

Idiomatic

Uses of Prepositions in Arabic with Special Reference to Translating the Holy Quran

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1- Introduction

It is clear that religious texts have a spiritual relationship with human beings. Therefore, dealing with such texts requires being considerate and respectful. Accordingly, the translation of religious texts requires an additional consideration to be respected besides those associated with literary translation, i.e. holiness of the texts.

In dealing with religious texts, a translator may come across many problems: grammatical, structural, lexical or cultural. For the lexical level, the translator would tackle the problem of idioms, which is sadly unexpressed area of linguistics in Arabic. This conclusion is based on the assumption that there are no sufficient sources in this respect in Arabic. Yet, there are many expressions when tested against the rules of distinguishing idioms (whether syntactic or semantic) prove that we have such constructions as far as Arabic is concerned.

The present research deals with (verb-preposition) idiomatic collocation in some verses of the holy Quran with reference to three interpretations.

It should be noted that this research tackles this matter from idiomatic point of view. A point which is not taken into consideration by some translators. Thus, this contributes to new understanding of the verses of the holy Quran.

It should also be taken into account that in dealing with such constructions for the purpose of translation that the technique that should be followed in translating (interpreting) the meanings of the holy Quran is the Functional Equivalence technique, in this way only the Quran has successfully been safeguarded from the negatives and mistakes of the literal translation. For example "And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift), so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty"(Quran 17-29) which gives a ridiculous meaning if it is literally interpreted, hence explanatory brackets are essentially required.

2-The Concept of Equivalence

Equivalence is a key concept in the process of translation because it determines which type of translation should be used to render a certain text. Farghal (1994:56) argues "translation is a mode of communication where choices are further subjected to a principle of equivalence between a source text in one language and a target text in another."

No single topic in this basic domain of knowledge has attracted the attention of workers in linguistics and translation theory more than the issue of equivalence, for it represents the backbone of the whole translation process (Al-Hajjaj, 1995:233).

In short, most translation studies emphasize the fact that there is no total equivalence or one-to-one equivalence throughout the whole text because of the differences in the systems, patterns, rules, conventions and cultures. However, they stress that the translator must do his best to reach the closest equivalent through following certain strategies.

3- Functional Equivalence

Waard and Nida (1986) adopt the term "functional equivalence" by "dynamic equivalence." Nida and Taber (1969:202) define the

former as “quality of translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors.” Such a translation is based on the principle of equivalent effect or response which means that the translator should affect his reader in the same way as the source text does (Newmark, 1988:48).

Another definition of functional equivalence is “understanding not only the meaning of the source text but also the manner in which the intended receptors of a text are likely to understand it in the receptor language.” Waard and Nida (1986:9)

Translation studies depend not only upon linguistic features, but also upon extra-linguistic ones such as semiotics, the scientific study of signs, which includes three basic elements: syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

When a translator analyzes a text in terms of these elements, he does his efforts to achieve a functional equivalence in the TT. In other words, he should circumscribe the function of the SL system and then find a TL system that will adequately render the function (McGuire, 1980:119).

To conclude, functional equivalence is considerably similar to dynamic equivalence adopted by Nida (1964). The only difference lies in the fact that the former applies pragmatics in addition to syntax and semantics in translation. Thus, it becomes clear that it is functional equivalence that translators should adopt in translating idiomatic expressions.

A fact to be stated here is that, idioms have no total equivalence. This difficulty is attributed to many factors which contribute to the difficulty of conveying meaning accurately.

4-The Role of Context in Translating Idioms

The importance of context in determining the meaning of words cannot be denied. Many of the idiomatic constructions have more than one meaning; therefore the role of context is very important in this case to clarify which one is meant.

Aziz (1998:261), identifies two types of contexts;

- 1.Linguistic context: It is the stretch of language which precedes and follows the sentence.
- 2.The situational context: It is the condition in the outside world in which an utterance occurs.

Concerning idioms, the context, whether linguistic or situational, is very important in many cases to determine the accurate meaning.

Idiomatic equivalence is difficult to decide because most idioms are culture-specific. Consequently, some idioms, when translated into another language, may not be understood by TL readers.

Newmark (1985:303) suggests the following procedures in translating idiomatic expressions:

- Careful reading of the whole passage is extremely required. In order to translate, one must understand. In other words, one must use the content to help him guess the meaning of such words or expressions.
- A translator should avoid translating idioms literally, and to render the idiomatic word or phrase with caution as any other figurative language.
- Concerning word order and sentence-structure, carefulness is required to follow the genius of idiom of the language into which it is translated.
- Idioms may have cultural distance or overlap, universal and subjective aspects; therefore, a translator has to attempt to render them as accurately as possible. However, the more universal the sense, the more likely the transfer.
- A translator may replace the image in the SL with a standard TL image that does not clash with the TL culture.

