

Contextual Meanings Of Qur'ānic Near-Synonyms And Their Translations

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Abstract

This study identifies the contextual meanings of some selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms and the semantic differences that exist between them, as explained in the Holy Qur'ān. It also elucidates how the semantic differences between the selected Qur'ānic pairs are reflected in the English translations. Three pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms are chosen for this study. The collected data are qualitatively analyzed based on the RC-S approach by Murphy. The findings show that some semantic differences exist between the selected pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms, and some semantic differences are not reflected in the English translations. An example of the investigated Qur'ānic near-synonyms is the pair of *جوع* and *مسغبة* (hunger). The findings reveal that *مسغبة* (famine) denotes extreme and severe hunger of a large number of people. It is also associated with weakness, fatigue, exhaustion, and thirst. However, its near-synonym *جوع* (hunger) is more general and does not have the same semantic features as *مسغبة* (famine). It is shown that translating both words by Arberry as 'hunger' is inappropriate since the semantic differences between them are not reflected in the English translation. This study presents recommendations that could be useful for translators, readers, and interested researchers. **Keywords:** Contextual Meaning; Denotative Meaning; Connotative Meaning, Translation; Qur'ānic Near-Synonyms.

INTRODUCTION

Synonymy is a universal linguistic phenomenon in semantics. It is a semantic relation between two or more words that maps to the same concept or meaning (Murphy, 2003). Likewise, it is seen as a semantic relation between words whose semantic similarities are more salient than their semantic differences (Cruse, 2000). Furthermore, Matulewska (2016) argues that a semantic connection binds two terms with the same denotative meaning; according to her, synonyms must belong to the same word category but differ in form. It is noticed that Matulewska focuses on denotation and the part of speech in her definition of synonymy. Within this semantic relation, there exist many types of synonyms.

For example, Murphy (2003) categorizes synonyms into two kinds: logical and context-dependent. She also divides logical synonyms into two types: complete and sense synonyms. Murphy maintains that context-dependent synonyms are all regarded as near-synonyms. Absolute synonyms are words that are identical in every sense (Murphy, 2003). Literature (Dolezal, 2013; Wang, 2016) reveals that full synonyms are uncommon or non-existent. However, since synonyms are defined by Murphy (2003) as

words that have one or more senses in common but differ in others. An example of this type of synonym is the pair of ‘commence’ and ‘begin’ since they have some senses in common but differ in respect of whether the lexical item is formal or informal. Full and sense synonyms will not be further discussed here as the present study is concerned with near-synonyms.

Near-synonyms are defined as words which have some but not all shades of meaning in common (Cruse, 2000). Similarly, they are seen as words that have similar but not identical meanings (Murphy, 2003). O'Neill (2018) contends that within the domain of lexical semantics, near-synonyms are more common than the other types of synonyms. The pair of ‘misty’ and ‘foggy’ is an example of near-synonyms as mistiness is a degree which is lower than fogginess. Furthermore, Haily and Jung (2015) point out that the words ‘beautiful’ and ‘pretty’ are near-synonyms because these words do not have the same usage in all contexts. In fact, near-synonymy is an interesting and challenging topic in lexical semantics research due to the difficulty in distinguishing near-synonyms or similar words in general even for the native speakers of a language (Wang, 2016). The current study aims to investigate the contextual meaning of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms, the semantic differences between them and how these differences are reflected in the English translation.

The Holy Qur'ān includes near-synonyms which seem to have exactly the same meaning but convey different meanings upon deeper semantic analysis of the semantic constituents of these near-synonyms. In this regard, Abdul-Raof (2018) applauds that “each lexical item in the Holy Qur'ān has its own inherent semantic componential features which can be slightly distinct from another lexical item that has its own innate semantic componential features claiming that the context and semantic componential features are the major factors in the selection of one word rather than the other” (p. 109). In a similar vein, Al-Sha^crāwī (1993) claims that every near-synonym in the Holy Qur'ān has a specific meaning that cannot be replaced by another Qur'ānic lexical item even though the two near-synonyms resemble each other. For instance, the Qur'ānic pair غيث *ghaith* and مطر *maṭar* have one equivalent in English (i.e. rain). Nevertheless, they have differences in meaning and more significantly such near-synonyms cannot be employed interchangeably in the Holy Qur'ān. Although both near-synonyms share the primary meaning “rain”, the lexical item غيث (*ghaith*) is always associated with mercy, compassion, and welfare whereas its near-synonyms مطر (*maṭar*) is always associated with punishment, destruction, and Godly wrath and torment (Al-Sowaidi, 2011).

In fact, the differences in meaning between such near-synonyms are difficult to understand even for non-specialist Arabic speakers due to the fact that they are interchangeably used in Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA). Such differences in are vital to perceive the Qur'ānic texts appropriately. If the differences in meaning between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are understood by the reader or translator, the Qur'ānic message would not be conveyed appropriately.

