

Corpus-based Analysis of Three Synonyms in Quran Translation

Summayya Moammer Mohammed ^{1*}, and Najat Mohammed Alqadi ²

¹ Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Translation, Al-Zaytouna University, Tarhuna, Libya.

² Department of English Language, Faculty of Education, University of Bani Waleed, Bani Walid, Libya.

su.khaleefah@azu.edu.ly

تحليل قائم على الكوربس لثلاثة مترادفات في ترجمة القرآن الكريم

أ. سمية معمر محمد ^{1*}، أ. نجاة محمد القاضي ²

¹ قسم اللغة الانجليزية، كلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة الزيتونة، ترهونة، ليبيا.

² قسم اللغة الانجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة بني وليد، بني وليد، ليبيا.

تاريخ النشر: 2025-07-08

تاريخ القبول: 2025-06-29

تاريخ الاستلام: 2025-05-16

Abstract

This study aims to demonstrate how a corpus-based approach offers an effective method for analyzing and enhancing existing English translations of the Qur'an. It addresses the specific challenges translators face when dealing with near synonyms. The research argues that the concept of semantic prosody (Sinclair, 2004) provides a valuable framework for resolving these difficulties. The central hypothesis is that each near-synonymous word in the Qur'an carries distinct connotations based on its lexical context.

By using a computerized concordancer, which allows for extensive searches of large text corpora, the study explores how words acquire meaning from the contexts in which they appear. This aligns with Firth's (1968) well-known notion that "you shall know a word by the company it keeps." Modern dictionaries increasingly rely on corpora to capture such contextual meanings.

This comparative descriptive analysis focuses on the Qur'anic Arabic term *ḥijāb* and its near synonyms *sit'r* and *ghitā*, examining how these are translated into English in the works of Pickthall and Sahih International, as available on a public website. The analysis uses componential analysis to investigate the semantic distinctions among these terms.

The findings reveal that the translators often do not differentiate clearly between these synonyms, commonly using terms like "cover," "partition," or "veil" interchangeably. The study proposes using "veil" specifically for *ḥijāb*, as it conveys the idea that what is veiled holds value. For *sit'r*, Pickthall's translation "shelter" is recommended because it effectively communicates the meaning of complete coverage. As for *ghitā*, the term "membrane" is suggested based on its semantic prosody, particularly because it implies a covering of the eyes.

Keywords: Collocation, corpus, quranic translation, semantic prosody, synonymy.

الملخص:

يركز هذا البحث على بيان كيف يمكن للمقاربة القائمة على الكوربس أن تسهم في تقديم محاولة جديدة وفعالة لدراسة وتحسين الترجمات الإنجليزية المتوفرة للقرآن الكريم. ويسلط الضوء على التحديات التي يواجهها مترجمو القرآن عند ترجمة المرادفات القريبة في المعنى، ويفترض أن مفهوم "الرنين الدلالي" (سينكلير، 2004) هو "المخرج" من هذه الإشكالية في الترجمة. وتفترض هذه الدراسة أن لكل مرادف دلالات معنوية مميزة تظهر من خلال بيانات لغوية مختلفة. وقد استخدم الباحث مُعالج توافقي إلكتروني يمكنه البحث في كمية كبيرة من النصوص عن جميع حالات ظهور مفردة لغوية معينة. ووفقاً لما أشار إليه فيرث (1968)، يمكن معرفة معنى الكلمة من خلال الكلمات التي تصاحبها؛ إذ تعتمد القواميس الحديثة بشكل كبير على الكوربس لتوضيح السياقات الفعلية التي ترد فيها الكلمة، مما يسقط الضوء على المعاني الدلالية المصاحبة لاستخدامها. في هذه الدراسة الوصفية المقارنة، خضعت ترجمات المرادفات القريبة للكلمة العربية "حجاب" في النص القرآني لتحليل تركيبى من أجل تقييم الجوانب الدلالية للمرادفات "ستر" و"غطاء". وقد اقتصرَت الدراسة على ترجمتين متوفرَتين على الإنترنت: ترجمة بكتال، وترجمة صحيح إنترناشونال. وخلص البحث إلى أن المترجمين لم يميزوا بين هذه المرادفات، بل استخدموا غالباً كلمات مثل "cover" و "partition" و "veil" دون تخصيص أي منها كمقابل محدد للكلمة الأصلية.

ويقترح البحث استخدام "veil" كمقابل لكلمة "حجاب"، لأنها تدل على أن الشيء أو الشخص المحجوب ذو قيمة. أما بالنسبة لـ "ستر"، فيوصي البحث بترجمة بكتال "shelter"، لأنها توضح المعنى المقصود وهو "تغطية تامة"، وتحمل الخصائص الدلالية المرتبطة بهذا المرادف. أما في ترجمة "غطاء"، فيُقدَّر استخدام "membrane" استناداً إلى الرنين الدلالي، لأنها تشير إلى الغطاء الذي يحجب الرؤية عن العينين.

الكلمات الدالة: الترادف، التلازم اللفظي، الرنين الدلالي، الكوربس، ترجمة معاني القرآن.

1.Introduction

Synonymy remains a debated linguistic issue in both English and Arabic. It is often conceptualized as a continuum along which words may be positioned at varying degrees—ranging from near synonymy to cognitive and absolute synonymy. However, most semanticists agree that absolute or perfect synonymy is extremely rare in natural languages (Cruse, 1986). Moreover, many scholars emphasize that identifying and analyzing synonyms is complex, and relying solely on intuition or dictionary definitions is insufficient. Instead, it is essential to base such analyses on empirical linguistic evidence. In this regard, the emergence of **corpus linguistics** has provided researchers with valuable tools for conducting data-driven investigations (Nugroho, 2018).