To begin with, the verb when it is accompanied by a preposition, it may acquire a new meaning which is different from the meaning of its components. For example, the verb(مال) when it is alone its

meaning is (to incline), when the preposition (على) is annexed, the total meaning is (to oppress). It is not the duty of this research to apply the rules of distinguishing idioms. This job will be left for the reader, but for the time being some explanations will be given altogether with the discussion of the examples.

What follows are examples listed with its discussion annexed to every example and the way of deciding whether to choose this meaning or that, seeking aid of every linguistic and extralinguistic evidence available relying to a large extent on context of situation for solving some of these problems.

It is to be taken into consideration that the exegetical material and the comments of the grammarians largely influence the way of analysis.

Accordingly, the following steps are to be followed in conducting the present research.

1-finding the text that holds an instance to be discussed.

2-submitting the extralinguistic situation of the text (the) condition of revelation if available.

3-comments of the exegetes are to be listed altogether with the comments of the grammarians.

4-deciding which meaning is to be selected based on the exegetical and grammatical comments.

5-comparing the translations (interpretations) of well-known translators.

6-giving a suggested interpretation.

Finally, we have to say that when the influence of a specific text is linked to divine and/or earthy authorities, this also means that a translation needs divine sanction, or blessings from those who exercise (and monopolize) religious and political power. Accordingly, we can say that translators and interpreters are themselves the people who exercise and monopolize religious power. Therefore, they are self-authorized. In addition, they are trustful and also experts in a religious sense to translate such a sacred text. It could be concluded

here that being a believer translator, he will be more cautious of not causing serious, or even any, damage or change to the spiritual and/or textual constituent of the source text of the Quran. Hence this work is to be added to their effort of conveying a better view of the meanings of this holy Book not to degrade their effort.

Discussion

(1) (سال سائل بعذاب واقع) (1) المعارج

In analyzing this verse, it is appropriate to begin with the reason of revelation. A Polytheist called "Al-Nadhr bin Al-Harith" invoked God by saying "O Allah! If this is indeed the Truth from Thee, Rain down on us a shower of stones from the sky, or send us a grievous chastisement." This verse is part of Surat Al-Anfal-(32). So he and some of his greatest warriors were slain at the battle of Badr. This is what concerns the extra linguistic context.

Let us now consider some of the comments of the exegetes to have a better view.

Al-Baidhawi in his exegetical comments vol.5 p.386 would say (سأل)

(سائل بعذاب) means a questioner invoked God about a punishment to be fall on him; for that the combination came with (الباء) not with (عن) and the questioner is (Al-Nadhr bin Al-Harith) and the penalty asked is not just to be fall, rather to be fall on a person by invoking God.

The same comment is stated by Ibn Kathir vol.4 p.419 quoted from Mujahid and Al-Qurtubi vol.18 p.278.

Another comment parallel to the above mentioned one is stated at (Al-Burhan fi Ulum Al-Quran) vol.4 p.165 the meaning here is" they ask about the penalty for the reason that they want it as soon as possible because they think that it is not true and they doubt that penalty"

The same comment is said also by the following: Al-Wahidi vol.2 p.1131, Fath Al-Qadeer vol.5 p.288, Zad Al-Maseer vol.8 p.385, Al-Jallalain vol.1 p.764 and Ruh-Al-Maa'ni vol.29 p.55

Another relative comment is said by Al-Nassafi vol.3 p.174 when he said " (سأل ب) interested in and this matter occupied his thought and filled his mind".

The above-mentioned argument supports the idea that it is not a matter of just asking rather it holds another meaning. A shift now will be made for the arguments of the grammarians to see if we could find another evidence.

As a starting point, we could say that for the verb (سأل) its usual collocation is with the preposition (عن) but its collocation with (الباء) is idiomatic to convey another meaning other than "asking about something". This is supported by what proposed by Al-Sammara'ai in his book Maa'ni Al-Nahu vol.3 p.20 backing his support by what is said by Al-Zamakhshari in his book Al-Kashaf which is a comment on the holy Quran from a grammatical point of view. Al-Sammaraai says "if the meaning required is just asking, Al-Quran would say (سأل عن) because we have many verses at Al-Quran in this meaning. For example

(يسألون عن أنبائكم) and الأحزاب (20)

(يسألونك عن الساعة) النازعات (26)

but the meaning required here is "he asked the punishment to be fall soon and he searched for that punishment and interested in it."