Literature (Ali, 1938, Abdul-Raof, 2001, Al-Sowaidi, 2011, Hassan, 2014, and Abdul-Ghafour et al, 2017) reveals that Qur'ānic near-synonymy is one of the difficulties that the translators face when they translate the Holy Qur'ān in that the Qur'ānic near-synonyms have special features that make their translation into another language highly problematic. In this regard, Ali (1938) maintains that the Qur'ānic vocabulary is so rich that it gives different words for similar ideas and things which have only one English

equivalent. Besides, it is claimed that although some Qur'ānic near-synonyms are used interchangeably in MSA, they are employed in the Holy Qur'ān differently (Al-Sowaidi, 2011).

An example of such near-synonyms is the Qur'ānic pair of *حلف* *ḥalafa* and *اقسم* *'aqsama* (swore). Abū 'Udah (1985) differentiates between these Qur'ānic near-synonyms claiming that *حلف* (*ḥalafa*) means untruthfully swore and is used to implicate a false oath while *اقسم* (*'aqsama*) means truthfully swore and implies a true oath in the Holy Qur'ān. In fact, English does not have equivalents for these near-synonyms and have only one general equivalent for both near-synonyms (i.e. swear). In addition, these two near-synonyms are utilized interchangeably in MSA and thus the semantic between them are difficult to understand even for the native speakers of Arabic. Another example of Qur'ānic near-synonyms is the pair of *العفو* *al-ʿafwa* and *المغفرة* *al-maghferah* (forgiveness). Abdul-Ghafour et al (2017) investigated the semantic differences between such Qur'ānic near-synonyms claiming that although both near-synonyms have the primary meaning 'forgiveness', in common, *العفو* *al-ʿafwa* might be associated with rebuke and blame whereas *المغفرة* *al-maghfirah* (forgiveness) is associated with the encasement, veil, and concealment of the sin. They add that the semantic differences between these near-synonyms are not reflected in the English translation and both Qur'ānic near-synonyms are dealt with as absolute near-synonyms.

The semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are vital to understanding the Qur'ānic texts. If such differences in meaning are not reflected in the English translation, the Qur'ānic text will be misinterpreted. This study aims to identify the contextual purposes of the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms, using various exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, it highlights the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and how these semantic differences are reflected in the English translation.

This study aims to achieve these objectives: i) to identify the contextual meanings of the chosen Qur'ānic near-synonyms as explained by the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān; ii) to compare the meanings of the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms in respect of denotative and connotative meanings, and iii) to investigate how the semantic differences between the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected in the English translations.

METHOD

This study examines three pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms: i) *مسغبة* *masghabah*/ *جوع* *jūʿ* (hunger), ii) *خَطْبًا* *khiṭ'an* (sin) and *خَطِيئَةً* *khaṭī'ah* (fault) and iii) *السر* *al-sirr* (secret) and *النجوى* *al-najwa* (secret conversations). These Qur'ānic near-synonyms are particularly chosen for some reasons. First, the Qur'ānic near-synonyms *مسغبة* *masghabah* (hunger), *خَطْبًا* *khiṭ'an* (sin) and *النجوى* *al-najwa* (secret conversations) are not common in the MSA and thus it is difficult to differentiate between them and their Qur'ānic near-synonyms even for the native speakers of Arabic. Second, the selected pairs of Qur'ānic near-synonyms occur frequently in the Holy Qur'ān; the pairs *مسغبة* *masghabah*/ *جوع* *jūʿ* (hunger), *خَطْبًا* *khiṭ'an* (sin) / *خَطِيئَةً* *khaṭī'ah* (fault) and *السر* *al-sirr* (secret) / *النجوى* *al-najwa* (secret conversations) occur 5, 10 and 21 times in the Holy Qur'ān respectively.

Moreover, the present study investigates two English translations of the Holy Qur'ān, Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). Thomas Ballantyne Irving was an American Muslim author, scholar, and professor. He wrote the first American English translation of the Qur'ān, published in 1985. However, Arthur John Arberry was a non-Muslim American scholar and writer of *The Koran Interpreted*, first published in 1955. Irving's (2002) and Arberry's (2003) translations are adopted for some reasons. First, both translators have different religious backgrounds because Irving is a Muslim, whereas Arberry is a Christian. Thus, the study investigates how Muslim and non-Muslim translators realize and convey the meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Second, the translators use different translation approaches for the Holy Qur'ān translation. Irving (2002) uses a communicative translation approach, while Arberry adopts a literal translation approach in his translation.

Consequently, the current study investigates how two translators employing two different translation approaches convey the differences in meaning between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Besides, Arberry's translation of the Holy Qur'ān is considered the most dependable translation by a Christian native English speaker. His translation addressed English readers born and living in the west (Al-Azzam, 2005). Moreover, Irving's translation of the Holy Qur'ān is also written in modern English, in which the most straightforward word is used. According to Irving, doing so helps the Muslim child and the interested non-Muslims understand the Qur'ānic message.