Near synonyms are typically defined as lexical items that share closely related denotational meanings but differ in terms of collocational behavior and semantic prosody. According to Partington (1998), these words are not always interchangeable in context, as they tend to co-occur with different sets of words. Saeed (1997) defines synonyms as distinct phonological items that have identical or nearly identical meanings. Common English examples include *Begin / Start, Job / Occupation, Buy / Purchase, Help / Assist, Father / Dad*. These pairs reveal the scarcity of true synonyms. Palmer (1981) and Lyons (1968) similarly argue that synonyms often vary in subtle semantic nuances, usage, and distribution, reinforcing the view that real or absolute synonymy is rare (as cited in Abu-Melhim & Al-Omari, 2014).

In the Arabic linguistic tradition, the study of synonymy dates back to early scholars such as **Sibawayh** (1988), Who divided the connection between words and their meanings into three types (1) distinct words with distinct meanings, (2) distinct words sharing the same meaning (synonymy), and (3) identical pronunciations representing different meanings (polysemy). His

classification sparked centuries of scholarly inquiry into Arabic semantics (Abu-Melhim & Al-Omari, 2014). For instance, the word **الخمير** (wine) has numerous synonyms in Arabic—**الشمول، الكُميت، الراحة، الكأس، القهوة، المُدام، العَقار،** each reflecting either a specific quality or contextual use of the drink. Despite their differences, all these expressions refer to the concept of wine, highlighting Arabic's rich synonymic vocabulary (Hayagnah, 2001).

With the advancement of corpus linguistics as a scientific method for analyzing language in digitally readable formats, researchers have increasingly incorporated **corpora** into their studies. A corpus, derived from the Latin word meaning "body," refers to a structured collection of written or spoken texts used for linguistic analysis (Kennedy, 1998). Corpora allow scholars to process and examine large datasets, offering empirical insights into actual language use. Tools such as concordancers, keyword analysis, and frequency lists enhance the research process by revealing patterns in vocabulary, syntax, and semantics.

According to Biber et al. (1998), a corpus is typically compiled to analyze specific language varieties. Williams (2010) notes that corpus linguistics initially gained traction in lexicography and translation studies. Key principles of corpus-based research include the use of computational tools, the examination of collocations to determine meaning, and the formulation of theoretical linguistic insights based on empirical data.

In the field of translation studies, corpus-based approaches have become increasingly prominent. Parallel corpora, which contain texts in two or more languages, are especially useful for exploring how meanings shift across languages and cultures (Baker, 2009). The growing popularity of corpus-based translation studies has led to international collaborations involving multiple languages, such as Finnish, German, Italian, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese (Baker, 2004). Researchers have examined lexical patterns in translated texts, including studies like those of Kanter et al. (2006), who identified universal features in translational English using Zipf's Law, and Kenny (2001), who explored collocation and semantic shifts in English-German corpora (Baker, 2009).

In light of these developments, this study aims to investigate **synonymy in Quranic Arabic and its English translations**, using a corpus-based methodology. By focusing on near-synonymous expressions and analyzing how they are rendered across multiple English translations, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of semantic nuance, translator choices, and the influence of collocational and prosodic.

2. Review Of Literature

In choosing English equivalents, as the study proposes, it is useful to know the word by the company that it keeps (Firth 1968:179, as cited in Tongnini-Bonelli, Elena (2001). Bint Al-Shati' (1987, as cited in Antar, 2003) clearly states that the Qur'an is unique as it is a divine text revealed in Arabic. As such, every word—and even every letter—holds a specific function and contributes to various layers of meaning depending on the context. She emphasizes that context serves as the key standard for selecting words in the Qur'an.

Similarly, John Sinclair, a leading figure in corpus linguistics, famously stated: "Trust the Text." This principle lies at the heart of corpus linguistics, which involves analyzing authentic language use by examining large, carefully compiled corpora—ideally made up of full texts—to gain insights into how language functions (Williams, 2010, p. 402).

The marriage between descriptive translation studies Corpora are composed solely of naturally occurring language, and corpus linguistics offers descriptive translation studies a reliable methodology along with dependable linguistic evidence.

Tymoczko (1998:652) predicated that corpus Translation studies is central to the way that translation studies as a discipline will remain vital and move forward'. This predication has been realized by an ever-growing number of corpus-based Translation Studies, for example , van Leuven-Zwart and ton naaijken (1991), Kenny (2001), Laviosa (2002) , Granger et al. (2003) , Hansen et al. (2004), Anderman and Rogers (2007) which have led to a better understanding of the scope , significance, usefulness and appropriateness of corpora in studying the processes, products and functions of translation." (Baker.P.' editor' ,2009:237). Corpus linguistics offers a framework that allows linguistics—especially lexicology—to move past viewing the individual word as the main unit of meaning. Instead of analyzing words out of context or defining them in isolation as in traditional dictionary entries, this approach focuses on how words function within actual usage. (Granger & Altenberg, eds., 2002, p. 222)

Wolfgang (2003) in their research paper entitled ' *Corpus linguistics and translation equivalence* ' assume that bilingual dictionaries based on the single word in isolation are insufficient for translating into a non-native language, and they are not enough instructions for ambiguity resolution as they don't take into account the target language perspective . They explain how to use parallel corpora to extract translation equivalence and to describe translation equivalence in a way that the problems of ambiguity disappears. They also study how to replace the single word by ' translation unit' . They show that parallel corpora are the material evidence of translation equivalence and contains language knowledge. They come with a result that parallel corpora contain the practice of many experienced translators.

