Lexical Analysis of Arabic Near-Synonyms in the Holy Qur'an: A Case Study ofسنة*sanah* and عام*'aam*

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Abstract

Translation is a process that enables communication between different cultures and breaks barriers between languages. Synonymy is equivalence of sense (Griffiths, 2006). It refers to words that mean the same or show semantic resemblance to one another. Words in synonymous pairs can replace each other in sentences with no change of the literal meaning, and therefore, the substitutability test is used to determine whether or not words are synonyms. Translators face many problems in conveying the intended semantic message and finding the exact lexical equivalents in the target language, in addition to the cultural aspects that they need to overcome in the source language. The present study is an attempt to explore the strategies used by different Qur'an translators in rendering an Arabic synonymous pair, namely سنة*sanah and* عام *'aam* (year) into English, and to find out which translations could be more proper than others. The findings proved that some Qur'anic terms are untranslatable, and choosing an accurate equivalent in the target language is not possible because of the differences in the lexical items available in each language. This study concludes that the Holy Qur'an has distinctive aspects that cannot be delivered in other languages and it impresses the readers with the deep and expressive terms that were used for certain purposes.

Keywords: Arabic, Componential analysis, Holy Quran, Near-synonymy

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that no one can provide a perfect translation of the Holy Qur'an since it is the speech of Allah. Therefore, the job of the translators may be limited as full understanding of the intended meaning of the Quran remains beyond the ability of human beings. Diaoudin (1988 p. 200) stated that if anyone begins investigating the wisdom and secrets of the eloquence of the Qur'an, they will sail into a deep ocean that has no escape from.

Translators agree that rendering the Holy Qur'an into a foreign language is only about transmitting the meanings of the text into the target language, since literal translation is unconceivable and cannot deliver the intended message behind the verses (Zarkani, 1945). Moreover, many words in the Holy Qur'an have more than one meaning, and therefore, the translators must be careful when they choose the proper equivalent of these words. This entails referring to various Qur'anic exegeses to determine the exact meaning of the lexemes (Hassan, 2003, p. 40). Abobaker Ali, Brakhw, Nordin, ShaikIsmail, and Humanity (2012) investigated the linguistic difficulties that translators of the Holy Quran face, among which is rendering some Islamic items that lack equivalence in the target language. This compels translators to use the communicative manner by giving approximate meanings such as زكاة (alms giving). This confirms that any translation of the Holy Qur'an is "bound to be little more than an approximation of the source language text" (Al-Malik, 1995, p. 3).

The eloquence and beauty of the Qur'an is incomparable that it is considered to be the ultimate reference for the Arabic rhetoric, grammar, and syntax (Ubaidat, 1990). It employs many stylistic, linguistic and rhetorical features that may impose even more challenges on the translators, especially when it comes to literary devices such as metaphor, irony, polysemy, metonymy, simile, synonymy and homonymy. Therefore, translators should not ignore such semantic features when attempting to translate the Qur'anic text.

In light of the difficulties mentioned above, it must be noted that translators of the Holy Qur'an need to have a linguistic competence in classical Arabic including syntax and rhetoric in order to understand the linguistic and rhetorical structures of the Qur'anic verses. They should also refer to Qur'an exegeses and both Arabic and English dictionaries in order to obtain the appropriate interpretation of the Qur'anic expressions and meaning of words.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

2.1 Synonymy in Arabic

Many early Arabic linguists studied the phenomenon of synonymy in the language and stated that it means succession (Al-Fairouzabady, 1978; Al-Faiyoumy, 1987; Al Shāya , 1993; Ibn Mandhūr, 1988). Sībawayh (1977) was probably the first linguistic scholar in Arabic to touch on the topic of semantic relationship between words. He stressed that the meaning of lexical units can be classified in terms of dissimilarity of form and meaning; dissimilarity of forms, but similarity of meaning; and similarity of form and dissimilarity of meaning. The second type which involves two separate words conveying the same meaning is a clear reference to

synonymy, and since then, numerous studies were conducted to investigate this linguistic phenomenon.

However, since synonymy was not clearly defined as it stands today, Arabic linguists fell in two opposing stands regarding its existence in language.

The advocates of synonyms in Arabic defined them as lexical items that denote one referent (Al-Rāzī, 1983; Al Suyūṭī, 1986; Az-Zubaidi, 1972). They attributed the occurrence of synonymy to different reasons.

Al-Zrkil î(1928) reported that Quṭrub, who was Sībawayh's student, said that Arabs tend to use two different words for the same referent in order to show how abundant and rich their language is, especially poetry, and synonymy is very useful for rhetorical purposes.

Moreover, some contemporary linguistic scholars stated that in order for two words to be synonymous, they should meet some conditions. Anis (1992, p. 178) listed these conditions as follows:

- The different words should convey the same semantic meaning.

