

The Functions of 'or' and 'aw': Implications for Translation

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Received: July 12, 2014 Accepted: July 25, 2014 Published: October 24, 2014

doi:10.5296/ijl.v6i5.5961 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v6i5.5961>

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to identify and compare the salient functions that the English conjunction *or* and the Arabic conjunction *ʾaw*¹ may perform. It also attempts to pinpoint the implications of this comparison for the translating process. In addition, it investigates the meanings of 'aw' in the Glorious Qur'an and the ways it is rendered in four English translations of the Qur'an with the aim of shedding light on some of the difficulties and translation problems encountered in this regard. It was shown that both *or* and 'aw' have multiple functions. In addition, it is found that *or* (*nor* in negative structures) is not the only possible English translation equivalent of 'aw'. There are potential various non-synonymous translation equivalents of 'aw' in English. These include *or*, *and*, *but*, *unless/except/but not when*, *until*, and *either...or*. They represent the different meanings that 'aw' has, namely alternative, uncertainty, deliberate ambiguity, division, absolute addition, exception, continuance of an action to a specified time, and nexus² question.

Keywords: *or*, 'aw', Conjunction, Functions, Translation equivalent

1. Arabic text is transliterated via 'Arabic Converter – Romanization' available at http://mylanguages.org/arabic_romanization.php.

2. A term used to describe the kind of relationship that exists between an element and its predicate, such as 'subject of' or 'object of' (as in *the dog barks*); it is distinguished from a junction, which is a relationship between a primary word and an adjunct (e.g. *the barking dog*). It is also used in role and reference grammar to describe that part of grammar that deals with syntactic relationships obtaining between sub-clausal units. It is seen in association with a theory of juncture. (Crystal, 2008:353)

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim and Significance of the Study

Many studies have tackled the class of English conjunctions - also called 'conjunctive element' (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 226); 'linking adverbial' (Biber et al., 2002: 237), 'connective' (Salkie, 1995: 75; Carter et al., 1997: 222); 'discourse marker' (Cruse, 2006: 51); and 'discourse connective' (Saeed and Fareh, 2006:19). Nevertheless, few of them dealt with the issue of conjunctions cross-linguistically. As far as English and Arabic are concerned, few studies have handled the similarities and differences between English conjunctions such as *and*, *so*, etc. and their Arabic correspondents. Studies investigating similarities and differences between the English conjunction *or* and the Arabic conjunction *أو* 'aw' are sparse.

This study may fill a gap in this somehow neglected area of linguistic investigation. It is an attempt to compare and contrast the various functions that *or* and 'aw' may signal in English and Arabic, respectively. More specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the functions that *or* and 'aw' may signal?
2. What are the implications of this comparison for the translation process?
3. To what extent is 'aw' accurately and appropriately rendered in English translations of the Glorious Qur'an?

1.2 Data Collection and Methodology

In data collection and corpus analysis, the following steps are followed:

- 1) Occurrences of 'aw' in the Qur'an are identified using the "FREE Noble Quran Search Software" available at <http://www.quransearch.com>.
- 2) Various exegeses of the Glorious Qur'an are consulted to determine the functions of 'aw' in each verse.
- 3) The translations of selected examples are reviewed.

The "FREE Noble Quran Search Software" has been chosen for three reasons. Firstly, a vast number of translations of the Holy Qur'an are available therein. Secondly, searching via such software is very fast. Thirdly, it affords the so-called "Exact String" Search Type of the Qur'anic text with which the result of searching is a list of all the verses in which 'aw' occurs with the numbers of chapter and verse placed before them which makes it easy to hone in a particular verse being analyzed.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conjunctions in English

According to Trask (1993), Salkie (1995), Carter et al. (1997), Kreidler (1998), Goddard (2003), and Fabb (2005), the term 'conjunction' refers to words or phrases used to join two

parts of discourse, either sentences, clauses or paragraphs together. It is also used to refer to ‘an item or a process whose primary function is to connect words or other constructions’ (Crystal, 2008: 101). It is used in the grammatical classification of words: conjunctions – along with prepositions, pronouns, articles, etc. – belong to the category of function words, and have ‘a predominantly grammatical role’ (Katamba, 1994: 9).

Crystal (2008), points out that in logic and formal semantics, the term conjunction is often limited in application to the word *and* and its equivalents in other languages. In this sense, it is opposed to ‘disjunction’ which refers to ‘the process or result of relating two propositions in such a way that they are in an ‘either-or’ relationship, e.g. (*Either*) *Mary is late or John is early*’ (Crystal, 200: 150).

Halliday and Hassan (1976), Baker (1992), Carter et al. (1997) indicate that conjunctions are common cohesive devices, i.e. formal ties that bind one sentence to another. They – along with reference, ellipsis, and substitution – belong to the class of grammatical cohesion i.e. ‘the way that grammatical features are woven together across sentences’ (Carter et al., 1997:126). Yet, it has been noted that the cohesive effect of conjunctions is different from that of reference, ellipsis and substitution. Conjunction signals the way the writer wants the reader to relate what is about to be said to what has been said before without having to supply missing information either by looking for it elsewhere in the text or by filling structural slots. For example, the word *but* tells the reader that what is to follow will revise, limit or re-focus the first part of the sentence.

Carter et al. (1997:142-44) point out that ‘different types of writing tend to use different types of connecting words adding that this is often very much related to the purpose of the piece of writing. For example, conjunctions such as *first, then, after that, in the end* are likely to appear in a story on the ground that a story may well concentrate on the way one event followed another in time. On the other hand, phrases such as ‘*on the other hand*’ may be more relevant in an information text interested in showing how an idea or theme is made up of different interrelating elements.