" Translation unit candidate expansion can be done largely automatically . Minimal frequencies apply. Result: List of monosemous source language translation units and their target language equivalents. Once there is a one-to-one relationship between translation unit and equivalent, the relationship is reversible." Wolfgang .T. (2003).p.38)

In her research paper titled "*Different Morphological Forms in the Holy Qur'an: Should They Be Translated the Same?*", Younis (2011) argues that varying morphological forms of the same Arabic root often express distinct meanings that are not easily conveyed in English. She highlights that these differences pose a significant challenge for translators of the Qur'an, who may resort to translating these forms using the same English word repeatedly, thus overlooking their unique nuances.

Younis proposes that the concept of *semantic prosody* (Sinclair, 1991, 1996, 2004) offers a practical solution to this issue, as each morphological variant typically carries its own subtle contextual associations. Her study demonstrates how a corpus-based approach can illuminate linguistic features relevant to Qur'anic translation, contributing valuable insights to both Linguistics and Translation Studies.

The central claim of her research is that corpus analysis can provide a two-fold strategy for dealing with the translation of Arabic verb forms in the Qur'an. The first level concerns the inherent semantic weight of the morphological pattern itself, with each of the twelve triliteral verb forms in the Qur'an carrying specific implications. The second level pertains to semantic prosody—how the form is used in context and the connotations it gathers through that usage.

" This study is an attempt to suggest that corpus research is of importance to translators as it gives more insights into and a wider scope of rendering Arabic, in general and Quran in particular into other languages , Corpus here mainly opens a window to see more clearly all linguistic problems with a view to finding more objective solutions ." (Younis, 2011,P.15)

Jawharah alasmari (2018) states in his authentic study " A comparative analysis of the Arabic and English verb systems using a Quranic Arabic corpus A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH " that the Quranic Arabic corpus is one of the most important computational tools that has been produced within the context of Arabic language research, aims to explore the morphological and syntactic structures of Arabic and English verbs through computational analysis of Qur'anic translations. It specifically focuses on examining how a sub-corpus of verbs, along with their translations, can be used to understand how the Qur'anic context employs various verb forms to express time and how these forms are rendered into English.

In the edited volume by Younis et al. (2020), the concept of *semantic prosody* is introduced as a valuable framework for translating prepositions in the Holy Qur'an through a corpus-based approach. The study hypothesizes that each preposition carries unique semantic prosody depending on the linguistic context, and that these prosodic nuances influence meaning in ways that go beyond mere syntactic function. In the Qur'an, prepositions are used not only to fulfill grammatical roles but also to serve deeper semantic and rhetorical purposes.

The research argues that consistently translating a given Arabic verb with the same English equivalent—regardless of the preposition that follows it—can result in inaccurate renderings. This is because prepositions such as *'alā* ('on'), *'ilā* ('to'), and *li-* ('for') can alter the verb's meaning significantly depending on the context. By analyzing collocational patterns in a corpus, the study reveals how different prepositions paired with the same verb can produce different interpretations, challenging traditional views held by some Arab grammarians.

Overall, the study underlines the significance of semantic prosody in Qur'anic translation and emphasizes the contribution of corpus-based approaches to translation studies. It suggests that identifying these prosodic patterns through corpus analysis can assist translators in preserving the semantic impact of the original Arabic prepositions in the target language.

3.The Method of the Research

This study employs a corpus-based methodology to investigate how semantic prosody can aid in translating near synonyms in the Qur'anic text. This method is rooted by Firth (1968) *"a word could be known through the company that it keeps"*. He emphasizes the significance of the collocation patterns in understanding word meaning. Modern dictionaries support this view, they use a considerable amount of corpora to illustrate the actual contexts in which a word occurs, shedding light on the semantic connotations that accompany the use of any word.

Furthermore, this research builds upon the foundation laid by John Sinclair (1987), who famously stated, *"Trust the Text"*. According to Sinclair, corpus linguistics is fundamentally about relying on authentic language data—large, carefully selected samples or full texts—to uncover patterns of language use (Williams, 2010, p. 402).

Influenced by the work of Firth, Malinowski, and Wittgenstein, this approach emphasizes the role of text, context, and co-text in linguistic analysis. Semantic prosody is a concept which has been a focus of interest among corpus linguists over the last 15-20 years (Stewart, 2010, p.6). It was originally an idea of Sinclair's in 1987. The term 'semantic prosody' itself gained currency in Louw (1993), and was based upon a parallel with Firth's discussions of prosody in phonological terms (Stewart, 2010, p. 7). Louw's definition of semantic prosody as a "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates" (ibid: 8).

Parrington (2004a, pp. 131–132) describes semantic prosody as being akin to connotative meaning, though far less immediately noticeable. Stewart (2009) explores how semantic prosody functions in translation between English and Italian, noting its complexity. Similarly, Parrington (1998, pp. 48–64) argues that true equivalents between the two languages are rare. Even terms that appear similar—or so-called “false friends”—often exist within entirely different lexical contexts, leading to significant variation in meaning (Stewart, 2010).

4.The Aims of The Research

The study aims to investigate one of the Problems that hinder a translator in Quranic translation. It is the translation of synonymous words that have nearly the same meaning. The study tries to answer this question :

To what extent are the different translations of the three near-synonymous accurate and adequate in terms of their frequency , different context occurrences, lexical semantic meaning, and semantic prosody?

5.Importance of the Research

This study provides objective and scientific analysis of the translation of synonymy in the Holy Quran. Also this study examines two translations on the website in question.

This research contributes to Muslims' task to convey the message of the Quran to non-Arabic speakers as clearly as possible.

6.Limitation of the Research

The research selects three synonymous words to be studied (hijab, getah, siter). This study is restricted to two translations offered at the website in question. They are of these translators according to the arrangement of the website: Sahih International 1997, Picthall 1930.