- The different words should belong to the same linguistic environment i.e. the same dialect.

- The different words should belong to the same era i.e. during the same time period.

- One of the two words should not have come into existence as a result of a phonological evolution.

By applying these conditions, the possibility of the occurrence of synonymy is narrowed down, and the number of synonymous words in language would be very limited. (Bishr, 1997) adopted Ulman's definition of synonyms and stressed that they must be interchangeable in any context, and this makes them only near-synonyms as it is very hard for two words to be used in the same context or style without distinction.

Al-Askary(as cited in Al Shāya , 1993) dismissed the idea of absolute synonymy. He argued that dissimilar words necessitate dissimilar meanings. He further pointed out that since a word can give a certain meaning, there is no need to use another to refer to it. Al-Askary also stressed that using two or more words to express the same idea leads to redundancy.

Ibn-Durostawaih(as cited in Al Shāya , 1993) believed that it is impossible for two words to have exactly the same meaning in the same language as some linguists and grammarians claim. He argued that synonymy could only exist between lexical items of different languages, or within the same language to show similarity between two objects.

2.2 Synonymy in the Holy Qur'an

Some scholars believe that synonymy exists in the Holy Qur'an just like it does in the Arabic language (Al-Husseini, 1387 ; Al-Saleh, 1976; Ibn Al-Arabi, 1238; Ibn Al-Atheer, 1998). They even deny some interpreters' attempts to mention the slight differences between the words that are said to be synonymous in the Holy Qur'an. Among the proponents of synonymy in the Holy Qur'an is Ibn Al-Atheer (1998) who stressed that synonyms are

abundant and are used for eloquent purposes. He argued that the successive use of similar words is not at all redundant as some may claim, but has a significant role in stressing and exaggerating the intended message.

Al-Saleh (1976) finds it dangerous to deny the existence of synonyms in the Holy Qur'an which was descended and written in the tongue of Quraish tribe. This language came into contact with other dialects, and borrowed many words that already had counterparts in the original language. By time, these words became part of the language vocabulary and the slight differences that distinguished one dialect from another were almost forgotten. Therefore, when the Holy Qur'an was descended, it used original words of the Quraish language, in addition to the ones borrowed from other tribes.

Although the aforementioned scholars advocated the existence of synonymy in the Holy Qur'an, the majority strongly denied it saying that this book is of great level of eloquence in which each word was used for an intended purpose and cannot be replaced with another to give exactly the same meaning (Al Shāya, 1993, p. 177). They even supported their argument with pieces of evidence from Qur'anic verses where the distinction between similar words was made clear.

IbnTaymiyyah (1996 p. 169) stated that synonymy in the Holy Qur'an is either rare or non-existent, and it is not permissible to express one concept with one word that leads to all its meanings, and that is why some similar words are used successively in order to capture all the senses involved. In the same vein, Al Aṣfahānī (1999) has a similar view regarding the non-existence of synonymy in the Holy Qur'an. He stresses that different words entail different meanings, and the same meaning can be approached by using more than one word that are not exactly the same, but can help build a better understanding of the word.

Bint Al-Shaṭī (1971) explained that each word, and even each letter, has a particular function at the different levels of meaning or usage in a specific context. She added that the context determines the choice of words in the Qur'an, and substituting a word for another does not fulfill all the different aspects of meaning and uses of the original text.

2.3 Empirical Literature on Qur'an Translation

This section includes previous studies on the translation of synonyms in the Holy Qur'an and points out how this study is different by its aim and procedures.

The problematic issues in translating the Holy Qur'an have attracted the attention of linguists and translation theorists alike over the years.

Abdellah (2010) investigated the accuracy of translating near synonyms in the Qur'an based on a context-analysis model. He selected the words مطر *matar* and غيث *ghaith* (rain) in five translations of the Holy Qur'an, namely, Arberry (1964), Yusuf Ali (1954), Pickthall (1999), Ali. Ahmad (1984), and Shakir (1983). He analyzed the linguistic, cultural and emotional contexts of this pair of near-synonyms in Arabic, and how they were translated into English. The results revealed that these words are different in terms of the proposed model. However, the translations of Arberry, Ahmad Ali, and Shakir do not differentiate the effect of each

ofthe words and are considered inadequate in conveying the message. All occurrences of both words were translated as 'rain'. On the other hand, the other two translators seem to have realized the difference in meaning and thus, rendered the message differently in English; Yusuf Ali used 'rain' to mean غيث *ghaith* all the time and 'shower of…' to mean مطر *matar*, while Pickthall used 'rain' for both, and added clarifying adjectives to explain different types of water that comes from the sky. Therefore, the latter two's translations better convey the message expressed in the pair of near-synonyms مطر *matar* and غيث *ghaith*.

