūd* (28), the term "*raḥmah*" (mercy) is interpreted to mean 'prophethood,' illustrating its profound and multifaceted connotations within the Qur'ān. According to exegetes like Al-Shaᶜrāwī (1991), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), this verse conveys that prophethood itself is a form of divine mercy granted by Allah. The translation by Ali (2006) presents this concept as Allah sending mercy in the form of a clear sign, which in this context is the gift of prophethood. This interpretation highlights "*raḥmah*" as not merely a passive or emotional divine favour but as an active, tangible gift of guidance through which Allah communicates with His followers. This use of "*raḥmah*" to mean prophethood underscores the role of prophets in Islam as bearers of mercy, through whom Allah extends His guidance and care to humanity.

TRANSLATION OF *RAḤMAH* (MERCY) IN THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

The findings of the study in the previous section reveal that the Qur'ānic polysemous word *raḥmah* (mercy) has ten meanings in the Holy Qur'ān. These include 'cordiality' in *surah al- Hadīd* (verse 27), Islam in *surah al--Shūra* (verse 8), paradise in *surah al-Nisā* (verse 175), rain in *surah al-*

Shūra (verse 28), blessing in *surah al-Nūr* (verse 14), the Holy Qur'an in *surah Yunis* (verse 58), livelihood and provision in *surah Al-Isrā* (verse 100), victory in *surah al-Aḥzab* (verse 17), well-being in *surah al-Zumar* (verse 38), and prophethood in *surah Hud* (verse 28).

However, it is noticed that this polysemous word is literally translated by Ali (2006) in all selected verses as 'mercy' except in *surah Al-Zumar* (verse 38) where it is translated as 'grace'. The componential analysis proposed by Newmark (1988) involves comparing a source language word with a target language word that has a similar sense. Based on this model, the contextual meanings of the polysemous word *raḥmah* (mercy) in the selected Qur'ānic verses will be compared with the meanings of its English translation. For example, the contextual meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) is 'cordiality' which means "being friendly but polite and formal" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). However, its English translation i.e. mercy means "being kind and acting in a forgiving way" (ibid) which indicates that there are nuances in the meaning of the source and target language word. It is clearly shown that the meaning of 'cordiality' does not include forgiveness.

Moreover, the contextual meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) in *surah al-Shūra* (verse 8) is 'Islam' which is the Muslim religion. However, its translation 'mercy' does not reflect the intended meaning of this word in the Qur'ānic verse. Besides, *raḥmah* (mercy) in *surah al-Nisā* (verse 175) refers to the paradise which, according to the religion of Islam, refers the perfect place where people are believed to go after death if they have led good lives (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). Consequently, it can be stated that this meaning is not reflected in the English translation of this word (i.e. mercy).

Furthermore, the contextual meaning of *raḥmah* (mercy) in *surah al-Shūra* (verse 28) is 'rain' which means "water that fall in small drops from the clouds in the sky" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). Nevertheless, its English translation as 'mercy' is literal and does not convey the intended meaning in the Qur'ānic verse i.e. rain. Besides, *raḥmah* (mercy) implicates 'blessing' in *surah al-Nūr* (verse 14) which, according to (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007), means "something that you have or something that happens which is good because it improves your life helps you in some way, or makes you happy." This translation does not reflect the intended meaning of this word as 'blessing'.

In addition, the findings show that the polysemous word *raḥmah* (mercy) is used in *surah Yunis* (verse 58) to mean 'the Holy Qur'an'. This word 'the Holy Qur'ān' refers to the Holy Book of Muslims. However, the English translation of this word in this Qur'ānic verse is literal and does not convey the implicated meaning i.e. the Holy Qur'an. However, this Qur'ānic word i.e. *raḥmah* (mercy) has another meaning in surah Al-Isra (verse 100) which is livelihood and provision. This word i.e. *raḥmah* (mercy) is literally translated as mercy in this Qur'ānic verse which does not reflect the intended meaning of this Qur'ānic word.