Siepmann (2005) tackles conjunctions (e.g. *and, but, or, because, etc.*) under the heading of ‘discourse markers’ i.e. words or phrases which help to signal the direction in which language, particularly in a conversation, is going. Similarly, Saeed and Fareh (2006), state that discourse connectives – their term for conjunctions - are common cohesive devices that language users employ to mark logical relations between sentences, or any other discourse units joined together by a connective. They argue that connectives can explicitly indicate the function that each sentence has in a text and, therefore, constitute a major linguistic device available for a writer to indicate explicitly the structure of a discourse.

As Halliday and Hasan (1976), point out, though conjunction is identified as a grammatical device of cohesion, yet, it also has a lexical component. They add that cohesion, be it grammatical or lexical, has to do with meaning. It is a semantic relation realized through the lexicogrammatical system of language. They assert that with conjunctions, however, the semantic relations are a specification of the way in which what follows is systematically connected to what has gone before. That is to say, conjunctive relations are not related to any

specific sequence. For example, if two sentences are joined together by means of a conjunction, they are not necessarily restricted to one order.

Conjunctions are also said (e.g. Austin, 1965; Grice, 1975; Carter and Simpson, 1989; and Cutting, 2002), to be illocutionary force indicating devices. That is, they help indicate the force of utterances. For example, *therefore* may indicate the force of 'I conclude that', *although*; the force of 'I concede that', and *still*; the force of 'I insist that'.

Grice (1975), Carter and Simpson (1989) and Cutting (2002), argue that connectives do not contribute to the truth conditions of the expressions they occur in, but can be analyzed as carrying conventional implicature and encoding information about the type of speech act the speaker intends to perform. Accordingly, the meaning that connectives such as *and*, *or*, *if* . . . *then* seem to have in natural languages can be explained in terms implicature, not of word meaning. For instance, the use of *but* in *He arrived on Thursday, but left on Sunday* conventionally implicates that there is some kind of contrast between the two conjuncts. This contrast cannot be adequately recovered by reference to truth conditions alone.

There have been many attempts for setting up a classification of conjunctions in English. According to Kress (1994), Hughes (1996), and Crystal (2008), from a grammatical point of view, conjunctions take two forms:

- (1) The form of co-ordination (e.g. *I went to the shops and I saw a King and Queen*). Here, connective items exemplified in *and*, *or*, and *but* are known as co-ordinating conjunctions or co-ordinators, and the structures they produce consist of units of equal syntactic status;
or
- (2) The form of subordination (e.g. *When I went to the shops, I saw a King and Queen*, or, *I went to the shops to see a King and Queen*). Here, connective items exemplified in *because*, *when*, and *unless* are known as subordinating conjunctions or subordinators, and the structures they produce consist of units of unequal syntactic status.

Semantically speaking, conjunctions in English are classified under several types of relations as follows:

- 1- Additives/alternatives (add/give an alternative). They show that the two clauses or sentences complete each other. Examples include *and*, *or*, *furthermore*, *also*, *in addition*, *likewise*, *in other words*, and *that is*.
- 2- Adversative or opposition connectives (contradict/concede). They express the contrary of what is being said. Examples include *but*, *yet*, *though*, *however*, and *on the contrary*.
- 3- Causal or cause connectives (one idea causes another). Examples are *so*, *then*, *for this reason*, *consequently*, *it follows that*, *as a result*, *therefore*, and *because*.
- 4- Temporal or time connectives. The temporal relation relates the clauses or sentences in time and bears a sequential sense by means of conjunctions such as *next*, *then*, and *after that*.
- 5- Continuatives (please continue to follow the text). Examples include *well*, *now*, *of course*, *surely*, and *after all*.

It has been noted (e.g. Baker, 1992; and Farah, 1998), that the same conjunction might

encode several meanings or convey more than one conjunctive relation depending on the context. For example, *and* can convey an additive relation as, for example, in *I met Tom and John*. It may also convey an adversative relation, that is, it expresses a contrast with what has been said before as, for example, in *John is an extrovert and Mary is an introvert*. In addition, it could convey a temporal relation as, for instance, in *I called her and we went together*. Moreover, the same conjunctive relation can be expressed using different conjunctions. For example, causal relations can be expressed using conjunctions such as *because* and *so*. This multiplicity of meaning constitutes one of the problems of studying the functions of conjunctions in natural language.

2.2 Conjunctions in Arabic

From a semantic point of view, Arabic conjunctions have functions similar to that of English conjunctions. According to Chaalal (2010), these functions include the following:

(1) **Additives.** The most common Arabic devices that are used mainly to express additive relations between parts of texts are ‘*w*’ (roughly, and), ‘*f*’ (roughly, and/then)

(2) **Adversatives.** Adversative conjunctions such as ‘*bl*’ and ‘*lkanna*’ express both an additive relation, by linking two opposite units of meaning together, and an adversative one by reflecting contrastive relations. For example, in ‘*lm azr lndn fy nysan 1995 bl zrtha fy ayar 2010*’ (I did not visit London in April 1995 but in May 2010), ‘*bl*’ bears both the additive meaning of *and*, and the adversative meaning of *however*.

(3) **Causal.** Conjunctions such as ‘*flabd an*’ (roughly, it is a must that/therefore) reflect a causal relation. In addition, other kinds of causal conjunctions include ‘*mma*’ (roughly, for this reason).