This study makes use of many exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. The analyses of Al-Shacrāwī (1991) and Ibn cĀshūr (1984) are adopted because the exegetes worked on explaining the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Other exegeses like Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Qurṭubī (2006), and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) are also consulted because they are regarded prominent as explained by (Abdul-Raof, 2001). These prominent exegeses are dependable, and thus they provide the precise meanings of the Qur'ānic texts, verses, and the context of these verses, which are essential to understand the differences in meaning between the chosen Qur'ānic near-synonyms.

To achieve the objectives of study, the researchers went through many steps. First, the Qur'ānic verses where the selected Qur'ānic pairs are used were identified. However, only two Qur'ānic verses for each pair are selected and analyzed because they convey the meaning of Qur'ānic near-synonyms and there are no benefits in analyzing all the verses in which the near-synonyms occur in the Holy Qur'ān. After selecting two Qur'ānic verses for each pair, the Qur'ānic verses were presented along with their English translations in tables. Subsequently, the researchers identified the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic pair based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān and the semantic differences between such near-synonyms are also explained based on the parameters of the RC-S approach by Murphy (2003). Finally, the study discussed how the semantic differences between the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected into the English translations of the Holy Qur'ān.

Data Analysis

The study's data are qualitatively analyzed based on Murphy's Relation by Contrast Approach to Synonyms (RC-S) (2003). This approach explains synonymy regarding the minimal semantic differences between the synonyms. Murphy claims that in any set of different word forms with similar denotations, there could be a slight

semantic difference in denotative and expressive meaning between the synonyms. Consequently, the differences in meaning between the synonyms can be explained based on the offered parameters:

Denotative Meaning

Denotation refers to “the relationship between sense and reference, and the sense of a word is the set of conditions on the word reference” (Murphy, 2003, p. 148). Hatim and Mason (1997) distinguish between two kinds of meaning: denotative and connotative meanings. They argue that denotation covers a word's core referential meanings. At the same time, connotation refers to a word's additional meanings beyond its referential meaning, e.g., notorious means ‘famous’ but with negative connotations. The connotative meaning is also named expressive meaning by Murphy (2003) and will be discussed in the next section.

Expressive Elements of Meaning

Expressive meaning comprises connotative, affective and social meaning (Murphy, 2003). These meanings will be highlighted below:

Connotation is viewed as “the additional meanings that a word or phrase has beyond its central meaning” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 108).

Affect is a non-denotative meaning that is concerned with the speaker's attitude toward the subject at hand (Murphy, 2003).

Social meaning comprises dialect, register, jargon, and other sub-varieties of a language or vocabulary (Murphy, 2003).

This approach is adopted in the present study because it offers a framework for analyzing the study's data by providing parameters that facilitate the analysis of the differences in meaning between the selected near-synonyms. Based on the RC-S approach, the purposes of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are analyzed, and the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are highlighted and discussed. Finally, the study examines how the differences in meaning between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are reflected in the English translations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Contextual Meanings Of جوع *Jūc* And مسغبة *Masghabah*

The contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms جوع *jūc* and مسغبة *masghabah* (hunger) reveals that there exist some semantic differences between these Qur'ānic words in terms of denotative and connotative meanings. This section discusses the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic pair based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Here is the contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses:

Table 1 The contextual meaning of جوع *jūc* (hunger)

The Qur'ānic verse	Irving's (2002) translation	Arberry's (2003) translation
قال تعالى: "لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيْعٍ، لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ" ﴿٦-٧﴾ الغاشية ﴿٦-٧﴾	“They will have no food except some cactus which will neither fatten (them) nor satisfy their <u>hunger</u> ”(Al-Ghashyah: 6-7)	“No food for them but cactus thorn unfattening, unappealing <u>hunger</u> ” (Al-Ghashyah: 6-7)

This verse describes the state of those who enter the Fire and in particular the type of food provided to them in the Hereafter. The verses illustrate that they will not have food save for ضريع *darīc* (cactus) - a kind of harmful plants grown in the roads of

Mecca. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) provides an interpretation of this word, ضريع *darīc* (cactus), as a thorny plant; if it is soft, it is called شبرق (*shabraq*) and can be eaten by camels but if it is hard, it is called ضريع *darīc* (cactus) and no animal grazes on due to its vileness. Furthermore, this kind of plant, ضريع *darīc* (cactus), neither nourishes nor avails against hunger.