Similarly, Al-Sowaidi (2011) examined the problems that translators of the Holy Qur'an face while translating near-synonyms from Arabic into English with reference to two translations namely, Yusuf Ali and T.B. Irving. The study focused on four near-synonymous pairs namely, مطر*matar* and غيث*ghaith* (rain), *alhalf*الحلف and *alqasm*القسم (swearing), *bakhil* بخيل*and*شحيح*shahih*(stingy)and عاقر*aqer* and عقيم*aqeem*(sterile) in their context. These pairs were compared in the two selected translations to determine how the referential and the connotative meaning of the original Qur'anic text were reflected in the English translations, and to which extent they maintained the textuality standards such as cohesion, coherence, informativity, situationality and acceptability, intentionality and intertextuality. The study concluded that the selected translations failed to maintain the depth of the Qur'anic message as well as the connotative shades of meanings of the original expression.

In the same vein, Al-Omari and Abu-Melhim (2014) investigated the phenomenon of synonymy in both English and Arabic languages with special reference to the Holy Qur'an. The aim of the study was to compare and contrast the use of synonymy in both languages by highlighting different theories and opinions offered by scholars and linguists. They selected illustrative examples of synonymy that were extracted from the translation of the Holy Qur'an by Yusuf Ali in particular. The study revealed that absolute synonyms in the Holy Qur'an do not exist at all. What exist are simply words that appear to be synonymous at first glance but prove to be semantically different upon deeper analysis. Moreover, these words are used for various functions such as emphasis, substitution and clarification of the Qur'anic meaning.

Al Ghamdi (2015) investigated the accuracy and consistency of the English renderings of Divine Names in the Holy Qur'an, particularly near-synonymous root-sharing Names such as غفور/غفار*ghaddar/ghafour*, in five well-known English translations. These translations include: Pickthall (1930), A. Y. Ali (1936/1986), Arberry (1955), Hilali- Khan (1985) and Abdel-Haleem (2004). He analyzed hundreds of occurrences of the root-sharing Divine Names and evaluated them critically and comparatively. The results of the study revealed that all the five translations failed to distinguish between the near-synonymous Names, particularly the root-sharing ones, and proved unsuccessful in rendering them accurately and consistently. The study also demonstrated that the translation of Arberry was the best in terms of accuracy and consistency.

Hussein and Hameed (2017) analyzed synonyms in the Holy Qur'an to prove that there is no identical meaning between lexical items. They chose the Holy Qur'an in particular because it is considered the most reliable reference through which this phenomenon can be investigated. Their study touched mainly upon the salient synonymous pairs in the Sura of Al-Maaida and

the translation of Yusuf Ali to the glorious Qur'an was adopted. They classified the synonymous items into four levels namely: nominal, verbal, phrasal, and clausal and provided a table showing the frequencies of occurrences of these four levels and the number of the verses. The study concluded that synonyms may take various forms with the nominal being the most frequent, followed by the clausal, phrasal and finally verbal. The study also found that there are no identical synonyms in almost all languages, including Arabic.

2.4 Research Gap and Questions

Although the literature review on translating synonyms in the Holy Qur'an is rich, none of the previous studies touched on those occurring within the same verse which may be even more problematic than the ones occurring in different verses. This may be due to the fact the having two words of similar meaning within the same context entails that considerable attention be paid to the lexical choices when rendering them into another language. Using the same equivalent to refer to near-synonyms may not be a proper solution as it may sound redundant for non-Arab readers who are unaware of the Arabic language style. At the same time, deleting one of the words will give an incomplete meaning since each word in the Holy Qur'an was intended for a specific purpose.

Moreover, none of the studies conducted in this field referred to the Qur'anic corpus that provides different English translations and makes finding all occurrences of the same word in the Holy Qur'an very easy and time saving. Looking for the different occurrences is important because it gives an implication of the extent to which each translator could maintain consistency in rendering the same word when it occurred along another word of similar meaning and elsewhere. In some cases, varying the English lexical choices may be a tool to avoid repetition without taking the meaning of words into consideration.

Although some studies used the componential analysis as a means of differentiating the meaning of synonymous words, it was done only for the Arabic words. This study makes use of this analysis for the Arabic words as well as their English equivalents in order to match up the components of both and then come up with the best translation for each word in the near-synonymous pair/set.

The current study aims at answering the following questions:

1. How do the lexical choices of the translated near-synonyms (**سنة/عام** **'aam/ sanah**) into English differ among the selected translations of the Holy Qur'an?

2. What are the strategies that these translations adopt to render these near-synonyms into English?

3. Could the translators maintain consistency when they translated the words under investigation as part of the synonymous pair and elsewhere?

3. Methodology

In this study, the researchers selected one synonymous pair to thoroughly investigate (Table 1).

