Investigating Synonyms in the Glorious Qur’an

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ABSTRACT

Synonymous forms are of importance in language, as they are used to avoid repetition, make explication and clarification. Synonyms can be defined as different lexemes with nearly similar meanings. The present study deals with synonyms in terms of their nominal, clausal, phrasal, and verbal levels. At the stylistic level, synonyms are considered to be a sign of eloquence. The pivotal issue of the present study is to investigate the phenomenon of synonyms in the glorious Qur’an. It also discusses the idea of no total similarity in meaning among words.

Keywords: synonyms, semantic relations, lexeme.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of synonyms has received a great deal of interest by linguists and theorists, alike, over a very long period of time. This interest has linguists into two groups: one group believes in identical synonymy while the other group rejects the idea of total synonymy. Yule (2006: 251) defines synonymy as "the lexical relation in which two or more words have very closely related meanings, e.g. conceal is a synonym of hide. Arab and non-Arab linguists seem to have agreed on the idea that there is no identical meaning between lexical items, i.e. the idea of sameness is a fictitious one.

Since there is the sense of no total sameness between lexical items, we try to pinpoint the fact that synonyms pose a problem for researchers. Nevertheless, the study will touch upon the salient synonymous items in the Sura of Al-Maaida. The present study aims to demonstrate that the glorious Qur’an is almost the richest source of synonyms. This study is limited to the analysis of only one Sura in the glorious Qur’an, i.e. the Sura of Al-Maaida. By doing so, it aims at showing one type of lexical relations embodied in synonymy.

It is hypothesized that the phenomenon of synonymy is not a clear cut one. There is no identical meaning between lexical items. Likewise, it has been hypothesized that the glorious Qur’an is the most reliable reference through which we can investigate and shed light on this phenomenon. The present study is divided into two main sections. The first section includes a short survey of semantic relations with reference to synonymy, as the main interest of the study, the origin of the word synonymy with some examples. It also covers the Arab and non-Arab linguists’ views on this phenomenon.

The second section consists of the analysis of the Sura of Al-Maaida. In his section, the researchers classify the synonymous items into four levels namely: nominal, verbal, phrasal, and clausal. A table has also been provided showing the frequencies of occurrences of these four levels and the number of the verses. The researchers have adopted the translation of Yusif Ali to the glorious Qur’an.

SECTION ONE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Semantic Relation

Semantic relations are the fundamental building blocks that allow words to be associated with each other to form a cohesive text. Despite their importance, semantic relations are severely underrepresented in current linguistic anthologies (Ranger and Ratnaparkhi, 1997:17). As Morris and Hirst (2004:13) point out, current linguistic anthologies only capture what they call classical relations. Basically, wordnet relations can be said to cover concepts such as hyponymy, polysemy,
metonymy, homophony, antonymy and synonymy. The present paper will limit itself to synonymy in particular.

On reading, a text, the relations between the words will contribute to the understanding of that text. Related pairs may join together to form larger groups of related words that can extend freely over sentence boundaries. These larger word groups contribute to the meaning of the text through text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 320). In looking for lexical relations, we look at the word choice in a text and observe the connections of meaning between words. These connections of meaning constitute very important factors by which a text can maintain both cohesiveness and meaning together.

There are a number of different types of lexical relations. A particular lexeme may be present simultaneously in a number of these relations, so that it may be more accurate to think of the lexicon as a network, rather than a listing of words as in a published dictionary (Saeed, 1997: 63). An Important organizational principle in the lexicon is the lexical field. This is a group of lexemes which belong to a particular activity or area of specialist knowledge, such as terms in cooking or sailing; or the vocabulary used by doctors, coal miners or mountain climbers. One effect is the use of specialists terms like phoneme in linguistics or gigabyte in computing. More common, though, is the use of different senses of a word, for example:

- Blanket (verb) to cover with a blanket.
- Blanket (verb) sailing to block another vessel's wind by sailing close to it on the wind word side.

Dictionaries recognize the effect of lexical fields by including in lexical entry labels like Banking, Angling, etc. as in the example above.

One effect of lexical fields is that lexical relations are more common between lexemes in the same field. Thus, peak “part of the mountain” is a near synonym of the summit, while peak “part of a hat” is a near synonym of the visor. Related to the above-mentioned points are synonyms which constitute part of the wordnet relations.

**History and Origin of Synonymy**

Synonyms are different words with identical or very similar meanings. Words that are synonyms are said to be synonymous, and the state of being a synonym is called synonymy. The word comes from the ancient Greek syn (with) and onoma (name) (Wikipedia). The words car and automobile are synonyms. Similarly, if we talk about a long time or an extended time, “long” and “extended” become synonyms. In the figurative sense, according to (Hockett, 1964: 57), two words are often said to be synonymous if they have the same connotations.