(4) **Temporal.** Conjunctions such as ‘*hynma*’ (roughly, when) and ‘*thm*’ (roughly, then) ensure a temporal relation between the two events stated in the sentence. For example, ‘*thm*’ (roughly, then) reflects a sequence of events in ‘*ebrna altryq thm wslna ela kwkh sghyr*’ (roughly, We crossed the road. Then, we got to a small cottage).

By analyzing different types of Arabic conjunctions and identifying their similarity to the English ones, Chaalal (2010:31), reached the conclusion that ‘Arabic is highly cohesive within sentence boundaries and across it’.

Like English conjunctions, Arabic conjunctions are said to have multiple functions. For example, the Arabic connective ‘*w*’ has about six functions, namely, the resumptive, the additive, the alternative, the comitative, the adversative and the circumstantial. Likewise, the Arabic conjunction ‘*f*’ can be used to signal concessive (adversative), illustrative and sequential functions.

2.3 Conjunctions in Translation

According to Baker (1992) and Holes (1995), languages differ widely in the type of conjunction they prefer to use and the frequency with which such items are used. There are noticeable differences between English and Arabic in this concern. English favors the use of small chunks in order to present information in unambiguous ways, and, hence, prefers subordination. In contrast, Arabic favours grouping information into very large grammatical

chunks, and, therefore, has a tendency for coordination. Moreover, Arabic tends to use a relatively small number of conjunctions each of which has a wide range of meanings that are interpreted with reference to the context in which they are used. Thus, the readers have a crucial role in inferring relationships that are only vaguely alluded to by the writer.

Accordingly, as Baker (1992) and Fareh (1998), point out, multiplicity in meaning and high frequency of occurrence associated with conjunctions impose many difficulties when translating them from one language to another. Baker (1992) argues that when a translator is faced with an array of explicit conjunctions in the source text, s/he has two alternatives: producing a smooth text with typical but semantically less precise conjunctions, or giving priority to meaning and, therefore, opting for an equally varied array of conjunctions with precise meanings. What happens in practice is often something in between these two extremes. Most translators will try to do a bit of both.

Saeed and Fareh (2006) and Chaalal (2010), have noted that problems encountered when translating conjunctions are mainly related to the misuse, overuse or underuse of conjunctions that may decrease the comprehensibility of texts, and might lead to a potential communicative breakdown. They argue that difficulties often encountered by translators during the process of translating conjunctions may be attributed to a number of factors including:

1) The lack of one-to-one correspondence between conjunctions in different languages especially when languages are genetically unrelated, as is the case with Arabic and English. A conjunction in a source language might be translated into other grammatical devices in the target language e.g. adverbial conjuncts (*however, consequently*, etc.), a non-lexical device such as punctuation marks, or even zero (i.e. left untranslated).

2) The multiplicity of functions that most conjunctions have. A conjunction might indicate more than one logical relationship and, at the same time, more than one conjunction might be used to indicate these relationships. For example, *and* and its nearest Arabic equivalent 'w' have various functions that do not often match.

Saeed and Fareh (2006:20), argue that the improper translation of a connective into a target language is likely to lead to drastic changes in meaning or to unintended meanings. Hence, they assert that translators need to use connectives with utmost care taking into account the various functions that connectives have in *discourse*. *They also maintain that the accuracy of the translated text should be evaluated in comparison to the source text.*

Likewise, Fadlullah (2009), asserts that the difference between English and Arabic as far as connectives are concerned has a negative effect on translation. For example, addition is signaled in Arabic by the connective 'w' (and) placed before each of the connected items (words, phrases, etc.) as, for example, in '*alnyl w djlh w alfrat*' (The Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates); by 'w' accompanied with the comma as, for example, in '*yslwn kma nsly, w yswmwn kma nswm*' (They pray the way we pray and fast the way we fast); or by the comma alone, as, for example, in counting '*wahd, athnan, thlathh*' (one, two, three).

By contrast, in English the comma is used to separate the connected items and *and* is used

before the final item only as, for instance, in *Red, pink, yellow and white are my favorite colors*. Fadlullah (2009), proceeds to note that problems encountered in translation as a result of this difference between English and Arabic include dropping ‘w’ in Arabic translations of English texts, and repeating *and* in English translations of Arabic texts. Apart from distorting the structure of the Target Language Text, this leads to a stylistically odd, crude text.

Chaalal (2010), investigates the various functions of the Arabic conjunction ‘*f*’ and concludes that ‘*f*’ has various potential translation equivalents in English depending on the logical relations it entails and that while translating, we should take into account the semantic precision of conjunctions.

3. Discussion

3.1 Functions of Or

According to Huddleston (1988), Carstairs-McCarthy (1992), Hughes (1996), Syal and Jindal (2002), Yule (2010), *or* belongs to the ‘closed class’ of conjunctions- words that are used to ‘make connections and indicate relationships between events’ (Yule, 2010: 83). It is one of the main English coordinators used to join units at all levels in the constituent hierarchy – clauses, phrases and words. Fabb (2005:76) describes it as a coordinating conjunction that joins two constituents of the same kind and makes the same kind and level of constituent from them as, for example, in *To be, or not to be. That is the question*. However, unlike coordinators such as *both, either, neither*, etc., it can occur as ‘the sole marker of a coordinative construction’ (Huddleston 1988: 33).