After this argument we could say that the construction of the two items (verb preposition) here is idiomatic and brought another meaning for a special purpose that is accuracy in selecting the words to convey deep view of the event. What follows are some interpretations by authorized translators to compare the resultative meaning:

Yusuf Ali: A questioner asked about a penalty to befall.

Pickthal :A questioner questioned concerning the doom about to fall.

Shakir: One demanding demanded the chastisement which must be fall.

A quick look at the above-mentioned interpretation reveals the fact that Shaker's interpretation is the nearest one to the meaning of the Ayah. However, it lacks something to be added at the end. The following is a suggested interpretation:

One demanding demanded the punishment to be fall on him soon.

which best meet the requirements of a better view to be conveyed through translating this Ayah.

(2) (ونصرناه من القوم الذين كذبوا بآياتنا) (21) الأنبياء

In order to know the consequences of this Ayah, we have to concern what precedes it .The whole situation is concerning the story of the prophet Noah (peace be upon him). When the contemporaries of Noah were given to unbelief, oppression of the poor, and vain disputations. He carried Allah's message to them, and standing fast in faith, built the Ark, in which he was saved with his followers from the Flood, while the wicked were drowned.

Concerning exegetes, the author of Fath Al-Qadeer vol.3 p.417 (نصرناه من)"protect him from". The author of Ruh Al-Maa'ni vol.17 p.73 agrees with this opinion and adds that this protection is not restricted to this, but refers to the fact that it is followed by revenge from the enemy and victory on him and left no trace of him.

Ibn Taimiya vol.13 p.342 agrees with the above mentioned by adding the meaning of (rescue) Noah from his enemy.

Grammatically speaking, the usual collocation of the verb (نصر) is with the preposition (على) because we have many instances within the holy Quran support this. For example

فانصرنا على القوم الكافرين البقرة 286

Grant us victory over the unbelievers.

و يخزهم و ينصركم عليهم التوبة 14

"And disgrace them. Help you to victory over them.

But the mater here is different; it is not a matter of victory over.

Al-Sammarrai vol.3 p.14 agrees with what stated above and adds the following:

The victory has two sides: the first one is one who has gain victory; the other side is those whom they defeated or destroyed. So, the meaning of (نصرته منهم) is that you protect him and punished the wrong people or have gain your right from them.

By this the reader would know how it is problematic to translate such religious texts because they involve more than one meaning in one construction which is something not found in the target language and that puts more barriers before the translator when he wants to convey a better view of the source text. Hence brackets, footnotes, and new structures are extremely required.

The translators give the following renderings for the above-mentioned Ayah

Yusuf Ali: We helped him against people who rejected Our signs: Truly they were a people given to Evil.

Pickthal: And delivered him from the people who denied Our revelations .Lo! They were folk of evil.

Shakir: And we helped him against the people who rejected Our communications; surely they were an evil people.

In comparing the output meaning of the Ayah concluded from the arguments with the interpretations of the translators submitted, we

find that they conveyed one part of the meaning and neglected the other part.

The following rendering is suggested:

And we rescued him (by punishing) the people who denied Our signs.

Which convey more accurately the idiomatic meaning of

(نصر من).

(3) (عينا يشرب بها عباد الله يفجرونها تفجيرا) (6) الدهر

This Ayah comes in a situation of praising the Believers and to illustrate their state in paradise; in terms of blessing and happiness they are in. It also illustrates the far limits of this state and this would seem to be the culmination of the honor, which the blessed receive at the Royal and Divine Banquet. Hence, the words and statements are carefully selected to cope with the situation.

The whole situation which must come into mind is that they are in comfort, bliss, happiness, etc, of the state they are in. This idea would help our argument of the idiomatic meaning of (يشرب ب).

Exegetes including Al-Baidhawi vol.5 p.426 would say

“their drinking is mixed with pleasure and enjoyment to the full extent“.

Another comment is stated by Al-Qurtubi vol.19 p.129 and Ibn Kathir vol.4 p.455 when they say (يشرب ب) infuse to saturate or to drench in the spring.