Al-Qurtubī (2006) asserts that when this verse “لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيْعٍ” (They will have no food except some cactus) was revealed upon the Prophet Mohammed, the infidels claimed that their camels eat ضريع *darīc* (cactus) and become fat. Then, the next verse “لَا يَسْمَنُ وَلَا يَغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ” (which will neither fatten (them) nor satisfy their hunger) was revealed to prove that they are liars. He also illustrates that the infidels are not right in that their camels eat شبرق *shabraq* (soft cactus) but ضريع *darīc* (the hard cactus) does not help fatten their camels. Therefore, it can be concluded that hunger in this verse denotes the feeling that someone needs to eat because their stomachs are empty. In the next verse, the contextual meaning of the near-synonym مَسْغَبَةٌ *masghabah* (hunger) will be discussed.

Table 2 The contextual meaning of مَسْغَبَةٌ *masghabah* (hunger)

The Qur'ānic verse	Irving's (2002) translation	Arberry's (2003) translation
قال تعالى "أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ، يتيما ذا مقربة" ﴿14-15 البلد﴾	"Feeding some orphaned relative on a day of <u>famine</u> " (Al-Balad: 14-15)	"Or giving food upon a day of <u>hunger</u> to an orphan near of kin" (Al-Balad: 14-15)

These two Qur'ānic verses state that feeding an orphaned relative during a famine is favored in Islam. These two verses are interpreted by Ibn cAshūr (1984), Al-Alūsī (1995), and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) as follows: or feed an orphan near of kin in a time of famine where a large number of people suffer from hunger. They explain that مَسْغَبَةٌ (*masghabah*) in this verse means "famine" where people are in dire need of food. It is seen that مَسْغَبَةٌ (*masghabah*) does not signify the hunger of an individual at a particular time. Besides, Al-Alūsī (1995) adds that مَسْغَبَةٌ (*masghabah*) (famine) refers to the worst type of hunger which is associated with fatigue. Ibn cAshūr (1984) also argues that the lexical item يوم *yawm* (day) in verse مَسْغَبَةٌ ذِي يَوْمٍ فِي (on a day of hunger/famine) implicates "time" but not the literal meaning of the day, i.e., a period of 24 hours. He also claims that the Qur'ānic message in this verse is that feeding at a time of famine when many people are in dire need of food is particularly favored in Islam.

The Semantic Differences Between جوع And مَسْغَبَةٌ Based On RC-S Approach

The contextual analysis of the meanings of the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms demonstrates that there exist some semantic differences between جوع *jūc* and مَسْغَبَةٌ (hunger) in terms of denotative and connotative meanings. It is revealed that the lexical item جوع *jūc* (hunger) denotes the feeling that someone needs to eat. This lexical item is more general than مَسْغَبَةٌ (*masghabah*) (famine), which signifies extreme hunger of a large number of people and is associated with fatigue and weakness as revealed in the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān.

It is also crucial to discuss some of the distinctions made by some Arab scholars between these two words. For instance, Dawūd (2008) differentiates between these words in Arabic, claiming that جوع *jūc* (hunger) is the opposite of satiety and signifies the feeling that somebody or an animal needs to eat because the stomach is empty.

However, *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) denotes severe hunger which is associated with fatigue (ibid). Al-Alūsī (1995) and Dawūd (2008) confirm that *مسغبة* *masghabah* (starvation) is the worst type of *جوع* *jūc* (hunger) as it is associated with weakness, fatigue and exhaustion. Al-Alūsī (1995) also affirms that the lexical item *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) is used to describe the effect of hunger on one's physiology. Moreover, Al-Asfahānī (2009) agrees with Dawūd (2008) and Al-Alūsī (1995) that *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) denotes severe hunger, which is associated with fatigue and thirst. Additionally, *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) is rendered as “famine” in the Dictionary of Islamic Terms by Al-Khudrawī (2004). In this regard, Al-Samarāī (2003) argues that *مسغبة* *masghaba* (famine) refers to a situation in which a large number of people have little or no food for a long time while *جوع* *jūc* (hunger) is a more general word signifying a situation of an individual or a group of people. There are also semantic differences between the near-synonyms “hunger” and “famine” in English. Based on the Oxford English Dictionary (1989), the lexical item “hunger” denotes the uneasy or painful sensation caused by want of food, whereas “famine” signifies extreme and general scarcity of food in a town or country and a period of intense and general dearth. The following section discusses the translations of *مسغبة* *masghaba* (famine) and *جوع* *jūc* (hunger) and how the semantic differences are reflected in the English translation.

The Translations Of *جوع* And *مسغبة*

As discussed in the previous section, it is revealed that the lexical item *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) is more specific than *جوع* *jūc* (hunger). This lexical item *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) denotes extreme and severe hunger of a large number of people. It is also associated with weakness, fatigue, exhaustion and thirst. However, its near-synonym *جوع* *jūc* (hunger) is more general and does not convey the same semantic features of *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine). Consequently, the translation of *مسغبة* *masghabah* by Irving as “famine” is more appropriate. It is seen that Arberry (2003) does not differentiate between the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms *جوع* *jūc* (hunger) and *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine) since both words are rendered as “hunger” by him. It is noticed that he dealt with the two lexical items as absolute synonyms. Therefore, it would have been better had the translator, Arberry, rendered the lexical item *مسغبة* (*masghabah*) as “famine” or “severe/extreme hunger”. The rendering of this lexical item by Ali as “privation” is also appropriate. Such translations would be more faithful and reflect the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms *جوع* *jūc* (hunger) and *مسغبة* *masghabah* (famine).