7.Methodology

The Quranic Arabic Corpus ([https://corpus.quran.com/Quranic Arabic Corpus](https://corpus.quran.com/Quranic%20Arabic%20Corpus)), an annotated linguistic academic website was chosen as the source of data which was then analyzed using leading corpus tools , widely used in Quran translation.

Three tools in the corpus named the Quran Dictionary , Word by Word and English Translation were mainly used to investigate the occurrences of the three synonyms and their different translations . Through the following three tools in this authentic academic website , we can get

not only word's parallel translations but also their concordance(The Key word In Context (KWIC)), collocational behavior, and grammatical category , as shown in the following three Figures

7.1.Quran Dictionary:



Figure 1: Quran Dictionary

7.2.Word by Word:

Welcome to the Quranic Arabic Corpus, an annotated linguistic resource which shows the Arabic grammar, syntax and morphology for each word in the Holy Quran. Click on an Arabic word below to see details of the word's grammar, or to suggest a correction



Figure 2: Word by Word

7.3.English Translation

Welcome to the Quranic Arabic Corpus, an annotated linguistic resource for the Holy Quran. This page shows seven parallel translations in English for the all the quranic verses and chapters and .to show word by word details of each verse's morphology



Figure 3 : Quran Dictionary

8. Analysis and Discussion

8.1. The First word synonym (حجاب) *hijāb*



Concordance 1 : Concordance of Hijab

The word Hijab in the first verse above is used to be a barrier between two sides, one of that side is value and good whereas the other is bad. But according to the verse here Muslims are calling the infidels, which means that the Hijab here doesn't hide the voice. The Hijab here is made for keeping Muslims in order to protect them.

The second verse is in Surah Isra' , the Hijab is between the prophet Mohammed and unbelievers when he is reading the Quran. Also here there are two sides one is good and the other is bad.

Here the Hijab is to keep the prophet . who has special value. There is a voice behind Hejab which is the Quran reading.

The third verse is in surah Mariam .The Hijab is put to hide her from her tribe and people to keep her from their words and deeds. The Hijab here is also between two sides, one is good and the other is bad. Hijab is used to hide valuable person; favorable semantic prosodies .

The meaning of words and phrases differs according to their use in different linguistics" and social contexts. Corpus semantic refers to an approach to studying language in which observational data from large text collections are used as the main evidence for the uses and meanings of words and phrases." (Stubbs.M, 2002, p.20)

The fourth verse is in Surah al -ahzab the context is in the prophet's home. There are two sides to the prophet's women and Muslims, Hijab is demanded to hide women from men because women have special value and they are good/something precious . Here Hijab is to hide them when men are asking them something here Hejab does not hide the voice. The fifth verse is about the prophet hood and Hijab here refers to the time of sunset where there is no real barrier to hide behind it. This may refer to the being of Hejab that it is immaterial. The semantic prosody here is different because the subject here the sun is the user of Hijab and the verse refers to definite Hijab . The sixth verse is a context between the prophet and disbelievers and the Hijab is made between them but the speakers here are the disbelievers who are hidden. The seventh verse is about a Hijab that exist between Allah and man if Allah is talking to him. The Hijab is just for hiding the sight not the voice.

8.2.The verses of the synonym word noun "sit'r"

The trilateral root *ṣāḥ ṭā ṣā* (ص ت ر) occurs three times in the Quran, in three derived forms:

- once as the form VIII verb *ṭasṭaṭirū* (تَسْتَوِرُونَ)
- once as the noun *ṣitr* (سِتْر)
- once as the passive participle *masṭūr* (مَسْتُور)

The translations below are brief glosses intended as a guide to meaning. An Arabic word may have a range of meanings depending on context. Click on a word for more linguistic information, or to suggestion a correction.

Verb (form VIII) - to cover		
(4:101:13) <i>ṭasṭaṭirū</i>	covering yourselves	وَمَا تَسْتَوِرُونَ أَنْ يَشْهَدَ عَلَيْكُمْ سَمْعُكُمْ وَلَا أَبْصَارُكُمْ
Noun		
(18:90:15) <i>ṣitr</i>	any shelter	وَعَلَّمَهَا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهَا مِنَ الْغَيْمِ مَنْزِلٌ مِنْ سُحُبٍ
Passive participle		
(17:45:10) <i>masṭūr</i>	hidden	وَيَا قَوْمِ أَكْزَبُ أَنْ يَقُولَ إِنَّ الْكُفْرَ بِلِلَّهِ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ لَمَنْعٌ وَإِنَّ أَكْثَرَ الْبَشَرِ لَكَا فِي غَيْبٍ

See Also

- *Tasṭaṭir* (تَسْتَوِرُونَ) - *ʿIṭṭaṭir* (عِطْطِرُونَ)

There is just one verse that contain “sit'r” word which is in surah “Alkaf” it is mentioned at Alkedr story and here ‘siter’ is used to tell us that the sun cannot be hidden for those people how live at the sun rising place if we concentrate we will find that the benefit of siter is to keep them from sunshine and the damage of it . .Here it should be material or touchable on the contrary of Hijab.