Grammatically speaking, the verb (شرب) usually collocates with (من) and this is proved by the preceding Ayah

and (إن الأبرار يشربون من كأس كان مزاجها كافورا) الإنسان 5

(فلما فصل طالوت بالجنود قال إن الله مبتليكم بنهر فمن شرب منه فليس مني و من لم يطعمه فانه مني إلا من اغترف غرفة بيده فشربوا منه)

البقرة- 249

The author of Al-Mughni states that one of the meanings of (ب) is adherence and when you say (شرب من) means that either they are very near to the spring or they are (in the spring) to the opposite of saying (يشرب من) which does not mean that they are very near to the spring. He ends his argument with saying " I ate an apple from your orchard" does not mean that you were in the orchard rather they brought the apple to you.

Another comment is raised at Al-Burhan when the following is stated :

(يشرب بها) means they are inside the spring, drinking from it with pleasure The enjoyment happens for both drinking and sight to the opposite of just drinking. So the reference here is to the place for which the spring flows .

This meaning comes in accordance with the final phrase at this Ayah (يفجرونها تفجيرا) on one side and the state of the Believers they are in concerning the Blessing of Allah as a reward for them and their endeavor is accepted and recognized on the other side.

As a conclusion of what is mentioned above, we could say that the meaning presented through this construction (شرب ب) is idiomatic and taken to mean, "their drinking is mixed with pleasure and they are in the spring"

The following are renderings of the translators for this Ayah:

Yusuf Ali: A Fountain where the Devotees of Allah do drink, making it flow in unstinted abundance.

Pickthal: A spring wherefrom the slaves of Allah drink, making it gush forth abundantly,

Shakir: A fountain from which the slaves of Allah shall drink; they make it to flow a (goodly) flowing forth.

What can be deduced from looking at the translations is that the idiomatic meaning of (شرب ب) is neglected despite some arguments of the grammarians and exegetes. Therefore the following is suggested as a better rendering for (شرب ب) .

A spring where the Devotees of Allah are in, do drink (with pleasure)...

(4) (وقد احسن بي ربي إذ أخرجني من السجن) (100) يوسف

This Ayah is part of Surat Yusuf. This Surah is entirely taken up with the story recapitulated rather than told of Joseph .The story is called the most beautiful of stories for many reasons: I-it is the most detailed of any in the Quran II-it is full of human vicissitudes, and has therefore deservedly appealed to men and women of all classes; III-the way how modest Joseph is throughout. The first things he thinks of among Allah's gracious favors to him are 1) that he was brought out of prison and publicly proclaimed to be honest and virtuous; and 2) that his dear father was restored to him as well as the brothers who had persecuted him all his life. He will say nothing against them personally. But now all is rectified by the grace of Allah, to whom he renders due praise.

The above-mentioned introduction sheds light on the fact that Allah's charity and goodness for Joseph are not of usual type rather they are of a special type .

Al-Sammarai vol.3 p.22 leads the argument by saying (أحسن) (إلى) means charity of Allah to all mankind including Joseph, while (أحسن ب) holds a special type of charity because Allah took him out of prison and made him in a prominent place and brought his family

from the desert and the other events which represent divine providence.

The author of Al-Mughni vol.1 p.105 would say: there is a difference in meaning between (أحسن إليه) and (أحسن به). The meaning of (أحسن إليه) is to do goodness for or make a favor for somebody in the usual manner; while (أحسن به) means that while you are doing favor for someone you are with him spiritually.

As for the usual collocation of the verb (أحسن) it is with the preposition (إلى) because we have many verses at the holy Quran prove the same. For example :

(و لا تنس نصيبك من الدنيا و أحسن كما أحسن الله إليك) القصص-77

It is to be noted here that Yusuf Ali has translated the above mentioned Ayah at the same way he translated

(أحسن ب) by saying : (Nor forget thy portion in this World: but do thou good, As Allah has been good to thee)

Which means that there is something wrong with the translation and the translator has neglected the meaning obtained by (أحسن ب).

Finally, the author of Al-Burhan vol. 3 pp.338-339 says that there are many meanings for (أحسن ب)

1-fine, subtle (the basic meaning); 2-so fine and subtle as to be imperceptible to human sight 3-so pure as to be incomprehensible; 4-with sight so perfect as to see and understand the finest subtleties and mysteries; 5-so kind and gracious as to bestow gifts of the most refined kind; extraordinarily gracious and understanding.

For the above-mentioned argument we could select the fifth meaning of (أحسن ب) because Joseph was brought up in the best way

possible from an earthly point of view and Allah's special providence looked after him through his life.

The following renderings are found for the translators:

Yusuf Ali: Allah hath made it come true! He was indeed good to me when he took me out of prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert.