Semantically speaking, *or* has the following functions:

- 1) Indicating possibilities or choices. In a list, *or* is usually used only before the last possibility or choice (e.g. *Which colour do you want – red, green, yellow, or blue?*)
- 2) Including someone or something else in a negative statement (e.g. *She’s had nothing to eat or drink all day*).
- 3) Showing that the speaker does not know what the exact number is (e.g. *I can photocopy your notes. It’ll only take a minute or two.*)
- 4) Saying what will happen if someone does not do something (e.g. *The soldiers told everyone to leave or they would be shot.*)
- 5) Introducing a comment that corrects or adds more information to what has just been said (e.g. *There are six cashpoints, or ATMs, in the main airport terminal.*)
- 6) Showing that something must be true, by saying that the situation would be different if it was not true (e.g. *He obviously doesn’t have a plan, or he would have said something.* (Macmillan Dictionary))

In Halliday and Hasan’s 1976 model, *or* is an ‘additive’ conjunction the basic meaning of which is alternative. It may express either the external or the internal type of conjunctive relation. In its external sense- the offering of a range of objective alternatives- *or* together

with its expansion *or else* is largely confined to questions, requests, permissions and predictions as, for example, in *Shall we try another figure of the Lobster Quadrille?, the Gryphon went on. Or would you like the Mock Turtle to sing you a song?* In the internal sense, *or* means ‘alternative interpretation’, ‘another possible opinion’, ‘explanation’, ‘in place of the one just given’, etc. Here, *or* is associated with statements as, for example, in *Perhaps she missed her train. Or else she has changed her mind and is not coming.*

Kreidler (1998), describes *or* as a question marker. For example, *Would you like coffee or tea?* and *Is your son in the Army or the Navy?* have inverted word order but they cannot be answered simply with a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. Therefore, here ‘the marker is the word *or*’ (Kreidler, 1998: 179). The questioner gives the addressee two or more alternatives and asks for a choice.

Similarly, Jespersen (2006), argues that the coordinating conjunction *or* turns a nexus-question to which the answer is simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’ into a disjunctive or alternative question to which the answer is one of the two alternatives (or else ‘neither’) as is the case in *Is it black or white?*

Cruse (2006:86), makes a distinction between the ‘inclusive’ and the ‘exclusive’ interpretations of *or*. The inclusive is exemplified in *The successful candidate will be a graduate or someone with managerial experience* which suggests that someone who qualifies on both counts will not be excluded. The exclusive interpretation is illustrated by *Was the door open or shut?*

3.2 Functions of 'aw' (roughly, or):

According to Arab grammarians and rhetoricians such as Ibn Hisham (n.d.), Al-Suyoutiyy (n.d.), Al-Sakkaki (n.d.), Salman (2003), and Abdullah (2005), 'aw' is a conjunction which has various functions. The most common functions of 'aw' are discussed in the following subsections

3.2.1 In Declarative Sentences

1. Uncertainty

'aw' is used in declarative sentences to denote uncertainty. Examples include *'lbthna ywma aw b'ed ywm'* (We stayed a day or part of a day).

2. Deliberate ambiguity

'aw' is also used when the speaker is sure of something but wants to make it ambiguous for the listener: 'و تأتي هنا إذا كان المتكلم عالماً بالأمر و لكن أراد أن يبهم على السامع' (Salman 2003: 66). An example is *'ja' zyd aw 'emrw'* (Zaid or Amr came.) in which it is possible that the speaker does not want to reveal the identity of the person who came. The same structure could also be used to mean that the speaker is uncertain about whether Zaid or Amr came. The context normally determines which meaning is intended.

3. Addition

'aw' is also used in the same sense of 'w' (roughly, and) used for addition as, for example, in '*ja' alkhlahf aw kant lh qdra*' (He got the caliphate and it was preordained for him.) In this context, 'aw' is used in the sense of additive 'w'.

4. Correction of a Preceding Clause

'aw' is used for correcting a previous assumption. Some linguists (e.g. Sibawayh, as cited in Ibn Hisham, n.d.) said that 'aw' has this meaning only if the clause comprises a negation or prohibition and that the factor (negation or prohibition marker) is reiterated. This is exemplified in '*ma qam zyd aw ma qam 'emrw*' (Zaid didn't depart, but Amr didn't depart.) and '*la yqm zyd aw la yqm 'emrw*' (Zaid is not to depart, but Amr is not to depart.) Here, 'aw' is used in the same sense of 'bl' that is usually used as a correction marker, i.e. it guides the hearer to see that the proposition expressed in the 'bl'-clause is relevant as a correction and replacement of an assumption communicated in the previous clause.

5. Division

According to Arab grammarians, 'aw' is used to express the so-called '*altqsym*' (roughly, division). An example is '*alklmh: ism aw f'el aw hrf*' (A word is a noun, a verb, or a particle.) Notably, 'aw' here has an exclusive meaning, i.e. a word is only one of the three alternatives in the list. It cannot be all three of them simultaneously. Moreover, the alternatives are exhaustive, or, in other words, the division is strictly limited between the three options i.e. nothing can be added to the list.

6. Exception

Like '*ella*' (roughly, except), 'aw' is used for expressing exception as, for instance, in '*laqtih aw yslm*' (I will kill him unless/ except/ but not when he surrenders).

7. Continuance (of an action or condition) to a specified time

'aw' is also said to be used in the same sense of '*ela*' (roughly, to/until) i.e. to indicate continuance (of an action or condition) to a specified time e.g. '*lastshln als'eb aw adrk almna*' (I'll overcome difficulties until I attain my ambition.)

3.2. In Imperative Sentences

8. Indicating Alternatives

According to Ibn Hisham (n.d.), Al-Suyoutiyy (n.d.), Al-Sakkaki (n.d.) and Abdullah (2005), 'aw' in imperative structures indicates an alternative. A distinction is maintained here between two kinds of alternative: '*alkhyr*' (exclusive alternatives) and '*alebahh*' (inclusive alternatives). In the case of the former, the addressee is permitted to take just one of the alternatives denoted by the items connected by 'aw', whereas in the case of the latter, s/he is permitted to take all of them.