The Contextual Meanings Of *خَطِيئَةٌ* *Khiṭ'an* (Sin) And *خَطِيئَةٌ* *Khaṭī'ah* (Fault)

The contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic words *خَطِيئَةٌ* *khiṭ'an* (sin) and *خَطِيئَةٌ* *khaṭī'ah* (fault) reveals that there exists a semantic difference between these Qur'ānic words in terms of denotative meaning. This section discusses the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic pair based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Here is the contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses:

Table 3 The contextual meaning of *خَطئًا khiṭ'an* (sin)

The Qur'ānic verse	Irving's (2002) translation	Arberry's (2003) translation
قال تعالى: "وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا" ﴿٣١ الإسراء﴾	"Do not kill your children in dread of poverty; We shall provide for both them and you. Killing them is a serious blunder!" (Al-'Isra:31)	"And slay not your children for fear of poverty; We will provide for you and them; surely the slaying of them is a grievous <u>sin</u> " (Al-'Isra:31)

This verse is concerned with the prohibition of killing children. The meaning of this verse is analyzed here to identify the meaning of *خَطئًا khiṭ'an* (sin). This verse is interpreted by Al-Shacrāwī (1991), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) as follows: Do not kill your children (daughters) by burying them alive for fear of poverty and humiliation. This means that Allah forbade them from killing their children. There is a consensus among exegetes that although *أولادكم awlādikum* (children) denotes male and female children, the intended meaning in this verse is the killing of females (daughters) which was common among some Arab tribes before the era of Islam, and this is the reason behind revealing this verse upon the Prophet Mohammed. Then, Allah said: We shall provide them (your daughters) and you. Killing them is considered a great sin that deserves a tremendous punishment.

Al-Shacrāwī (1991), Al-Alūsī (1995), Ibn Kathīr (1999), Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Qurtubī (2006) explains that *خَطئًا كَبِيرًا khiṭ'an kabiran* in this verse means a great sin. They add that *خَطئًا khiṭ'an* denotes a deliberate mistake which is different from the Arabic lexical item *خَطَأً (khat'an)*, which signifies an indelible error. Thus, the first word is specifically used and is interpreted as "sin" because it (i.e., killing their daughters) is deliberately committed. Similarly, Ibn Al-Jawzī (2002) makes a distinction between the Arabic lexical items *خَطئًا (khiṭ'an)* and *خَطَأً (khata'an)*, claiming that *خَطئًا (khiṭ'an)* denotes *إثم (sin)* while *خَطَأً (khata'an)* means to do something in a wrong way.

Ibn cAshūr (1984) also contends that the Arabic lexical items *خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ khashyat aimlāq* (for fear of poverty) in this verse explains the reasons behind killing their daughters. He argues that *خَطئًا كَبِيرًا كَان قَتْلُهُمْ إِنَّ (killing them is a great sin)* is a warning to those tribes, and the verse implicates the forbiddance of burying their girls alive. In this regard, Ibn cAshūr (1984) argues that *الْخِطْءِ al-khit' (sin)* is the sin that is deliberately committed. Al-Shacrāwī (1991) also point out that the lexical items *نَرْزُقُهُمْ (We provide them)* are mentioned before *وَإِيَّاكُمْ (and you)* to convey a particular meaning. This specific order of words is intended to emphasize that Allah will provide for your daughters, so do not kill them and do not worry about their provision (ibid). The next verse will be analyzed to understand better the meaning of the other near-synonym *خَطِيئَةٌ khatī'ah* (fault) and how it is semantically different from *خَطئًا khiṭ'an* (sin).

Table 4 The contextual meaning of *خَطِيئَةٌ khatī'ah* (fault)

The Qur'ānic verse	Irving's (2002) translation	Arberry's (2003) translation
قال تعالى: "وَمَنْ يَكْسِبْ خَطِيئَةً أَوْ إِثْمًا ثُمَّ يَرْمِ بِهِ بَرِيئًا فَقَدِ احْتَمَلَ بُهْتَانًا وَإِثْمًا مُّبِينًا" (١١٢ النساء)	"Anyone who commits a <u>blunder</u> or vice, then casts [the blame] against some innocent person, will burden himself with slander and flagrant vice" (Al-Nisā: 112).	"And whosoever earns a <u>fault</u> or a sin and then casts it upon the innocent, thereby has laid upon himself calumny and manifest sin" (Al-Nisā: 112)

This verse is considered a warning for those who accuse an innocent person. The meaning of this verse is analyzed to identify the meaning of the Qur'anic word *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (sin). This verse is interpreted by Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) as follows: And whoever commits a minor sin (mistake) or a grave sin and afterward throws the blame upon an innocent person, he has burdened himself with calumny by falsely accusing an innocent person and a manifest sin that is apparent because of what s/he has committed.