Synonyms can be any part of speech (e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs or prepositions) as long as both members of the pair are the same part of speech. Consider the examples below:

- student and pupil (nouns)
- buy and purchase (verbs)
- sick and ill (adjectives)
- quickly and speedily (adverbs)
- on and upon (prepositions)

Synonymy is a term used in semantics to refer to a major type of sense relations between lexical items: lexical items which have the same meanings are synonyms. Synonyms can be said to occur if items are closed enough in their meaning to allow a choice to be made between them in some contexts, without there being any difference in the meaning of the sentence as a whole (Crystal, 2003: 450). Saeed (1997:65) defines synonyms as different phonological words which have the same or very similar meanings. Some examples might be the pairs below:

- Couch \ Sofa
- Boy \ Lad
- Lawyer \ Attorney
- Large \ Big

Thus, two expressions of language are called synonyms if they mean the same. This notion typically applied to lexical items, including idioms, but it can be used for larger expressions as well, of course.

Synonyms expressions can, in general, be substituted for each other without change of the truth conditions of the largest constructions in which they are used. This is typically used as a defining criterion for synonyms. Curse (1986:88) states that “a lexical expression A is a synonym of a lexical expression B if every declarative sentence that contains A has the same conditions as B, the sentence where A is related to B.

Some lexicographers, however, claim that no synonyms have exactly the same meaning (in all context or social levels of language) because etymology, orthography, phonetic qualities, ambiguous meaning, usage, etc. make them unique. Different words that are similar in meaning usually differ for a reason: facline is more formal than cat; long and extended are only synonyms in one usage and not in others, for example, a long arm is not the same as an extended arm. It allows that there are few true synonyms.

This stand has also been emphasized by some Arab linguists. Malik (1980:20 ff) states that “until the beginning of the third Century A.H. the concept of total synonymy prevailed among Arab linguists. Ibn Gini, Al-Asmaiy and Al-Fairouz Abadi held the view that there was a total sameness among words and lexical relations. After that, a new trend has risen among Arab linguists that there is no total sameness among words. The pioneers of this trend were Abo Mansoor Al-Thaalibi, author of “Fiquh Al-Lugha Wa Asrar Al-Arabia”. Through this book, Al-Thaalibi affirmed that words are not synonyms. This group of linguists envisaged words which could have been thought of as synonyms, but they were semi-synonymous because they carried minute differences that can be discovered by linguists who considered language as a matter of sense, test, and common sense”. (The translation is mine).

This view of non-total synonymy has been supported by other non-Arab linguists. Lobner (2002:46) demonstrates this idea by presenting the notion of *partial synonymy*: two lexemes may have one meaning variant in common. For example, spectacles and glasses may both denote the same sort of objects that people wear in their noses to look through, but glasses may also just be the plural of glass in one of its other meanings. Similarly, the United States and America are used synonymously, but the latter may also be used for continent consisting of North, Central, and South America. Words with same descriptive meaning but different social or expressive meanings may also be regarded partial synonyms.

Yule (2006:104) confirms that the idea of ‘sameness’ of meaning used in discussing synonymy is not necessarily ‘total’ sameness. There are many occasions when one word is appropriate in a sentence, but its synonym would be odd. For example, whereas the word answer fits in a sentence like “John had only one answer correct in the exam”, the word reply

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would sound odd. Synonymous forms may also differ in terms of formal and informal uses. The sentence "my dad bought a big car" with four synonymous replacements, but the second version sounds more casual or informal than the first.

Plater (1981) notes that synonyms often have different distributions of a number of parameters. They may have belonged to different dialects and then become synonyms for speakers familiar with both dialects like Irish English Press and British English Cupboard. Or the words may belong to different registers, those styles of language, colloquial, formal, literary, etc. that belong to different situations. Thus, wife or spouse, are more formal than old lady or missus.

Synonyms may portray positive or negative of the speaker; naïve or gullible seem more critical than ingenuous. One or other of the synonyms may be collocational restriction. For example. The sentences below might mean roughly the same thing in some contexts:

- She called out to the young boy.
- She called out to the young lad.
- She called out to the young man.

In other contexts, however, the words, lad and boy have different connotations. Consider the examples below:

- he always was a bit of a lad.
- he always was a bit of a boy.

In investigating the occurrence of some words which can be said to have some synonyms in the glorious Qur’an, one can observe that there are some differences between these so-called synonyms and each should not replace the other, otherwise there will be a deviation from the original meaning.

Consider the examples below taken from the glorious Qur’an and see how far these words and expressions are synonymous:

[2:2] "This is the book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah;"

[2:12] "We have sent it as an Arabic Qur’an in order that ye may learn wisdom"

These two expressions “The Book and Qur’an” are synonyms, they both refer to the glorious Qur’an.

SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY

It is time now to investigate the phenomenon of synonymy in the Sura of Al-Maaida of the glorious Qur’an. Since the glorious Qur’an is rich in synonyms, and if one decides to tackle this phenomenon in all Suras, he may need a detailed and comprehensive study rather than a paper to cover such a phenomenon. Hence, the researchers have devoted the analysis to the Sura of Al-Maaida inclusively.

The researchers have classified synonyms into four levels: Nominal, Verbal, Phrasal, and Clausal. Annexed to the analysis is a table showing the frequencies of occurrences of the items and the number of the verses.