3.2.3 In Interrogative Structures

9. Expressing A Nexus Question

An interrogative sentence headed by the so-called '*hmzh altswyh*' (the *hamza* of equalization) (Wright, 1975:307), might be connected to another sentence headed by '*aw*' or '*am*'. As Wright (1975), points out, '*aw*' and '*am*' are syntactically interchangeable, but the use of one rather than the other conveys a different meaning. For example, in saying '*azyd 'endk am 'emrw*' (Are you with Zaid or Amr?) the speaker knows that one of them is there and only asks which one. By contrast, in saying '*azyd 'endk aw 'emrw*' (Are you with Zaid and Amr?) the whole predication is being questioned, i.e. the speaker does not know whether any one of them is there or not. The answer to the question involving '*am*' is one of the two alternatives (i.e. *Zaid* and *Amr*) whereas the answer to the question with '*aw*' is *yes* or *no*. Accordingly, unlike *or*, '*aw*' does not turn a nexus question into an alternative question.

As far as translation is concerned, *or* is an appropriate translation equivalent of '*am*'. As for '*aw*' it could be rendered as '*and*'

4. Corpus Analysis

In this section, the researcher investigates the meanings of '*aw*' in the Qur'an, sheds light on the ways it is rendered in four English translations of the Quran, and pinpoints some of the difficulties and translation problems encountered in this regard. The four translations under scrutiny are Pickthall's (1930), Yusuf Ali's (1934), Al-Hilali and Khan's (1985), and Ghali's (2003), which represent old and recent translations by Arab and non-Arab Muslims.

Selected examples represent the different meanings that '*aw*' in the Glorious Qur'an has. '*aw*' and its equivalents in the translations under scrutiny are underlined.

1. Uncertainty:

Verse 18:19

قال قائل منهم كم لبثتم قالوا لبتنا يوما او بعض يوم

'*qal qa'el mnhm km lbthm qalwa lbthna ywma aw b'ed ywm*'

A speaker from among them said: How long have ye tarried? They said: "We have tarried a day or some part of a day." (Pickthall)

Said one of them, "How long have ye stayed (here)?" They said, "We have stayed (perhaps) a day, or part of a day." (Yusuf Ali)

A speaker from among them said: "How long have you stayed (here)?" They said: "We have stayed (perhaps) a day or part of a day." (Al-Hilali and Khan)

A speaker from among them said, "How long have you lingered?" They said, "We have lingered a day, or part (Literally: some "part" of a day) of a day." (Ghali)

The speakers here are the People of the Cave. Their utterance '*lbthna ywma aw b'ed ywm*' comes as an answer to a question asked by one of them about how long they had stayed in the

cave. This question is referred to in 'km lbthtm' at the beginning of the verse.

According to some Qur'anic exegeses (e.g. Ibn Adel, 880 AH; and Abu Al-Su'd, 951 AH), their answer reveals that at first they thought that they stayed for a day because they had entered the cave at sunrise and were awakened at sunset. Therefore, when they found that the sun had not gone down yet, they thought it was the time of sunset on the day of their entry. Accordingly, 'aw' in 'aw b'ed ywm' denotes their uncertainty about the length of their stay in the cave. However, they become uncertain only after they had found that the sun had not gone down yet. Ibn Adel (880 AH), adds that 'aw' could also be indicating possibilities: some of them answered 'ywma' (a day) while another said 'b'ed ywm' (part of a day).

Here, if 'aw' is taken to be expressing uncertainty, *or* is an appropriate translation equivalent on the ground that both conjunctions are used to express uncertainty.

Yet, as Emara (2010), points out, *perhaps* in Y. Ali's, and Al-Hilali and Khan's translations is an unjustifiable addition in the translations for three main reasons. Firstly, it has no explicit equivalent in the Arabic text which makes the translation unfaithful to the power of the original. Secondly, and more importantly, *perhaps* - placed as it is in the two translations - suggests that the speakers were uncertain from the very beginning about the length of their stay in the cave which is not the case: their uncertainty comes at a later stage as shown above. Thirdly, given that *or* - the translation equivalent of 'aw'- is used for indicating alternatives and also for indicating uncertainty, it seems sufficient for expressing the uncertainty expressed in the Arabic text via 'aw'.

2. Deliberate ambiguity

Verse 34:24

وانا او اياكم لعلی هدی او في ضلال مبين

'wana aw ayakm l'ela hda aw fy dlal mbyn'

Lo! we or you assuredly are rightly guided or in error manifest. (Pickthall)

and certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or in manifest error"! (Yusuf Ali):

And verily, (either) we or you are rightly guided or in a plain error". (Al-Hilali and Khan)

And surely, either we or you (only) are indeed upon (right) guidance or in evident error." (Ghali)

In some Qur'anic exegeses (e.g. Al-Mahaliyy and Al-Suyoutiyy, 864 AH), this utterance is said to mean: it is sure that either you (disbelievers) or we (i.e. believers) are in manifest error or rightly guided. They add that the ambiguity concerning which of the two is rightly guided is intended as a gentle invitation for them to embrace faith if God facilitates their way to it. Accordingly, 'aw' in this verse expresses deliberate ambiguity.