In this verse, the two near-synonyms are used together at the beginning of the verse, and thus it is essential to highlight the semantic differences between the words in the light of the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Al-Shacrāwī (1991) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) differentiate between *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) and *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) by claiming that *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) is not intentionally committed. In contrast, *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) is intentionally committed. Therefore, they are used together in the same verse. Moreover, Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) claims that the lexical item *يَكْسِبُ yaksab* (earn/commit) in this verse indicates that the person who commits a minor sin or sin is the only one responsible for those mistakes as well as sins. Ibn cAshūr (1984) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) also agree with Al-Ṭabarī (2001) in terms of the distinction made between *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) and *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) and adds that *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) is a minor sin while *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) is a grave one.

The Semantic Differences Between *خَطِيئَةٌ* And *إِثْمٌ* Based On RC-S Approach

As shown in the contextual meanings of the two Qur'anic near-synonyms, there exist some semantic differences between *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) and *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) in terms of denotative meaning. The semantic differences between the two Qur'anic words are explained here in the light of the parameters mentioned by Murphy (2003).

As noticed in the contextual analysis, there exist some differences between the two Qur'anic near-synonyms in terms of the denotative meaning. Based on the exegeses, the Qur'anic word *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (*khiṭ'an*) denotes a grave sin and is deliberately committed. However, *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* signifies a minor sin and is indeliberately committed. In addition to what has been discussed in the contextual analysis, it is perhaps crucial to indicate that other scholars (Al-Askarī 1997; Dawūd 2008; Al-Asfahānī 2009) discuss the semantic differences between these two lexical items and acknowledge that *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) is a minor sin and is committed unintentionally by people while *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) is a grave sin and is intentionally committed.

The Translations Of *خَطِيئَةٌ* *Khaṭī'ah* (Fault) And *إِثْمٌ* *Khiṭ'an* (sin)

As noticed in the contextual analysis, there exist some semantic differences between *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) and *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) in terms of denotation. However, it is revealed that the semantic differences between these two Qur'anic words are not reflected in the English translations. For instance, Irving (2002) does not differentiate between both Qur'anic words *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) and *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin) and render them as “blunder”. In English, the lexical item “blunder” denotes a careless and stupid mistake (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). This lexical item, blunder, reflects neither the meaning of *خَطِيئَةٌ khaṭī'ah* (fault) nor the meaning of *إِثْمٌ aiṭhm* (sin).

Moreover, Arberry (2003) makes an attempt to differentiate between *khīṭ'an* خَطِيئَةً and *khaṭī'ah* خَطِيئَةٌ (sin) by translating the lexical item *khaṭī'ah* as “fault” and *khīṭ'an* as “sin”. The rendition of *khīṭ'an* as “sin” is appropriate. In English, this lexical item, sin, means an action that is against religious rules and is considered to be an offence against God (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007) or an act which is regarded as a transgression of the divine law/ a violation of some religious or moral principle (the Oxford English Dictionary 1989) which reflects the meaning of *khīṭ'an*(sin). However, the translation of *khaṭī'ah* as “fault” is not that congruent with the meaning of the original Qur'ānic word since this word implicates that the fault is intentional and is defined as a usually intentional act forbidden by law (Merriam-Webster online) or deficiency of something or blamable quality (the Oxford English Dictionary 1989). It would have been better had the translators rendered this lexical item, *khaṭī'ah*, as “mistake”. Such translation would be more appropriate as it reflects the meaning of this word as an unintentional mistake based on (Merriam-Webster online).

السِرّ Al-Sirr (Secret) And النجوى Al-Najwa (Secret Conversations)

The contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic words *السِرّ al-sirr* (secret) and *النجوى al-najwa* (secret conversations) reveals that there exists a semantic difference between these Qur'ānic words in terms of denotative meaning. This section discusses the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic pair on the basis of the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Here is the contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses:

Table 5 The contextual meaning of *السِرّ al-sirr* (secret)

The Qur'ānic verse	Irving's (2002) translation	Arberry's (2003) translation
قال تعالى: ”وَأَنَّ تَجَهَّرَ بِأَقْوَالِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى ﴿٧ طه﴾”	“No matter whether you speak out loud, He still knows your secrets and what is even more suppressed” (Taha: 7)	“Be thou loud in thy speech, yet surely He knows the <u>secret</u> and that yet more hidden” (Taha: 7).