Table 1. The investigated synonymous words within the same verse

No.	Chapter & Verse	Synonymous Words	
1	Chapter (29) sūrat l- ankabūt (The Spider) "فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلاَّ خَمْسِينَ عَاماً" falabithafeehimalfasanatinillaakhamseena 'aaman	عام *'aam*	سنة *sanah*

This particular verse mentioned in Table 1 was opted for because the words **aam/** عام/سنة ، **sanah** was not studied deeply by previous studies. Furthermore, the researchers have considered the different translations, exegeses, and dictionaries of all verses with synonymous pairs and found that these are the most problematic among translators due to the great similarity in their meanings. Using the same equivalent to refer to each word in the near-synonymous pair stresses that they were perplexing and not easy to render. Therefore, considerable attention needs to be paid for the accuracy of their translation.

This study investigates only five translations of the ones listed above, namely Pickthall (1930), AY Ali (1982), Arberry (1996) Abdel Haleem (2004), and Al-Hilali and Khan (2018). These were mainly selected because they belong to different periods of times and show variation in the religious and cultural background of the translators. There are also other features that distinguish each of these translations and made the researchers choose them for this study.

Translation in general represents one's understanding of the source text. However, this cannot be the case when it comes to translating the Holy Qur'an as it is the word of Allah that includes the basis of the entire system of life. Therefore, translators must rely on the interpretations of the Qur'an in order to provide an accurate translation. There are many exegeses that can help in the right understanding of the various passages of the Qur'an. The accuracy of the selected translations in rendering near-synonymous words is basically reliant on some interpretations of the Qur'an. They are considered among the most widely read and highly esteemed exegeses by Muslims through ages.

Arabic language is rich with lexical items which exhibit features of similarity but cannot be used interchangeably in each and every context. Therefore, before translating such lexical items, one should be familiar with the slight differences between words in order to be able to render them accurately in the target language. In order to check whether or not the translators understood the differences between the near-synonymous words correctly, the first step was to consult Arabic dictionaries and books alongside the exegeses.

English-English online dictionaries were also consulted in the study in order to find the most appropriate equivalents to the investigated words. Those dictionaries included mainly Cambridge Dictionary (Note 1) and Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (Note 2). The researchers also referred to a website (Note 3) that offers definitions from many respected

reference resources such as the Random House College Dictionary, Princeton WordNet, Wiktionary, and Webster Dictionary.

The present study is qualitative in nature. It aims at finding to what extent the translated near-synonyms within the same verse are accurate in the verses under investigation. It uses a descriptive method that is based on the componential analysis which is considered a useful approach in the study of meaning. In this type of analysis, the word is believed to be built up of smaller components of meaning that form a complicated structure (Crystal, 1987, p. 104). In componential analysis , the meaning of a words is described through sets of semantic features, and the contrasts of those features are usually made in terms of binary rules with (+) or (-) showing the presence or absence of features respectively (Saeed, 2004, p. 260) . These semantic features are not of equal importance. One or some may be more or less important for the meaning of the word (Leech, 1980; Lyons, 1996).

The componential analysis helps in defining the lexical relations that hold between words, and distinguish the meaning of lexemes that belong to the same semantic domain (Palmer, 1981). Since the componential analysis is useful in the distinction of meaning of synonyms, it is applied on the words investigated in this study in addition to their English equivalents.

4. Data Analysis

The synonymous pair سنة/عام **'aam/ sanah** occurred in the same verse in Chapter (29) sūrat l-ankabūt (The Spider). The translators under investigation rendered them as follows.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا فَأَخَذَهُمُ الطُّوفَانُ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Transliteration:

WalaqadarsalnaaNoohanilaaqawmiheefalabithafeehimalfasanatinillaakhamseena 'aamanfaakhazahumuttoofaanuwa hum zaalimoon

Pickthall: And verily we sent Noah (as Our messenger) unto his folk, and he continued with them for **a thousand years save fifty years**; and the flood engulfed them, for they were wrong-doers.

Yusuf Ali: We (once) sent Noah to his people, and he tarried among them **a thousand years less fifty**: but the Deluge overwhelmed them while they (persisted in) sin.

Al-Hilali& Khan: And indeed We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, and he stayed among them **a thousand years less fifty years** [inviting them to believe in the Oneness of Allah (Monotheism), and discard the false gods and other deities], and the Deluge overtook them while they were Zalimun (wrong-doers, polytheists, disbelievers, etc.).

Arberry: Indeed, We sent Noah to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years, all but fifty; so the Flood seized them, while they were evildoers.

Abdel-Haleem: We sent Noah out to his people. He lived among them for **fifty years short of a thousand** but when the Flood overwhelmed them they were still doing evil.

The different translations of the near-synonyms are arranged in Table2.