Moreover, *raḥmah* (mercy) is intended to mean 'victory' in *surah al-Aḥzāb* (verse 17). The word 'victory' means 'a situation in which you win a battle' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). This word 'victory' in this Qur'ānic verse refers to the victory of Muslims in the battle of *al-Aḥzāb* (the allies) in the prophet era. However, its English translation as 'mercy' is literal and does not convey the intended meaning in this Qur'ānic verse. Besides, the findings of the study reveal that the word *raḥmah* (mercy) in *surah al-Zumar* (verse 38) means 'well-being'. This word 'well-being' means 'the feeling of being comfortable, healthy and happy' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). Nevertheless, its English translation as 'grace' is literal as this word, according to (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007), means 'God's kindness that is shown to people' which does not also reflect the same meaning

intended in the Qur'ānic verse. Finally, the results of the study show that *raḥmah* (mercy) in *surah* Hud (verse 28) means prophethood. This word i.e. 'prophethood' means 'the state and position of a prophet' (The Free Dictionary Online). Nonetheless, its English translation as 'mercy' is literal and does not reflect the intended meaning in this Qur'ānic verse.

To conclude, it can be stated that the polysemous Qur'ānic word *raḥmah* (mercy) has ten meanings in the Holy Qur'ān depending on the contexts in which it is used. These meanings include 'cordiality', Islam, paradise, rain, blessing, the Holy Qur'ān, livelihood and provision, victory, well-being and prophethood. However, it is literally translated as 'mercy' which does not facilitate understanding of the intended in the Qur'ānic verses. Consequently, it would have been better had the translator provided a footnote which explains the intended meaning of the polysemous word *raḥmah* (mercy) in the Qur'ānic verses. Another suggestion for translating this polysemous word is to provide the intended meaning between two brackets while translating the Qur'ānic verses. Such translation could be faithful and conveys the intended meaning of this polysemous word in the Holy Qur'ān.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study scrutinizes the polysemous Qur'ānic word *raḥmah* (mercy) and its English translation in the Holy Qur'ān. The contextual meanings of this word are explained and discussed in the light of the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, a componential analysis is used for analyzing the collected data of this study where the meaning of source language word is compared with the meaning of the target language i.e. its English translation. The findings of the study reveal that *raḥmah* (mercy) is a polysemous word having ten meanings in various Qur'ānic contexts.

The data analysis reveals that in the Holy Qur'ān, the term "*raḥmah*"(mercy) exhibits a rich polysemy, extending its meaning beyond the conventional sense of compassion to denote various nuanced concepts, each contextually grounded within specific verses. For instance, in *surah al-Ḥadid*, "*raḥmah*" symbolizes "cordiality," implying a deep, interpersonal warmth among believers, while in *surah al-Shūrā (verse 8),* it represents "Islam" itself, signifying divine inclusion into the faith. In other contexts, such as *surah al-Nisā,* it conveys "paradise" that reflecting ultimate spiritual reward, and in *surah al-Shūrā (verse 28)*, it transforms into "rain," a metaphor for life-sustaining divine benevolence. Further, in surah *al-Nūr*, "*raḥmah*" is depicted as "blessing," safeguarding believers from earthly and spiritual perils, and in *surah Yunis*, it stands for "the Holy Qur'ān," a guide and mercy to the faithful. In surah Al-Isra, the term morphs into "livelihood," indicating sustenance from Allah, while in *surah Al-Aḥzāb*, it implies "victory," a form of divine favour in triumph. *Surah al-Zumar* interprets "*raḥmah*" as "well-being," a comprehensive state of divine grace, and in *surah Hūd*, it signifies "prophethood," representing a clear sign of Allah's mercy through spiritual leadership. These diverse interpretations illustrate the profound semantic range of "*raḥmah*," each resonating with deep theological significance and reflecting the multifaceted ways in which divine mercy manifests within Islamic teachings.

However, while comparing the contextual meanings of this polysemous word in various contexts with its English translation, it is revealed that the English translation is literal and does not reflect the intended meanings of this polysemous word in the selected verses. This finding is congruent with some previous studies such as (Sadiq, 2008; Abobaker et al, 2012; Sharifabad et al, 2012; Ali, Brakhw & Nordin, 2014; Abdul-Ghafour et al., 2017& 2019) which revealed that some Qur'ānic words are polysemous and that their translations are literal.

Based on the findings obtained from data analysis, the study recommends that the translators should examine the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān thoroughly to initially identify the contextual meanings of polysemous Qur'ānic words and then they should choose the intended meaning in certain contexts. This study also recommends that the translators of the Holy Qur'ān should take into the multiple meanings of the polysemous Qur'ānic words while translating the Holy Qur'ān. Such meanings should be rendered into English through utilizing different translation strategies to mention but a few the use of footnotes or adding parenthetical word or phrase to clarify the intended meaning in the Qur'ānic verses the translator intends to translate.

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