The *sit'r* keeps from anything causing pain or hurt . *sit'r* is also clear here that it is near those who use it . If we look at the other structure of the stem we find it as a verb in the verse that talk about the disbelievers who did not hide their bad deeds the verb “tastateroun” is used to mean not to be ashamed from their deeds and if

we adopt our analysis of “*sit'r*” the verb here means that they don't fear of .the punishment and harm of their own bad deeds; unfavorable prosodies. At another structure “adjective” "mastoura" which is used to describe hijab here means that Hijab keeps the prophet from unbelievers not just from seeing him but also they cannot hurt him or make injury to him . And this emphasize that Hijab and siter are not the same meaning

8.3.”Then the word “*ghitā*”



This word is mentioned only twice in the Holy Quran and in both of them it talks about forgetting and negligence of man and those who are disbelievers the word is used to express that *ghitā* is a mean that hide the brain and heart or the thinking so it is isolate the thing or person completely

” The synonym *ghitā* is used with the collocation prepositions “ fiY and ‘anka prepositions" which mean that *ghitā* is to stick for something which is " حروف الجر (here sight that refer to faith. The prepositions that used with “*ghitā*” tell us that this word is closed to the someone or something which is intended, and it is put on that .person or thing

After the analysis of the semantic prosody of the three synonyms, we could conclude that “Hijab” is used to hide value person or thing, whereas ‘*sit'r*’ is used to keep from any harm or pain, “*ghitā*” is used to isolate completely the thing which intended to hide and it's something closed and adhesive to it. Now we will try to examine the translations of these synonyms for Sahih International and Pikthall .the first and second translations on the source data website corpus

Sahih international translation “*sit'r*” to “cover” , here the interpretation is not accurate because it does not take into consideration the semantic aspects of the .word, hence it is literal translation and it does not carry the meaning



Also we observe that one of the collocation of this synonym is the eyes in both of "غشاوة" verses, "ghīṭā" is used with the sight and eyes. It refers to the "geshawa the sight of people. It is on the eye and completely covers it, this means that it has the same space with the thing that is hidden. According to the semantic

analysis "membrane" may convey the intended meaning more than "cover". Pickthall interprets it to "hoodwinked" which means the eyes are in cheating, we think that this meaning is far from the intended message

At surah qaf, Sahih international translates "ghīṭāka" to "cover", as well as Pickthall translates it to "thee covering", as we said before "cover" does not convey the exact meaning. Using the same equivalent "membrane". May be more suitable than cover



Sahih international translates "sit'r" to "shield that means according to oxford a person or thing providing protection whereas Pickthall translates it to "shelter" a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger. The both

translation are carry the semantic aspect which is protecting, and we can substitute them with "protective" to specify the meaning of protection in general. (Negative Semantic Prosody.) Metaphorical Meaning

verse (18:90) - English Translation

Welcome to the [Quranic Arabic Corpus](#), an annotated linguistic resource for the Holy Quran. This page shows seven parallel translations in English for the 90th verse of chapter 18 (*sūrat l-kahf*). Click on the Arabic text to below to see word by word details of the verse's morphology.

Chapter (18) *sūrat l-kahf* (The Cave) ▼
 Verse (18:90) ▼ | [Go](#)

Chapter (18) *sūrat l-kahf* (The Cave)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَطْلِعَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَطْلُعُ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ لَّمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهَا مِن دُونِهَا بَرْقًا

Sahih International: Until, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had not made against it any shield.

Pickthall: Till, when he reached the rising-place of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We

The first verse of “*hijāb*” is translated by Sahih international to “partition” that does not carry the intended meaning, because it is not just for parting but to hide a person or thing. Pickthall translates it to “vail” that means in oxford ‘a piece of very thin material, worn especially by women to protect or hide the face, or as part of a hat, etc.’ Here the equivalent may include the aspect of hiding voluble things. It is better than ‘partition’.

Positive Semantic Prosody

Chapter (7) *sūrat l-a rāf* (The Heights)

وَبَيْنَهُمَا جَبَابٌ وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَتِهِمْ وَنَادُوا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَن سَلِّمُوا عَلَيْهِمُ لَمْ يَدْخُلُوهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ

Sahih International: And between them will be a partition, and on [its] elevations are men who recognize all by their mark. And they call out to the companions of Paradise, “Peace be upon you.” They have not [yet] entered it, but they long intensely.

Pickthall: Between them is a veil. And on the Heights are men who know them all by their marks. And they call unto the dwellers of the Garden: Peace be unto you! They enter it not although they hope

At surah Maryam, Shih International translates it to “screen” that means something that prevents somebody from seeing or being aware of something, or that protects somebody/something. Pickthall does not translate literally; on the contrary he “avoids translating the word. Material “*hijāb*

Chapter (19) sūrat maryam (Mary)

فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا (١٩)

Sahih International: And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man.

Pickthall: And had chosen seclusion from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit and it assumed f

In surah al-isra we find Sahih international translates “*hijāb*” also to “partition”,

whereas Pickthall to “barrier” that means something that exists between one thing :or person and another and keeps them separate. Metaphoric Meaning

Chapter (17) sūrat l-isrā (The Night Journey)

وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ حِجَابًا مَسْتُورًا (١٧)

Sahih International: And when you recite the Qur'an, We put between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter a concealed partition.

Pickthall: And when thou recitest the Qur'an we place between thee and those who believe not in the hereafter a hidden barrier;

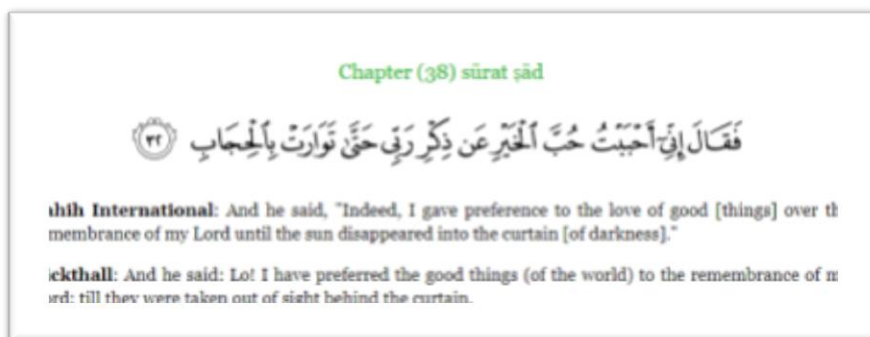
In surah al-ahzab, sahih international uses the same equivalent “partition”, Pickthall uses “curtain” which means a thing that covers , hides or protects . something