This verse conveys a message to humankind that Allah does not only know the secret but He also knows what is more hidden than a secret. The meaning of this verse is analyzed here to identify the meaning of *السِرّ al-sirr* (the secret). Ibn 'Ashūr (1984), Al-Sha'rāwī (1991) and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) explain that this verse states that God knows the secret and that yet more hidden than the secret (i.e. the whisper of the soul to oneself and that which happens to someone's mind but without speaking to anyone else). They claim that *السِرّ al-sirr* (the secret) is something hidden among a few people while *وَأَخْفَى wa 'akhfa* (what is more hidden) denotes the whisper of the soul without speaking to others. In addition, Al-Zamakhshari (2009) provides two interpretations of the lexical item *وَأَخْفَى wa 'akhfa* (what is more hidden) claiming that it might mean what is more hidden than secret (the whisper of the soul) and might be the verb *أخفى 'akhfa* (hid) in the past form and thus the interpretation of the verse will be: Allah knows the secret but hid what He knows about them so that they would not know.

Al-Sha'rāwī (1991) points out that this verse conveys a certain message to humankind. He explains that the verse conveys a Qur'ānic message to hypocrites who

pretend to have certain beliefs or opinions but they do not really have. Thus, Allah will know the secret and even the whisper of the soul. Al-Sha^crāwī (1991) explains that *السر* *al-sirr* (the secret) is the opposite of *الجهر* *al-jahr* (openness) and consequently *السر* *al-sirr* (the secret) is to hide something among a few people while *الجهر* *al-jahr* (openness) is the act of openly talking to others. Al-Sha^crāwī (1991) agrees with Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Ibn ^cAshūr (1984) with regard to the meaning of *وَأَخْفَى* *wa 'akhfa* (what is more hidden) saying that the intended meaning of this lexical item is the whisper of the self. The next verse will be analyzed in order to understand the meaning of the other near-synonym *النجوى* *al-najwa* (secret conversations) and how it is semantically different from *السر* *al-sirr* (the secret).

Table 5 The contextual meaning of *السر* *al-sirr* (secret)

The Qur'ānic verse	Irving's (2002) translation	Arberry's (2003) translation
<p>قال تعالى: “لَا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِنْ نَجْوَاهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَاحٍ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا” (النساء: 114)</p>	<p>“There is no good in much of <u>their intrigue</u> except with someone who calls for charity, decency or reconciliation among people; We shall give a splendid wage to anyone who does that in pursuit of God's approval” (Al-Nisā: 114).</p>	<p>“No good is there in much of <u>their conspiring</u>, except for him who bids to freewill offering, or honour, or setting things right between the people. Whoso does that, seeking God's good pleasure, We shall surely give him a mighty wage (Al-Nisā: 114).</p>

The verse explains the condition of *النَّجْوَى* *al-najwa* (secret conversation) i.e. when they are good. The meaning of this verse is analyzed to identify the meaning of the Qur'ānic word *نَجْوَاهُمْ* *najwāhum* (their conspiring). This verse is interpreted by Ibn ^cAshūr (1984), Al-Sha^crāwī (1991), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), and Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) as follows: There is no good in much of their secret conversations except for the secret talks of he who enjoins to freewill offering, voluntary almsgiving and who encourages the giving of alms to the poor or kindness, a righteous deed or reconciliation among people. Whoever does that for the sake of God's good pleasure as well as contentment but nothing else of the affairs of this life, We shall give him/her a great reward.

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) explains that *المعروف* *al-ma^crūf* (kindness) in this verse denotes all what Allah commands humankind to do like righteousness and good deeds *أو إصلاح* *or* setting things right among people and putting an end to conflicts among people *ومن يفعل ذلك إبتغاء مرضات الله فسوف نؤتيه أجرا عظيما* and who he does all these deeds to win the satisfaction of God will surely be provided with a great reward i.e. the Paradise.

Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) points out that the lexical item *نَجْوَاهُمْ* *najwāhum* signifies *التناجي* *tanājī al-nās* (the people's secret conversations). Besides, Ibn Kathīr (1999) and Al-Qurṭubī (2006) acknowledge that *النجوى* *al-najwa* (secret conversations) signifies the secret between two persons and it is good if it is about enjoining to freewill offering, setting things right between people or kindness. Al-Qurṭubī (2006) also claims that this Qur'ānic word is also interpreted by other exegetes as the secret conversations between two or more people providing the Arabic sentence *ناجيت فلاناً* *nājaytu fulanan* (I talked to somebody secretly) as an example. Ibn ^cAshūr (1984) and Al-Sha^crāwī (1991) assert that *النجوى* *al-najwa* (the secret conversations) of people might be good in some cases and thus the exception in this verse *إلا من أمر بصدقة* (except with someone who calls for charity) implicates that the secret conversations might be good as indicated in this

verse. Ibn ʿAshūr (1984) illustrates that the secret conversations are good if they are about these three matters: calling for charity, decency or reconciliation among people. According to him, if the secret conversations are not about these issues, then they are not good.