Analysis of the Sura of Al-Maaida

In this analysis, the synonymous forms are underlined for the purpose of making them accessible to the reader.

Analysis at the Nominal Level

A nominal phrase is a group of words functioning as a noun. Consider the following examples:

[2:2] "This is the book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah;"

[2:12] "We have sent it as an Arabic Qur’an in order that ye may learn wisdom"

These two expressions “The Book and Qur’an” are synonyms, they both refer to the glorious Qur’an.

O ye who believe! Violate not the sanctity of the symbols of Allah, nor of the sacred month, nor of the animals brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands that mark out such animals, nor the people resorting to the sacred house, seeking of the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord. But when ye are clear of the sacred precincts and of pilgrim garb, ye may hunt and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part). Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment.

Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than Allah; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been partly eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety. This day has those who reject faith given up all hope of your religion: yet fear them not but fear Me. This day has I perfecedd your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, Allah is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

This day is (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time, - when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues if any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).

From those, too, who call themselves Christians. We did take a covenant, but they forgot a good part of the message that was sent them: so we estranged them, with enmity and hatred

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between the one and the other, to the day of judgment. And soon will Allah show them what it is they have done. (14)

Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers for there is no god except One Allah. If they desist not from their work (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them. (73)

Then will Allah say: '0 Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favour to thee and to thy mother! Behold! I strengthened thee with the holy spirit so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturity! Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it and it becomes a bird by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! thou bringest forth the dead by My leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) thee when thou didst show them the clear Signs, and the unbelievers among them said: 'This is nothing but evident magic.' (110)

Then will Allah say: "Who then hath the least power against Me? For to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all their fruits: and to Him belongeth the dominion of the worlds. (28)

Allah did aforetime take a covenant from the Children of Israel, and we sent Jesus the son of Mary, and a predicate. Consider the examples below:

And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah (46)

Many of them dost thou see, racing each other in sin and rancour, and their eating of things forbidden. Evil indeed are the things that they do. (62)

The Jews say: "Allah's hand is tied up." Be their hands tied up and be they accused for the (blasphemy) they utter. Nay, both His hands are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth. But the revelation that cometh to thee from Allah increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. Amongst them, we have placed enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgment. Every time they kindle the fire of war, Allah doth extinguish it; but they (ever) strive to do mischief on earth. And Allah loveth not those who do mischief. (64)
The (selfish) soul of the other led him to the murder of his brother: he murdered him and became (himself) one of the lost ones. (30)

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. "Woe is me!" said he; "Was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the shame of my brother? then he became full of regret. (31)

And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say unto them what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou knowest what is in my heart, Thou I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in Thine heart" (32)

And for this, their prayer hath Allah rewarded them with gardens, with rivers flowing underneath, - their eternal home. Such is the recompense of those who do good. (85)

And to the Unbelievers: their souls have incurred the curse of Allah and His wrath, those of whom some (as judged) by the treatment it received from Allah? those who have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: but many of them follow a course that is evil. (66)

And if only they had stood fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: but many of them follow a course that is evil. (66)

O Messenger! proclaim the (message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His mission. And Allah will defend thee against men, as also the Sacred Months, the animals for offerings, and the garlands that mark them: That ye may know that Allah hath knowledge of what is in the heavens and on earth and that Allah is well acquainted with all things. (97)

And to the Unbelievers: their souls have incurred the curse of Allah and His wrath, those of whom some (as judged) by the treatment it received from Allah? those who have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: but many of them follow a course that is evil. (66)

And if only they had stood fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: but many of them follow a course that is evil. (66)

Analysis at the Phrasal Level

A phrase is a syntactic structure that consists of more than one word but lacks the subject/predicate organization. Consider the examples below:

- إن الذين كفروا لا أَن لهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَن سَخِطَ اللَّهُ عَلَٰهِمْ وَفَّٰهَامُ أنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُّٰرٌ (99)

As to those who reject Faith, - if they had everything on earth, and twice repeated, to give as ransom for the penalty of the Day of Judgment, it would never be accepted of them, theirs would be a grievous penalty. (36)

Their wish will be to get out of the Fire, but never will they get out therefrom: their penalty will be one that endures.

Your (real) friends are (no less than) Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers, - those who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and they bow down humbly (in worship). (55)

And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses. (83)
And behold! I inspired the disciples to have faith in Me and My Messenger: they said, "We have faith, and do thou bear witness that we bow to Allah as Muslims". (111)

Analysis at the Verbal Level

A verb is a word that describes a word. Consider the following examples:

Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been partly eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety. This day have those who reject faith given up all hope of your religion: yet fear them not but fear Me. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, Allah is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (3)

Then will Allah say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favour to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the holy spirit so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! Thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! thou bringest forth the dead by My leave, and behold! I inspired the disciples to have faith in Me and My Messenger: they said, "We have faith, and do thou bear witness that we bow to Allah as Muslims". (111)

CONCLUSION

In parallelism with its two parts, the present paper has arrived at two types of conclusions: theoretical and practical.
phrasal. No total or identical synonyms in almost all languages, including Arabic.

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