إِنَّ دَوْلَكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذَى النَّبَى فَيَسْتَعِجُ مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَعِجُ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسَأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقَالُوكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْذُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تَنْكِحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا إِنَّ دَوْلَكُمْ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا (٥٣)

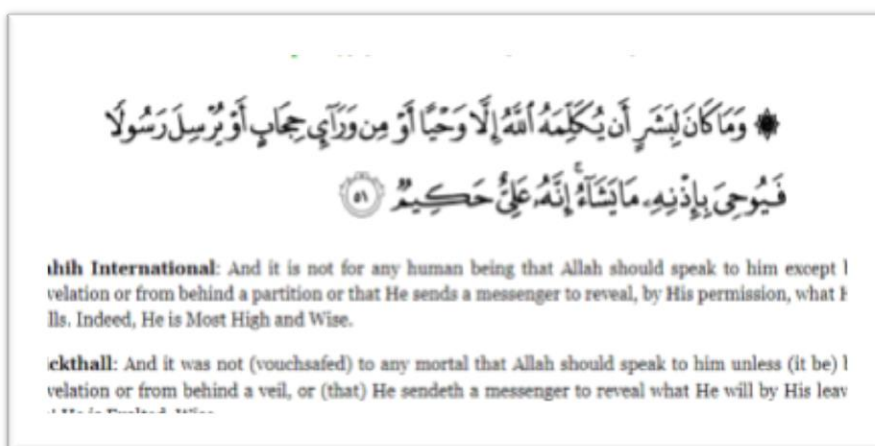
Sahih International: O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that [behavior] was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of [dismissing] you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not [conceivable or lawful] for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity.

Pickthall: O Ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended; then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! that would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when ye ask of them (th

In Surah “Sād” both of the translators use the same equivalent “curtain” with .clearing/clarifying the meaning (darkness) by Sahih international



In sūrat l-shūrā Sahih uses the same word “partition” and Pickthall .”uses also the same word “vail



At last we observe that the translators do not differentiate between the synonyms, and they use in most cases “cover” “partition” veil”, .without specifying each one for its equivalent. Corpus linguistics tools allow translators to approach texts, their own and those of " others , and analyze them both quantitatively and qualitatively (Beeby.A. et al.2009,p.2). Pearson (2003) argues that parallel corpora play a complementary role to comparable in)helping translators solve certain translation problems, (IN Beeby.A. et al.2009,p.10)

8.4.Quantitative Data Analysis

8.4.1.Frequency Table of Synonyms in the Qur'an

Arabic Term	Grammatical Form	Occurrences	Surahs
ḥijāb	Noun	7	Al-Isra, Maryam, Ahzab, etc.
sit'r	Noun/Verb	2	Al-Kahf, others
ghīṭā'	Noun	2	Qaf, Al-Baqarah

8.4.2.Translation Equivalents Frequency

Arabic Term	Sahih International	Pickthall
ḥijāb	partition (4), screen (1), veil (1)	veil (3), curtain (2), barrier (1)
ṣit'r	shield (1), cover (1)	shelter (1), cover (1)
ghitā'	cover (2)	covering (1), hoodwinked (1)

8.4.3.Collocation Patterns (within ±5 words window)

Term	Frequent Collocates	Function
ḥijāb	believers, prophet, veil, screen	Positive Protection
ṣit'r	sun, harm, light	Physical Shielding
ghitā'	eyes, heart, forget	Mental/Spiritual Negligence

8.4.4.Semantic Prosody Distribution

Word	Positive	Neutral	Negative
ḥijāb	6	1	0
ṣit'r	2	0	0
ghitā'	0	0	2

8.4.5.Discussion

The quantitative data confirms that while the three words may be considered synonyms, they exhibit clear distinctions in usage:

ḥijāb consistently appears in protective and positive contexts, often associated with divine protection or the preservation of modesty.

ṣit'r is linked to material, tangible forms of protection, such as shielding from light or exposure, supporting its translation as “shield” or “shelter.”

ghitā' is used exclusively in negative contexts, where it symbolizes spiritual blindness or ignorance, often collocated with eyes or hearts of disbelievers.

Translation analysis shows that Sahih International tends toward literal and uniform equivalents such as “partition” or “cover,” whereas Pickthall shows some variation, yet still lacks consistency with the semantic fields.

9.Findings

After analyzing the semantic prosody and the collocation of the synonyms (*ḥijāb*, *ṣit'r*, *ghitā'*) , we find that they do not have the same meaning and they are not completely synonyms, rather each one of them has specific semantic aspects that characterize it. “Hijab” is referred to as positive semantic prosody ,that is to say, it is used to hide valuable and precious something or someone to be safe ,and to separate between two sides. It would not be tangible ,rather it is a hidden power to

protect someone. This analysis may clarify why elderly people say "kids have Hejab” they mean Allah keeps children from any harm' ' . They use Hijab because a child is valuable ,they think

also that *ḥijāb* is to separate between child and the world of jinn. We use the word “Hijab” also to refer to the clothes that worn by Muslim women, according to our analysis here Hejab cover and hide their beauty and body .which considered in Islam very valuable and special