The Semantic Differences Between السر And النجوى Based On RC-S Approach

As revealed in the contextual analysis of the meanings of the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms, there exist some semantic differences between السر *al-sirr* (secret) and النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations) in terms of denotative meaning. The semantic differences between the two Qur'ānic words are explained here in the light of the parameters mentioned by Murphy (2003).

As noticed in the contextual analysis, there exist some differences between the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms in terms of the denotative meaning. It is revealed that السر *al-sirr* (the secret) is something hidden in one's self or among a few people while النجوى *al-najwa* signifies the secret conversations or secret talks of people. It is also revealed that النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations) are good only if they are about enjoining to freewill offering, setting things right between people or kindness. In other words, the exception in this verse إلا من أمر بصدقة (except with someone who calls for charity) implicates that the secret conversations might be good. If النجوى *al-najwa* (the secret conversations) are not about these three deeds (i.e. calling for charity, decency or reconciliation among people), then they are not good. Therefore, it could be concluded that the Qur'ānic word النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations) is more specific than السر *al-sirr* (the secret). According to Dawūd (2008), النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations) is more specific than السر *al-sirr* (secret) since it is limited only to conversations (i.e. not actions).

Furthermore, Al-Askarī (1997) and Dawūd (2008) claim that the lexical item النجوى *al-najwa* denotes the secret talks while the word السر *al-sirr* means to hide something in one's self and not to reveal it to anyone else. They assert that السر *al-sirr* (secret) is not shared with someone else; it is only kept in one's self and thus السر *al-sirr* (secret) is a more closely-guarded secret than النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations). Also, Al-Askarī (1997) asserts that النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations) signifies speech only while السر *al-sirr* (secret) might be speech or actions. Abdur-Rahim (2008) also points out that the word السر *al-sirr* denotes “secret” while the word النجوى *al-najwa* signifies “a private conference” or “clandestine discourse”. The Complete Easy Dictionary of the Qur'ān by Parekh (2000) also provides the words “secret conferences” as an equivalent to the Qur'ānic word النجوى *al-najwa* (secret conversations).

The Translations Of السر And النجوى

This verse conveys to humankind that Allah does not only know the secret but also knows what is more hidden than a secret. The meaning of this verse is analyzed here to identify the meaning of السر *al-sirr* (the unknown). Ibn ʿAshūr (1984), Al-Shacrāwī (1991), and Al-Ṭabarī (2001) explain that this verse states that God knows the secret and that yet more hidden than the secret (i.e. the whisper of the soul to oneself and that which happens to someone's mind but without speaking to anyone else). They claim that السر *al-sirr* (the secret) is something hidden among a few people while وأخفى *wa'akhfa* (what is

more hidden) denotes the whisper of the soul without speaking to others. In addition, Al-Zamakhshari (2009) provides two interpretations of the lexical item *وَأَخْفَى* *wa'akhfa* (what is more hidden) claiming that it might mean what is more hidden than secret (the whisper of the soul) and might be the verb *أخفى* *'akhfa* (hid) in the past form and thus the interpretation of the verse will be: Allah knows the secret but hid what He knows about them so that they would not know.

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Moreover, both translators rendered the lexical item *أجرا* *ajran* as “wage”. This word is always associated with money (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). Since the intended meaning here is the Paradise, it would have been better had the translators rendered this lexical item as “reward”. This translation would be more faithful and accurate.

CONCLUSION

The study results reveal that the Qur'ānic texts are different from all other types of texts written by humans in that Allah reveals the Qur'ān for humankind. It is noticed that each lexical item is purposefully selected to convey a specific meaning. More importantly, the Qur'ānic near-synonyms cannot be interchangeably used in all Qur'ānic verses. The data analysis also shows differences in denotative and connotative meanings between the selected Qur'ānic near-synonyms. However, these differences in meaning are not reflected in the English translations of Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). Therefore, the current study highly recommends that the translators of the Holy Qur'ān should look for the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms whenever they encounter lexical items with similar meanings and make sure that such semantic differences are reflected in their translations. It is also shown that the Qur'ānic context where the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are used plays an essential role in making the meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms clear to the reader and the translator.

Consequently, the current study emphasizes the importance of conducting a contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic verses that the translators intend to translate. This analysis could help clarify the differences in meaning between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Whenever the readers or translators of the Holy Qur'ān encounter near-synonyms with similar meanings, they should consult as many prominent exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān as possible because this helps in understanding the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms. Finally, the literature reveals that few studies have investigated the Qur'ānic near-synonyms and their English translation. Consequently,

there is a need to investigate further the Qur'ānic near-synonyms, specifically their English translations, due to the importance of the Holy Qur'ān to all Muslims worldwide.

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