Pickthal: My Lord hath made it true, and He hath shown me kindness, since He took me out of the prison and hath brought you from the desert.

Shakir: my Lord has indeed made it to be true; and he was indeed kind to me when He brought me forth from the prison and brought you from the desert.

It is obvious from the above-mentioned argument that no one of the renderings has conveyed the idiomatic meaning of (احسن ب)، therefore the following is a suggested translation for: (احسن ب)

My Lord hath made it true, and He hath shown me divine providence, since He took me

(5) (ويل للمطففين*الذين إذا اكثالوا على الناس يستوفون) (1-2) المطففين

This Ayah is part of Surat Al-Tatfif or Al-Mutaffiffeen, which talks about the fraudulents which here be taken in a widely general sense. It covers much more than that. The next two verses make it clear that it is the spirit of injustice that is condemned, -giving too little and asking too much. It is worse than one-sided selfishness; for it is double injustice. But it is worst of all in religion or spiritual life: with what face can a man ask for mercy or love from Allah when he is unwilling to give it to his fellow men. You must give in full what is due from you, whether you expect or wish to receive full consideration from the other side or not.

This ayah is better understood through the explanation of verse 84-85 of Surat Hud which signifies the story of Shu'aib with the Madyan people.

The Midianites were commercial people, and their besetting sin was commercial selfishness and fraudulent dealings in weights and measures. Their Prophet tells them that that is the surest way to cut short their "prosperity", both in the material and the spiritual sense. When the Day of Judgment comes, it will search out their dealings through and through and they will not be able to escape then, however much they may conceal their frauds in this world.

Yusuf Ali states, "[B]oth Plato and Aristotle define justice as the virtue which gives every one his due. From this point of view Justice becomes the master virtue and includes most other virtues. It was the lack of this that ruined the Midianites. Their selfishness was (intent on mischief,) i.e. spoiling other people's business by not giving them their just dues." Hence the Midianites committed two sins: 1-giving short measure or weight, whereas the strictest commercial probity is necessary for success 2-a more general form of such fraud, depriving people of rightful dues.

Back to our discussion, it is not just a matter of cheating rather it is a matter of oppression because the punishment is woe (ويل).

Al-Sammarai vol.3 p.49-50 says that some grammarians would say that (على) here is synonymous in meaning with (من). He argues that this is incorrect since there is a difference in meaning between (اكتال عليه) and (اكتال منه) .

(اكتال منه) would not imply injustice; to the opposite of (اكتال عليه) which implies domination, high handedness and injustice because when (المطففين) take they oppress and when they give, they give little.

This meaning is supported by the next verse

(وإذا كالوهم ا و وزنوهم) and not

(كالوا لهم او وزنوا لهم) which both are correct but omitting (اللام) here would convey a meaning that is not conveyed when it is not omitted.

Grammarians would say that this (اللام) is for due and the fraudulent would not pay what is supposed to be paid. Therefore, the reader would feel that the meaning of oppression here is inherent.

In translating such verse, it is appropriate to convey the meaning of (injustice) to the target language. The following (interpretations), as the reader would notice, do not have any reference to injustice or oppression:

Yusuf Ali: Those who, when they have to receive by measure from men, exact full measure.

Pickthal: Those who, when they take the measure from mankind demand it full.

Shakir: Who, when they take measure (of their dues) from men take it fully.

The researcher thinks that adding the meaning of injustice is appropriate based on the above-mentioned argument. Hence, a better interpretation would be:

Those, who when they take measure from men take it full (unjustly).

Conclusions

1-The idiomaticity of the preposition results from its connection with the verb, and for this the preposition will gain a new meaning. However, the focus is put on the preposition because it is the generator of the idiomaticity.

2-Translators have neglected conveying the idiomatic meaning of the constructions verb-preposition. The researcher thinks that the main reason behind such negligence is that the constructions have many interpretations other than the one listed and these are not conveyed by translators or even tackled by their notes despite the fact that their meanings are different and well established.

3–Exegetes have tackled the meanings of such constructions in addition to the grammarians.

4–Exegetical comments support the idea that such constructions are idiomatic.

5–Idiomatic collocation strikes the two sides of collocation A- Violating the usual collocation between the verb and the preposition B- the total meaning of the construction is different from the meanings of the two parts.

6–The examples are more of being expressive than exhaustive.

7–Translators have given similar interpretation for different prepositions which reveals the fact that there is something wrong with translating prepositional idioms.

8-Context, whether linguistic or situational, is very important in specifying the meaning of the prepositional idiom.

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