Table 2. The translations of the words سنة/عام ʿaam/ sanah in the five translations

Chapter (29) sūrat l- ankabūt (The Spider)

فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا (14)

Word/Translator	سنة*sanah*	عام*ʾaam*
Pickthall	years	years
Yusuf Ali	years	Ø
Al-Hilali& Khan	years	years
Arberry	years	Ø
Abdel-Haleem	years	Ø

Table 2 shows that there is only one English word used as an equivalent to the near-synonyms سنة/عام **ʿaam/sanah**which is *year*. It also indicates that two different strategies were followed by the translators when they rendered them into English. Pickthall and Al-Hilali & Khan repeated *year* twice, adhering to the exact words of the original Qur'anic text. On the other hand, Yusuf Ali, Arberry and Abdel-Haleem used the word *year* one time only to refer to سنة**sanah**, and opted for a deletion strategy for the word عام*ʾaam.* Johnson (2001, p. 465) points out that the ellipsis site must be lexically and syntactically identical to its antecedent. Therefore, it is clear the Yusuf Ali, Arberry and Abdel-Haleem supposed that the words سنة/عام **ʿaam/ sanah**are identical in meaning and that is why they omitted the second. It must be noted here again that repeating words of similar meaning in the same sentence may not be welcomed in the English language. However, when it comes to the Arabic language, and specifically the Holy Qur'an, the case is different. The Holy Qur'an exhibits a unique beauty of the way words are put together, and words of similar meaning are not present in the verses without significance. This stresses that leaving one of the near-synonymous words out is also not the right strategy to follow as this will affect the intended message of the verse.

4.1 Accuracy of the English Equivalents of سنة/عام *ʿaam/ sanah*

After referring to some major Qur'anic exegeses (Al Qurṭubī, 1997; Al Ṭabarī, 2000; Ibn Kathīr, 2009), it is noted that none of them mentioned any clear difference between the words سنة/عام **ʿaam/ sanah** when they interpreted this verse. They all gave the same concept that Noah spent 950 years calling his people to worship Allah, but they did not believe in him.

They did not mention any direct reference to the significance of using two words of similar meaning within the same phrase. However, some other exegeses mentioned the difference between the near-synonyms as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences between سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah in two Qur'anic exegeses

Word	Al-Biqai'i (1984)	Al-Hanbali (1998)
سنة sanah	The word سنة*sanah* was used to refer in a negative manner to the days of disbelief	The word سنة*sanah* was used first followed by عام *'aam* so that they can flow more easily on the tongue since repeating the same word is heavy. سنة*sanah* referred to the period of time when Noah suffered a lot with his people and Arabs tend to use it to indicate a year of drought.
عام 'aam	عام referred to the days after the disbelievers were drowned and Noah's life got better with the abundance of earth	عام*aam* referred to the time after which Noah got rid of his people and enjoyed good times. Arabs tend to use it to indicate a year of abundance.

Although many commentators did not pay much attention to the difference between **سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah,** the Qur'anic terms dictionaries and Arab linguists did not leave this issue unsettled. We need to recall here, as discussed in Chapter 2, that many Qur'an scholars denied the existence of absolute synonymy in the Holy Qur'an, and they differentiated between the two terms in support to their belief. Table 4shows the definitions of **سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah**as given by some Arab linguists.

Table 4. Differences between سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah in Arabic and Qur'an Dictionaries

Word	Az-Zubaidi (1972)	Al Aṣfahānī (2009)	Al-Suhaili (2000)
سنة**sanah**	سنة**sanah** is longer than عام**in terms of durationand is used to refer to times of drought and famine.	سنة**sanah** is often used to refer to the year in which there is hardship or drought.	سنة**sanah** is longer than عام**in terms of durationand refers to the solar year. In Noah's story, the word سنة**sanah** was mentioned first in order to refer to the hardships that he faced when he was calling his people to Allah.

| عام | عامis shorter than سنةsanah in terms of duration and refers basically to the Islamic months. It describes times of ease and plenty. | عامrefers to a year in which there is ease and plenty. | عام refers to the lunar year and is shorter than the solar year. 50 lunar years are shorter than 50 solar years in one year and a half. It was used in this verse to refer to years of ease Noah had after the Flood drowned his people. |

Table 4 points out that the different uses of **سنة/عام** **'aam/ sanah** were not haphazard. The Holy Qur'an has a high degree of eloquence that makes it impossible for two words of similar meaning to be repeated in a single phrase unless that is done for a purpose. Many other occurrences of the two words in different Qur'anic contexts emphasize the idea discussed by the mentioned interpreters and Arab linguists. For example, in Chapter (12) sūratyūsuf (Joseph), both words occurred. When the context referred to the difficulty that people will go through during the seven years of drought in verse (47) "قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبًا", the word **سنة**sanah was mentioned. On the other hand, when the context referred to the year of abundant water and crops in verse (49) "ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ عَامٌ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ النَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يَعْصِرُونَ", the word **عام**was the one used**.** Another Qur'anic context that confirms that **سنة**sanah is associated with hard years is taken from Chapter (7) sūrat l-a rāf (The Heights) verse (130) "وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُون". Those times were described as the years of famine and deficiency in fruits and hence, **سنة**sanah was the more appropriate lexical choice. Additionally, many verses indicated the length of **سنة**sanah in their context. For example, in Chapter (46) sūrat l-aḥqāf (The Curved Sand-hills) in verse (15) "حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً" the word **سنة**sanah was used to refer to the idea of human beings reaching their full strength. Since it is longer than **عام,** it fits this context better. In the same vein, in Chapter (22) sūrat l-ḥaj (The Pilgrimage) verse (47) "وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ" and Chapter (70) sūrat l-ma ārij (The Ways of Ascent) verse (4) "فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ", the word **سنة**sanah occurred to exaggerate the length of the year.