As mentioned above, deliberate ambiguity has some of the uncertainty associated with *or* and

'aw'. However, uncertainty here is not on the part of the speaker, it is uncertainty s/he intends to reveal to the listener. Logically, deliberate ambiguity is not something that could be expressed by an overt marker. Therefore, *or* used in the above translations seems to be an appropriate translation equivalent of 'aw' here on the ground that uncertainty is one of the meanings that both conjunctions are used to express. It has some of the intended indeterminacy and indefiniteness.

3. Addition

Verse 3:195

اني لا اضيع عمل عامل منكم من ذكر او انثى

'any la ady'e 'eml 'eaml mnkm mn dkr aw antha'

Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. (Pickthall)

Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female (Y. Ali)

Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female. (Al-Hilali and Khan)

I do not waste the deed of any doer among you, any male or female. (Ghali)

According to some Qur'anic exegeses (e.g. Al-Mahaliyy and Al-Suyoutiyy, 864 AH), in this verse Allah (Be He Glorified) is addressing those supplicants referred to in previous verses asserting that He will not let their deeds be wasted - be they male or female. In other words, they – male and female- are both equal when it comes to recompensing them for their deeds and for not neglecting them. Accordingly, 'aw' in 'mn dkr aw antha' is used for expressing addition, i.e. both of them are included.

As mentioned above, *or* has both 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' interpretations. The inclusive interpretation (exemplified in *The successful candidate will be a graduate or someone with managerial experience.*) is close to the interpretation of 'aw' in this verse. Accordingly, *or* in the above translations is an appropriate translation equivalent of 'aw' here if it will be taken as having an inclusive interpretation, i.e. none of the two items connected by it will be excluded. Other possible translation equivalents of 'aw' used for addition include *and*, *as well as*, etc.

4. Correction of a preceding clause

Verse 11:80

قال لو ان لي بكم قوة او اوي الى ركن شديد

'qal lw an ly bkm qwh aw awy ala rkn shdyd'

He said: Would that I had strength to resist you or had some strong support (among you)! (Pickthall)

He said: "Would that I had power to suppress you or that I could betake myself to some powerful support (Yusuf Ali)

He said: "Would that I had strength (men) to overpower you, or that I could betake myself to some powerful support (to resist you)." (Al-Hilali and Khan)

He said, "If only I had power against you, or had my abode valiant support." (Ghali)

In some Qur'anic exegeses (e.g. Abu Hayyann, 754 AH; and Ibn Adel, 880), 'aw' in the above verse is said to be expressing, among other possible meanings, a correction of a previous assumption - the same meaning of the correction marker 'bl'. The speaker here is Lot (PBUH). At first, he wished that he would have power over his people so that he would resist them. Then, he corrects and replaces this wish, which is explicitly communicated by what precedes 'aw' and assumes something else, namely, resorting to some strong support.

The meaning of correction is expressed in English via *but*. Consider the following example (Hussein, 2009):

(1) A. Oh! Your brother looks exactly like you.

B. He is not my brother but my friend.

According to Hussein (2009:212), *but* in B's utterance above does not involve contradiction. It is used for 'correction' where the clause introduced by *but* provides a correct replacement for the assumption in the first clause.

Accordingly, *but* seems to be an appropriate English translation equivalent of 'aw' used in the sense of 'bl' i.e. as a correction marker.

A review of the above translation shows that 'aw' is literally translated as *or* – which is not consistent with this given interpretation of 'aw' as a correction marker.

5. Division

Verse 10:12

واذا مس الانسان الضر دعانا لجنبه او قاعدا او قائما

'w eda ms alansan aldr d'eana ljbh aw qa'eda aw qa'ema'

And if misfortune touch a man he crieth unto Us, (while reclining) on his side, or sitting or standing (Pickthall)

When trouble toucheth a man, He crieth unto Us (in all postures) - lying down on his side, or sitting, or standing. (Yusuf Ali)

And when harm touches man, he invokes Us, lying down on his side, or sitting or standing. (Al-Hilali and Khan)

And when adversity touches man, he invokes Us to his side, or sitting, or upright, (Ghali)

According to Abu Hayyann (754 AH), Al-Mahaliyy and Al-Suyoutiyy (864 AH), Ibn Adel (880), and Abu Al-Su'd (951 AH), 'w eda ms alansan aldr d'eana ljbh aw qa'eda aw qa'ema' in verse 10:12 means that if misfortune, illness or poverty would befall a man, he would call upon Allah. In every state, he does so be he lying down, sitting or standing. In none of these exegeses, is 'aw' said to be expressing uncertainty or deliberate ambiguity. It just connects the

three items that represent three states: *'ljbh'* (lying down), *'qa'eda'* (sitting), and *'qa'ema'* (standing)

This function of *'aw'* could be compared to that of *or* used for expressing alternative. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that whereas *'aw'* is repeated before each item in the list, *or* is usually used before the last term of a series. Accordingly, only the last *'aw'* will be rendered as *or* in the translation, and the others will be dropped.

In the above translations, *'aw'* is appropriately translated as *or*. Nevertheless, they all committed the error of repeating *or* before each item in the list, which is considered ungrammatical in English.