The word “*sit'r*” according to the semantic prosody it is used in context that refer to any material that protect from bad weather, that is to say, it is for protection. According to this analysis we find the justification why we call/name the material on window “*sit'r*” because it protect from the light of window, and the sitar of theater that protect or hide what behind scenes. Also when we use the verb “*Ister*” to order someone to cover him/her , we mean to protect the sight to see sensitive areas of .body. Therefore *sit'r* is to protect and cover the sight to see undesired images

ghīṭā” according to the semantic prosody it is mentioned in contexts concerning“ the negligence of Allah’s remembrance. It is collocated with the sight and eyes. It covers the eye where the men could not see the other life. “*ghīṭā*” is put on the eye that is to

say adjoin to eye, and it has the same space with eye. “*ghīṭā* ” is a cover but it should be compatible with the thing which is covered. That is why we call the piece of .cooking pan “*ghīṭā*” because when it is put on the pan it cover it completely

Both translators here do not differentiate among them and they do not take into consideration the specific semantic features of each one. They use in most interpretations “cover”, “ veil” and partition”. Here we suggest using veil to refer to Hijab because it revealed that the thing or person covered is valuable. For *sit'r* we suggest **Pickthall**’s translation “shelter” or to clarify the meaning “ full cover” we suggest **Pickthall**’s translation “ shelter”, it carries the semantic features that has been mentioned concerning this synonym. In translating “*sit'r*” we suggest according .to the semantic prosody “membrane” that refers to the cover of eyes Louw B. gave us semantic prosody, an insight into language which is far from being " exhausted as a field of study , the hidden effects of collocation.(ibid:403). Collocation is at the heart of corpus linguistics. Understanding collocation is part of understanding language.)that is one of the great lessons of corpus linguistics. (Williams.G. 2010:401-402

At the end we recommend using the semantic prosody and collocations to analyze the meaning of the Quran and the translation of it, because this method suggests that every word has its specific reference according to its collocations and occurs in the verses. Quranic corpus on the website facilitates the searching process. We hope that our research becomes a base for further studies to explore more issues concerning the translation of Quran Translators may not necessarily use corpora in their lives , but they derive great .benefit from the corpus studies on translation

Conclusion

Synonyms are presented in dictionaries as being interchangeable, which do lead (translators in general and) Qur'an translators in particular to adopt their contextual interchangeability. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of studies on how near synonyms are similar or different at the pragmatic level/ semantic prosody. To enrich the literature on corpus-based Quranic translation studies , this study tries to explore the collocational behaviors and the semantic prosody of the selected three synonymous (*sit'r* , *ghīṭā*, and *ḥijāb*). Quranic Arabic Corpus (**available**

<https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp>) electronic lexicon of the Quran was used to examine lexical collocates and the semantic prosody of the three synonymous words. In order to reveal fine-grained contextual differences in their semantic prosody

This study has shown how the use of corpora can contribute to the study of Quranic Translation. Scrutinizing the translations provided for the different realizations of the three synonym words in the Quranic Corpus (Dukes, 2011), it was observed that these synonymous were almost translated the same. The three synonymous words were investigated to demonstrate the similarities and differences between them in the Quranic Text. The findings disclosed that the three synonyms neither share the same core meaning, nor in terms of senses of meanings, semantic prosody (shades of meaning) and collocations. The results primarily show that the corpus provides some additional information which is nonexistent in the dictionary. From the data and analysis, we can conclude that the three synonymous words may have identical senses in respect of central semantic traits but they are not substitutable in certain contexts. Corpus linguistics is beneficial for people who are interested in linguistics analysis, such as, lexicographers and translators.

Recommendations

1. Use Corpus Linguistics as a Standard Tool in Qur'anic Translation Studies: Translators should integrate corpus-based analysis into their workflow to examine how Qur'anic words behave in context, particularly when dealing with near-synonyms. Corpus tools such as collocation analysis, frequency lists, and concordancers can help determine the most accurate translation equivalents.
2. Differentiate Between Near-Synonyms in Translation: Translators must avoid using the same English equivalent (e.g., *cover*, *partition*, *veil*) for all Arabic words that appear similar but differ semantically. Each synonym in the Qur'an should be studied in its semantic field, and translated accordingly. For example:
 - *ḥijāb* should be translated as "veil", emphasizing protection of something valuable and spiritual separation.
 - *ṣit'r* should be translated as "shelter" or "shield", to reflect physical or tangible protection from harm.
 - *ghīṭā'* should be translated as "membrane" or "adhesive covering", highlighting complete mental or spiritual obstruction.
3. Align Translations with Semantic Prosody: Translators should consider the positive or negative semantic prosody of each term:
 - *ḥijāb* carries positive prosody (divine protection, spiritual modesty).
 - *ṣit'r* carries neutral-to-positive prosody (material protection).
 - *ghīṭā'* carries negative prosody (spiritual blindness or ignorance).Therefore, the chosen English equivalents should preserve the emotional and evaluative tone of the original.
4. Avoid Literal or Mechanical Translation: Literal translation (e.g., consistently rendering all terms as *cover* or *partition*) risks obscuring the intended Qur'anic message. Translations should be context-sensitive and reflect functional meaning, not just lexical equivalence.

5. Employ Parallel and Comparable Corpora in Translation Training: Qur’anic translators and scholars should be trained in using parallel corpora (e.g., Arabic-English Qur’anic translations) and comparable corpora to analyze patterns and solve translation problems (Beeby et al., 2009). Using quantitative corpus data strengthens translation decisions and ensures greater semantic accuracy.

6. Develop a Corpus-Based Glossary for Qur’anic Synonyms: Scholars and translators should collaborate to create a glossary of Qur’anic near-synonyms, informed by corpus data.