Therefore, as the discussion above proves, any scholar or translator must do a deep and thorough investigation when dealing with the meanings of the words in the Holy Qur'an, especially when words of similar meaning occur in the same verse as they need much attention in order not to distort the full message behind the surface meaning. Looking in the prominent Qur'anic exegeses only is not always enough as was clear in the case of **سنة**sanah. Referring to Arabic books concerned with the studies of Qur'an in addition to the Arabic and Qur'anic dictionaries is indispensible with for a full understanding of the Qur'anic context.

Since the words **سنة/عام** **'aam/ sanah** demonstrated slight differences as the exegeses and dictionaries proved, they are analyzed into their semantic components for a clearer view of the variation in their use in different contexts. Table 5 shows the componential analysis of **سنة/عام** **'aam/sanah.**

Table 5. Componential analysis of سنة/عام ʿaam/ sanah

Investigated Lexical Items	The Semantic Components			
	Time Duration	Lunar year	Drought	Ease and Abundance
سنةsanah	+	-	+	-
عام	+	+	-	+

Table 5 shows that although the words سنة/عام **ʿaam/ sanah** to indicate a relatively long period of time, they differ in other aspects that can be crucial when used in the wrong context. It is well known that the lunar year is shorter than the solar year, and therefore, using the two words to refer exactly to the same period of time may not be accurate in many cases. Additionally, taking the connotation of each word into consideration, the Table shows that **سنةsanah** has a negative connotation as it indicates a year of hardships and deficiency of rain whereas **عام***'aam* has a positive connotation as it refers to years of abundance and ease. One may argue here that in our language, such differences are not acknowledged by most of the people and they just tend to use both words interchangeably. This is completely right and acceptable in everyday use of language and even in the books of Arabic. However, the case becomes complicated when we deal with sacred books like the Holy Qur'an where choosing the right word is highly sensitive to the overall meaning of the verse.

Looking back at the English equivalent given by the five translators, they all agreed on one word which is *year*. It is not surprising at all that there was no variation in their use as the English language does not have another term to refer to this period of time. In order to check the accuracy of the English equivalent of both Arabic words under study, the semantic components of سنة/عام **ʿaam/ sanah** are applied on the word *year* and are marked by +/- based on the definitions given in different online English-English dictionaries (Oxford (Note 4), Cambridge (Note 5), definitions.net (Note 6)).

Table 6.Applying the componential analysis of سنة/عام ʿaam/ sanah on the English equivalent in the selected translations

Investigated Lexical Items	The Semantic Components			
	Time Duration	Lunar year	Drought	Ease and Abundance
year	+	-	-/+	-/+

Table 6 makes it clear that the word *year* is much closer to the Arabic سنةsanah as it refers to a solar year that contains 365 or 366 days. English language has what matches to the Arabic

عام*'aam* but it is not simply the word **year**. It is an expression that contains the word **lunar** and **year** and has a separate entry in the dictionary. Therefore, using **year** by its own will definitely draw the English speakers minds to the solar year as it is their calendar year. Since **year** is the only used term to refer to this period of time, there are no positive or negative connotations associated with it, and is used neutrally all the time unlike the Arabic equivalents.

The discussion above stresses again the fact that some Qur'anic terms are untranslatable, and finding an accurate equivalent in the target language is not possible because of the differences in the lexical items available in each language. This confirms that the Holy Qur'an has distinctive aspects that cannot be delivered in other languages and it impresses the readers with the deep and expressive terms that were used for a certain purposes.