6. Exception

Verse 2:236

لا جناح عليكم ان طلقتم النساء مالم تمسوهن أو تفرضوا لهن فريضة

'lajnah 'elykm an tltqm alnsa' malm tmswhn aw tfrdwa lhn frydh'

It is no sin for you if ye divorce women while yet ye have not touched them, nor appointed unto them a portion. (Pickthall)

There is no blame on you if ye divorce women before consummation or the fixation of their dower; (Yusuf Ali)

There is no sin on you, if you divorce women while yet you have not touched (had sexual relation with) them, nor appointed unto them their Mahr (bridal money given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage). (Al-Hilali and Khan)

There is no fault in you in case you divorce women as long as you have not touched them nor ordained any marriage-portion (Literally: an ordinance) for them; (Ghali)

According to Ibn Adel (880), *'aw'* in *'aw tfrdwa'* in this verse could be expressing, among other things, alternative (i.e. it connects *'tmswhn'* and *'tfrdwa lhn frydh'*), or exception (like *'illa'*). In the formal case, the utterance means it would not be a fault if the addressees (i.e. Muslim males) divorce women *if* they have not had sexual intercourse with them, nor assigned them a dowry. In the latter, it means it would not be a fault if the addressees (i.e. Muslim males) divorce women if they have not had sexual intercourse with them unless/except that they have assigned them a dowry.

Similarly, Abu Al-Su'd (951 AH) mentions that *'aw'* here is expressing exception and the utterance, accordingly, means that the divorcer is not required to pay the dowry if divorce occurs before having sexual intercourse with the divorcee unless he has assigned her a dowry. In this case, he has to pay half of this dowry.

Therefore, *'aw'* used for expressing exception could be translated as *unless, except that, but not when, etc.*

In the four translations under study, *'aw'* is rendered as *nor* - which is consistent with its

interpretation as expressing alternative. In none of them is 'aw' rendered as expressing exception.

7. Continuance (of an action or condition) to a specified time

Verse 3:128

ليس لك من الامر شيء أو يتوب عليهم أو يعذبهم

'lys lk mn alamr shy' aw ytwb 'elyhm aw y'edbhm fanhm zalmwn'

It is no concern at all of thee (Muhammad) whether He relent toward them or punish them; (Pickthall)

Not for thee, (but for God), is the decision: Whether He turn in mercy to them, or punish them; (Yusuf Ali)

Not for you (O Muhammad SAW, but for Allah) is the decision; whether He turns in mercy to (pardons) them or punishes them; (Al-Hilali and Khan)

You have nothing to do concerning the Command, (i.e. My Command) whether He relents towards them or torments them, (Ghali)

According to Al-Mahaliyy and Al-Suyoutiyy (864 AH), 'aw' in 'aw ytwb 'elyhm' means 'ilatan' (until), i.e. continuance of an action or condition to a specified time. Accordingly, the utterance means it is no concern of the Prophet (PBUH) until Allah relents to those disbelievers through their acceptance of Islam, or chastises them.

In English, *until* is used to express this meaning of continuance (of an action or condition) to a specified time. This is exemplified in *He is never able to relax until he took up fishing*. Accordingly, *until* seems to be an appropriate translation equivalent of 'aw' in this context.

As for the four translations under scrutiny, 'aw' in 'aw ytwb 'elyhm' is rendered as *whether*, which does not express the meaning of continuance of an action or condition to a specified time that 'aw', according to Al-Mahaliyy and Al-Suyoutiyy (864 AH), expresses in this verse.

8. 'aw' indicating alternative

As said before, in imperative structures 'aw' has two meanings as follows:

-Inclusive alternatives ('alebahh'): indicates inclusive combination of alternatives. Both alternatives are possible and can also be done in combination as, for example, in 't'elm alfqh aw alnhw' (*Study jurisprudence or syntax*.) Here, *or* is an appropriate translation equivalent of 'aw'.

-Exclusive alternatives ('altkhyr'): indicates that only one possibility can be realized (excluding one or the other) as, for example, in 'tzwj hnd aw akhtha' (Marry either Hind or her sister.) Here, the two items linked by 'aw' are mutually exclusive possibilities, that is, you may do one of the things at your pleasure, but not both. It corresponds to *either . . . or* (*You may ride either to London or to Windsor*.)

Inclusive:
Verse: 24:31

و لا يبدين زينتهن الا لبعولتهن أو ابائهن أو اباؤهن أو ابناهن أو ابناهن أو ابناهن أو اخوانهن أو بني اخوانهن أو بني اخواتهن أو نسائهن أو ما ملكت ايمانهن أو التابعين غير اولي الاربة من الرجال أو الطفل الذين لم يظهروا على عورات النساء

'w la ybdyn zynthn ala lb'ewlthn aw aba'ehn aw aba' b'ewlthn aw abna'ehn aw abna' b'ewlthn aw akhwanhn aw bny akhwanhn aw bny akhwathn aw nsa'ehn aw ma mlkt aymanhn aw altab'eyn ghyr awly alarbh mn alrjal aw altfl aldyn lm yzhrwa 'ela 'ewrat alnsa'

. . . and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness. (Pickthall)

. . . and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; (Yusuf Ali)

. . . and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands fathers, their sons, their husbands sons, their brothers or their brothers sons, or their sisters sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex. (Al-Hilali and Khan)

. . . and not display their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or what their right hands possess, or (male) followers, men without desire (Literally: without being endowed with "sexual" desire) or young children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's privacies, (Ghali)

According to Abu Hayyann (754 AH), Al-Mahaliyy and Al-Suyoutiyy (864 AH), Ibn Adel (880), and Abu Al-Su'd (951 AH), the above utterance indicates that women are not permitted to reveal their hidden adornment, namely, all that is other than the face and the hands, except to their husbands, fathers, husbands' fathers, sons, husbands' sons, brothers, brothers' sons, sisters' sons, their believing women, what their right hands own, or old male servants who lack vigor, or small children who are not yet aware of women's private parts. To these all, they may reveal themselves except for that part from the navel to the knees, which is unlawful for any other than their husbands to see.