Each entry should include:

- Arabic term and root
- Frequency in the Qur’an
- Semantic prosody
- Collocations
- Suggested English equivalents based on context

7. Raise Awareness of Semantic Nuances in Religious Discourse :Translation committees and publishers (e.g., for Sahih International or Pickthall) should be encouraged to review and revise existing translations to better reflect semantic distinctions supported by linguistic research. A revised edition of English translations could annotate semantic choices for transparency and educational benefit.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Synonymy	The relationship between two or more words with similar or identical meanings.
Near Synonym	Words with similar core meanings but differing in usage, tone, or collocation.
Corpus Linguistics	A method of linguistic analysis based on real-life text data (corpora), often using computational tools.
Corpus	A digital collection of written or spoken texts compiled for research.
Collocation	The habitual co-occurrence of two or more words (e.g., “make a decision”).
Semantic Prosody	The positive or negative evaluative meaning that a word develops due to its frequent collocates.
Qur’anic Translation	The rendering of Qur’anic Arabic into another language, often requiring high sensitivity to linguistic and theological nuances.

References

English Books :

1. Altenberg B. & S. Granger (eds.) (2002). *Lexis in Contrast. Corpus-based approaches. Studies in Corpus Linguistics 7.* Benjamins: Amsterdam & Philadelphia.
2. Sinclair, (2004). *Trust the Text.*, London: Routledge.

3. Cruse, D.A. (1986). *Lexical Semantic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. Firth, J.R. (1957). *Modes of Meaning: in papers in linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press.
5. Partington, A. (1998). *Patterns and Meaning: Using Corpora for English Language and teaching*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
6. Palmer, F. (1981). *Semantics*. (2nd ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Lyons, J. (1968). *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
8. Louw, B. (1993). Irony in Text or Insincerity in the Writer: The Diagnostic Potential of Semantic Prosodies, In Baker et al. (eds.) 157-176.
9. Kennedy, G. (1998). *An Introduction to Corpus Linguistics*. London: Addison Welsey Longman.
10. Al-Damghani (1980), *Dictionary of the Qur'an, or the reform of faces and counterparts -1 in the Holy Qur'an . dar aleilm lilmalayin bayrut ,, altabeat althaalithat mayu 1980*. House of knowledge for millions of Beirut . Third edition, May 1980. Aldamghaniu qamus alquran aw asilah alwujuh walnazayir fi alquran alkarim
11. Baker, Paul (ed.). (2009). *Contemporary Studies in Linguistics : Contemporary Corpus Linguistics*. London, GBR: Continuum International Publishing , 2009.
12. Biber D et al. (1998), *Corpus linguistics : Investigating language structure and use*. Cambridge university Press
13. .Palmar, F. R. (1976). *Semantics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press -12 .J.
14. Stewart, Dominic (2010), *Semantic Prosody: A Critical Evaluation* .Routledge Taylor & Francis Group . New York London
15. Younis, N. & McEnery, T. & Hardie, A. (eds.). (2020). *Semantic Prosody as a Tool for translating Prepositions in the Holy Qur'an: A Corpus-Based Analysis*. Published online by Cambridge University Press: **11 November 2020**.
16. Alhusaiyan, E. A. (2023). Semantic prosody in the Holy Qur'an: A corpus study of the collocations and meanings of the verb waqa'a ('fell'). *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 7(4), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol7no4.2> journal.translationstudies.ir+11works.bepress.com+11papers.ssrn.com+11
17. Alshahrani, H. J. A. (2020). *The semantic prosody of natural phenomena in the Qur'an: A corpus-based study* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Leeds. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/26745/> etheses.whiterose.ac.uk
18. Hizbullah, N., & Mardiah, Z. (2020). Al-Qur'an translation parallel corpus for the development of Qur'an translation studies in Indonesia. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Quran and Hadith Studies... ICONQUHAS & ICONIST*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.2-10-2018.2295536> eudl.eu
19. Younis, N. (2011). *Different Morphological Forms in the Holy Qur'an : Should they be Translated the Same?* Department of English , Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University . Al-Alsun International Conference ,2011. *Journal of Scientific Reseach In Arts*.

Journals :

20. Abu-Melhim, A & Al-Omari, S. (2014). " Synonymy in English and Arabic with Reference to the -1 Holy Qur'an: A Contrastive Study". *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 12, pp. 2619-2626, December 2014 © 2014 ACADEMY

PUBLISHER Manufactured in Finland. Department of English Language and Literature, Irbid University College, Al-Balqa' Applied University, Irbid, Jordan

21. Baker ,Mona.(2004) . A corpus-based view of similarity and difference in translation . International Journal of Corpus Linguistics 9:2 (2004)167-193 .John Benjamins Publishing Company
22. Geoffrey, W. (2010) . Many rooms with corpora . Université de Bretagne Sud . - .International Journal of Corpus Linguistics 15:3 John Benjamins Publishing Company
23. Tongnini-Bonelli, Elena (2001) , Studies in Corpus Linguistics , Volume 6: Corpus Linguistics at Work. Amsterdam , NLD: John Benjamin's Publishing Company .

21. Alasmari, J, Watson, J.C.E & Atwell, E. (2018). *A Contrastive Study of the Arabic and English Verb Tense and Aspect A Corpus-Based Approach*. PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 3(3), 1604-1615. Alasmari et al. Volume 3 Issue 3, pp.1604-1615 Date of Publication: 20th . PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences ISSN 2454-5899

Websites:

24. [https://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8//1 %A1](https://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8//1%20%A1)
25. [https://www.tyndalearchive.com/TABS/Lane/ 2](https://www.tyndalearchive.com/TABS/Lane/2)
26.)Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane (London: Willams & Norgate 1863 :QURAN EXEGESIS

<https://www.alro7.net/ayaq.php?langg=arabic&sourid=83&aya=15>