4.2 Consistency of the English Equivalents of سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah Within the Same Verse and Elsewhere

All occurrences of the near-synonyms سنة/عام **'aam/ sanah** are arranged in tables with their renderings in the five translations under investigation. The variation in this case is not highly expected as there is no equivalent to both Arabic words in the English Language other than **year**. However, the influence of context may have played a role in choosing a different lexical unit in very few cases. Table 7 shows all occurrences of سنة **sanah.**

Table 7. All occurrences of سنةsanah in the Holy Qur'an with their translations (see appendix)

سنةsanah								
Chapter	Verse	order	Word	Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Al-Hilali& Khan	Arberry	Abdel-Haleem
2	96	14	sanatin	years	years	years	years	years
5	26	6	sanatan	years	years	years	years	years
7	130	5	bil-sinīna	Ø	years	years	years	years
10	5	12	l-sinīna	years	years	years	years	years
12	42	18	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years
12	47	4	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years
17	12	18	l-sinīna	years	years	years	years	years
18	11	6	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years

							(solar)		
18	25	6	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years	years
20	40	26	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years	
22	47	12	sanatin	years	years	years	years	years	
23	112	7	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years	
26	18	10	sinīna	many years	many years	many years	years	many years	
26	205	4	sinīna	(long) years	a few years	years	many years	some years	
29	14	9	sanatin	years	years	years	years	years	
30	4	3	sinīna	years	years	years	years	years	
32	5	15	sanatin	years	years	years	years	years	
46	15	20	sanatan	years	years	years	years	Ø	
70	4	11	sanatin	years	years	years	years	years	

Table 7 shows that the only word used to translate the different occurrences of سنة **sanah** is *year(s)*. In the cases that the translators differed in their renderings, the distinction was attributed to the strategy they followed, not to varying their lexical choice. For example, in Chapter (7) sūrat l-a rāf (The Heights) verse (130) "وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ", all the translators had similar renderings that included the word *years* except for Pickthall who chose not to refer to any time expression. Below are the different translations of the verse by the five translators:

Pickthall: And we straitened Pharaoh's folk **with famine** and dearth of fruits

Yusuf Ali: We punished the people of Pharaoh **with years (of droughts)** and shortness of crops

Al-Hilali& Khan: And indeed We punished the people of Fir'aun (Pharaoh) **with years of drought** and shortness of fruits (crops, etc.)

Arberry: Then seized We Pharaoh's people **with years of dearth**, and scarcity of fruits

Abdel-Haleem: We inflicted **years of drought** and crop failure on Pharaoh's people

Although all the translators delivered the intended message behind the verse, and they did not differ significantly from each other, it is clear that part of the meaning given by Pickthall is not complete. After referring to some Qur'anic exegeses (Al-Baghawī, 1989; Al Ṭabarī, 2000; Ibn Kathīr, 2009), the verse meant that Pharaoh's people were punished with famine and drought year after year. Therefore, not including the word *year* may give an indication that the duration of punishment was not so long.

Another verse that is worth discussing here is (25) in Chapter (18) sūrat l-kahf (The Cave) " وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ وَازْدَادُوا تِسْعاً". When the translators rendered the word **سنة sanah** into English, they used *years* only except for Al-Hilali and Khan. They used additional descriptions to make a clear distinction between the one hundred years and the added nine years as follows:

Al-Hilali & Khan: And they stayed in their Cave three hundred (solar) years, and add nine (for lunar years).

Having another look at the differences between **سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah** that were discussed in Table (5), **سنةsanah** refers to the solar year while **عام** refers to the lunar year. And by referring back to the concept of ellipsis, the omitted item should be lexically identical to its antecedent. Therefore, the added nine were meant as **سنةsanah** and not **عام***'aam.* But it seems that Al-Hilali& Khan based their assumption on IbnKatheer's interpretation of the Qur'an in which he stated that each 100 lunar years equal 103 solar years. And hence, the total in lunar years is 309. Nevertheless, considering what Arab linguists said about the difference between **سنة/عام 'aam/ sanah ,** it seems more appropriate to assume that what was meant here is the solar year based on the presence of the word **سنةsanah.**

In Chapter (26) sūrat l-shuarā (The Poets), the word **سنة sanah** occurred in two verses: verse (18) "أَفَرَأَيْتَ إِن مَّتَّعْنَاهُمْ سِنِينَ" (205) and "قَالَ أَلَمْ نُرَبِّكَ فِينَا وَلِيدًا وَلَبِثْتَ فِينَا مِنْ عُمُرِكَ سِنِينَ". Although the original Qur'anic text in both verses did not mention any quantifiers before **سنة sanah**, four translators out of five in each verse opted to use one. In verse (18), Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Al-Hilali& Khan, and Abdel-Haleem agreed on using *many*, whereas Arberry used the word **سنة sanah** solely without quantifiers. In his interpretation of this verse, Al-Baghawi (1989) mentioned that the number of years Moses spent with Pharaoh was 30 years. This justifies the reason why the translators preferred to use *many* since the period indicated by the meaning of the verse is long. In the English language, saying "for years" may not have the same effect as "for many years" as one may assume that the former is less in time than the latter. Arberry, on the other hand, cannot be blamed for not using *many* as the others did, as his aim may have been to adhere to the original text, especially when we take into consideration what Arabs said about the length of the word **سنةsanah**. In verse (205) of the same chapter, the case is different though. Again, no descriptive word was mentioned in the original text but four translators used one except for Al-Hilali & Khan. This time, none agreed with the other on the used word. Pickthall used an adjective *long*, Yusuf Ali used *a few*, Arberry used *many*, and Abdel-Haleem used *some*. In other words, Pickthall and Arberry indicated longer period of time than Yusuf Ali and Abdel-Haleem. By referring to Qur'anic exegeses (Al-Baghawī,

1989; Al-Saidi, 2000 ; Ibn Kathīr, 2009), the verse was meant to refer to a long period of time, and hence, Pickthall and Arberry were more successful in delivering the meaning.