Accordingly, 'aw' in the above verse is expressing inclusive alternatives; all alternatives are possible and can be done in combination. Here, *or* is an appropriate translation equivalent of

'aw'.

In the four translations, 'aw' is appropriately rendered as *or*. Yet, an overuse of *or* is noticed in them all: 11 times in Pickthall's and Ghali's translations, and 6 times in Yusuf Ali's, and Al-Hilali and Khan's translations. This sounds odd in English.

Exclusive

Verse: 2:229

الطلاق مرتان فإمساك بمعروف أو تسريح بإحسان

atlaq mrtan femsak bm'erwf aw tsryh behsan

Divorce must be pronounced twice and then (a woman) must be retained in honour or released in kindness (Pickthall)

A divorce is only permissible twice: after that, the parties should either hold Together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness. (Yusuf Ali)

The divorce is twice, after that, either you retain her on reasonable terms or release her with kindness. (Al-Hilali and Khan)

Divorce is twice; then retention with beneficence or release in fairness. (Ghali)

According to Abu Hayyann (754 AH), and Abu Al-Su'd (951 AH), 'aw' in '*femsak bm'erwf aw tsryh behsan*' is for '*althkhyr*' (i.e. exclusive alternative). It indicates that only one option can be realized (excluding the other).

A review of the four translations above shows that 'aw' is rendered as *or* in Pickthall's, and Ghali's translations and as to *either . . . or* in Yusuf Ali's, and Al-Hilali and Khan's translations. *Either . . . or* is a more appropriate translation equivalent of 'aw' here because it is used in English to indicate that the two possibilities it connects are exclusive, that is, only one of them may be done at the addressees' pleasure, but not both. This is exactly the meaning that 'aw' expresses in this verse.

9. Nexus question

11:87 أصلاتك تامرك أن نترك ما يعبد أبائنا أو أن نفعل في أموالنا ما نشاء

'aslatk tamrk an ntrk ma y'ebd aba'ena aw an nf'el fy amwalna ma nsha'

Doth thy way of prayer command thee that we should forsake that which our fathers (used to) worship, or that we (should leave off) doing what we will with our own property. (Pickthall)

Does thy (religion of) prayer command thee that we leave off the worship which our fathers practised, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? (Yusuf Ali)

Does your Salat (prayer) (i.e. the prayers which you offer has spoiled your mind, so you) command that we leave off what our fathers used to worship, or that we leave off doing

what we like with our property? (Al-Hilali and Khan)

does your prayer command you that we should leave what our fathers worshiped, or (leave) performing as we decide with our riches? (Ghali)

According to Abu Hayyann (754 AH), '*aslatk tamrk an ntrk ma y'ebd aba'ena aw an nf'el fy amwalna ma nsha'*' is a non-genuine question posed by the people of Shu'aib. They are mockingly saying to him: Would your way of prayer command you to make sure that we should leave what our fathers used to worship and cease to do as we wish with our goods. They mean that such a command is an absurdity that no person calling to good would commend. Abu Hayyann (754 AH), points out that '*aw*' in this verse has, among other potential meanings, the same meaning of additive '*w*'. They are not asking about which one of the two alternatives connected by '*aw*', namely, '*ntrk ma y'ebd aba'ena*' and '*nf'el fy amwalna ma nsha'*' his prayer commands him to do. Instead, the validity of the entire predication is being mockingly questioned.

As mentioned above, *or* turns a nexus-question that requires the addressee to say whether the propositional content of the question is true or not, and is simply answered 'yes' or 'no' into a disjunctive or alternative question to which the answer is one of the two alternatives (or else 'neither'). Accordingly, *or* in the above translations is not an appropriate translation equivalent of '*aw*'.

The following table exhibits the similarities and differences in the functions that *or* and '*aw*' have and possible English translations of '*aw*' in each case

Table 1. The functions of '*or*' and '*aw*' and possible English translations of '*aw*'

Functions		/?aw/	or	Possible English translations of /?aw/
Uncertainty		+	+	Or
Deliberate ambiguity		+	?	Or
Division		+	+	Or
addition		+	+(Inclusive 'or')	Or, And
Correction of a preceding clause		+	-	But
Exception		+	-	Unless/except when/but not when
Continuance (as of an action or condition) to a specified time		+	-	Until
Alternative (in imperative structures)	Exclusive alternative	+	-	Either . . . or
	Inclusive alternative	+	+	Or
Nexus question		+	+	and
Alternative question		-	+	-

5. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the functions of *or* in English, and of '*aw*' in Arabic, in general, and

in the Glorious Qur'an, in particular. It also investigates the ways 'aw' is rendered in four English translations of the Qur'an. It shows that both *or* and 'aw' have a multifunctional nature. It is even the case that in some Qur'anic exegeses, 'aw' is said to be potentially expressing various meanings in the same utterance, and that *in most cases* no consensus on its meaning in a given verse. As far as translation is concerned, the study shows that translating 'aw' is problematic due to its multiplicity of functions. In addition, the analysis indicates that 'aw' in the majority of the analyzed verses is literally translated as *or*, which is not an appropriate translation equivalent in some cases. It is proved that *or* is not the only possible translation equivalent of 'aw'. It has various potential English translation equivalents including *or, and, but, unless/except/but not when, until, and either . . . or*. The choice of one rather than the others depends on the function that 'aw' has in a given context. It is also found that there is an overuse of *or* in the translations in the sense that whenever 'aw' is repeated before each of the items it connects- which is normal in Arabic- it is rendered as *or* in the English translations- which sounds awkward in English.

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