In Chapter (46) sūrat l-aḥqāf (The Curved Sand-hills) verse (15) "حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً ", all the translators used the word **years** in their rendering of the verse except for Abdel-Haleem. He translated the verse as "When he has grown to manhood and reached the age of forty". This is an acceptable structure in the English and Arabic languages in general, but when dealing with the Holy Qur'an, and as discussed earlier, the word سنة**sanah** was used here to refer to the length of period that man needs to reach his maturity and full strength.

The next table includes all occurrences of the word عام **'aam**in the Holy Qur'an, with their renderings in the five translations.

Table 8. All occurrences of عام 'aam in the Holy Qur'an with their translations (see appendix)

عام 'aam								
Chapter	Verse	order	Word	Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Al-Hilali& Khan	Arberry	Abdel-Haleem
2	259	20	āmin	years	years	years	years	years
2	259	36	āmin	years	years	years	years	years
9	28	12	āmihim	year	year	year	year	year
9	37	11	āman	year	year	year	year	year
9	37	13	āman	year	year	year	Ø	Ø
9	126	7	āmin	year	year	year	year	year
12	49	6	āmun	year	year	year	year	year
29	14	12	āman	years	Ø	years	Ø	Ø
31	14	11	āmayni	years	years	years	years	years

Table 8 shows that the word عام' **aam** was less frequent than سنة**sanah** in the Holy Qur'an with only 9 occurrences in total. It also proves, just like the previous table, that there is no variation in the lexical choice as the word **year** is the only English equivalent to both سنة**sanah** andعام**.** There were two incidents only when the translators used different strategies in rendering the word عام **'aam** into English. The first was already discussed above when the near-synonym of عام **'aam** being سنة**sanah** occurred in the same verse in Chapter (29) sūrat l-

ankabūt (The Spider) verse (14). The other incident was in Chapter (9) sūrat l-tawbah (The Repentance) verse (37) "يُحِلُّونَهُ عَامًا وَيُحَرِّمُونَهُ عَامًا". As Table (?) demonstrates, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and Al-Hilali & Khan used the word year twice in their translation as follows:

Pickthall: they allow it one **year** and forbid it (another) **year**

Yusuf Ali: they make it lawful one **year**, and forbidden another **year**

Al-Hilali& Khan: they make it lawful one **year** and forbid it another **year**

Arberry: one **year** they make it profane, and hallow it another

Abdel-Haleem: they will allow it one **year** and forbid it in another

In this particular verse, عام **'aam** was repeated twice with only one word separating them. Looking at the translations above, it seems that Arberry and Abdel-Haleem rendered the verse in a way that matches the English style and allowed smoothness of the text flow. However, repeating the word in Arabic, and especially in the Qur'anic text, gives it music and emphasis of meaning. Recalling that the words in the Holy Qur'an are intended for a specific purpose, it was more appropriate to keep both occurrences in the translation. It is no doubt that the translated text should sound like an original text and follow the style of the target language, but this cannot be the case when it comes to religious books.

5. Conclusion

Muslims all over the world speak different languages and this means that the only way for them to study and understand the Qur'anic Arabic meanings and messages is through translation. Muslim scholars stress that any translation of the Holy Qur'an cannot be more than an approximate interpretation of the original text. At the same time, it must be accurate as it is the only way on which non-Arabic speakers rely to access the Qur'anic knowledge. Many Muslim and non-Muslim translators attempted to do this job, but unfortunately, some of the translations made are very poor; others show sectarian biases against Islam and intend to distort the spirituality of the Holy Qur'an, and some others insert political annotation (Mohammed, 2005).

This paper provided the necessary background for synonymy in Arabic. The researchers elaborated on the problems of translating the Holy Quran. Synonymy in Arabic in general, and in the Holy Quran in particular was also discussed in this paper. This study focuses mainly on rendering the meanings of near-synonyms in the English translations of the Holy Qur'an. This study concludes that many translators fail to capture the shades of overlapping denotations or connotations of the synonymous words, and a deep understanding of the verse context is needed to differentiate their meanings.

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Notes

Note 1. https://dictionary.cambridge.org

Note 2. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com

Note 3.https://www.definitions.net

Note4.https://www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com

Note5.https://dictionary.cambridge.org

Note6.https://www.definitions.net

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