



كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية  
College of Education for Human Sciences

ISSN: 1817-6798 (Print)

Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities

available online at: <http://www.jtuh..tu.edu.iq>

JTUH  
مجلة جامعة تكريت للعلوم الانسانية  
Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities

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**Keywords:**

Garden-path sentences  
Ambiguity  
semantics  
syntax  
Arabic language  
English language

**ARTICLE INFO**

**Article history:**

Received 3 Nov 2013  
Accepted 3 Dec 2013  
Available online 23 July 2020  
E-mail  
[journal\\_of.tikrit.university.of.humanities@tu.edu.iq](mailto:journal_of.tikrit.university.of.humanities@tu.edu.iq)  
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**A Semantic-Syntactic Study of  
Garden-Path Sentences in English  
with Reference to Glorious Qur'an**

**ABSTRACT**

This research deals with "A semantic-syntactic study of garden-path sentences in English with reference to Glorious Qur'an". At the beginning, the topic is explained in both Arabic and English, i.e. its definition and types, to shed light on the main characteristics of this linguistic phenomenon. Then, examples selected from English language alongside verses selected from Glorious Qur'an are analyzed. Finally, the study concludes that the context and the syntactic structure affect the determination of the intended meaning. Also, English sentences are more understandable than Arabic ones due to their syntactic structure.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.27.2020.2>

دراسة دلالية - نحوية لجمل التورية في اللغة الإنجليزية مع الإشارة إلى القرآن الكريم  
مروة كريم علي / جامعة تكريت / كلية الآداب  
الخلاصة

تناول هذا البحث "دراسة دلالية - نحوية لجمل التورية في اللغة الإنجليزية مع الإشارة إلى القرآن الكريم". في البداية، تم شرح الموضوع باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية، أي تعريفه وأنواعه، لتسليط الضوء على الخصائص الرئيسية لهذه الظاهرة اللغوية. ثم تم تحليل الأمثلة المختارة من اللغة الإنجليزية والآيات المختارة من القرآن الكريم. وأخيراً، وجدت الدراسة أن السياق والبنية النحوية للجمل تؤثر على تحديد المعنى المقصود. أيضاً، الجمل الإنجليزية هي أكثر قابلية للفهم من تلك العربية بسبب بنيتها النحوية.

**1.1 Background of the study**

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The recent studies tend to study certain cases in Glorious Qur'an in order to clarify them depending on authorized interpretations. Some of these cases motivate Arabic linguists and interpreters all over the world to think more about them and verify their existence. One of these cases is "At-Tawrya"; in English it is translated as Pun, Double-entendre, or Garden-path. Many Arabic linguists and scholars attempt to make a suitable definition for "At-Tawrya". Al-Masri ( 1995 ) and Al-Qzwini ( 2003 ) defined it as the utterance that has two meanings, one of them is intended and the other one is not ; thus the addressee understands the unintended meaning and neglects the intended one . This occurs when two words sound alike because they have the same pronunciation with different meanings.

In English , garden-path sentence is defined by Trask ( 1993 ) , Parker and Riley ( 2005) as being the sentence which is constructed to confuse the addressee in adopting the incorrect structure while analyzing it and to be considered as an ill-formed sentence when unobserved well-formed interpretation is available. Regarding these two definitions, it is clear that in Arabic this type of sentences is more understood when the semantic and syntactic structures of a sentence are analyzed; whereas in English it is more preferable to examine the syntactic structure of a sentence to understand it. Moreover , Parker and Riley ( 2005 ) state that syntax and semantics are related to each other , i.e. they cannot be separated , that analyzing a sentence depends on its grammatical structure and its semantics to understand the utterance perfectly. Woods (1973 ; p. 133 ) says that in English " There are clearly cases where , on the basis of local context and the history of the sentence up to a point , a decision is made to follow a particular alternative and all other alternatives are left to be processed later . Garden path sentences in which the listener is fooled into a false choice among syntactic alternatives and must consciously undo this choice after detecting an inconsistency ".

The importance of garden-path (pun) sentences in Arabic is due to the ability of being more conventional and mysterious to achieve the rhetorical purposes of writing and speaking. In addition, they improve thinking since our minds rethink to find a suitable meaning for them. They reflect the variety of language style. Aesthetic aspect of garden-path sentences is achieved if they are used properly without any manipulation. Studies that are related to Glorious Qur'an are considered as the most sensitive ones because they have to be rendered using authorized interpretations without being subjective . Some Arabic linguists, like Al-Alwani ( 1985 ) argue that Qur'an is free of garden-path sentences depending on the belief that considers them as a kind of falseness and suspicion which cannot be applied to the Glorious Qur'an because it reflects Allah's Word to His Prophet Mohammad ( PBUH ) to inform people about Islam and its regulations. However, others indicate the importance of At-Tawrya and its influence on declaring the meaning. Thus , this topic raises argument between those whom believe its existence in Glorious Qur'an and those whom deny it . Yet, confirming its existence needs to be studied semantically and syntactically to prove it.

Another point to be raised here is that the context in which the intended word is mentioned has important impact on defining its meaning . The interpreter has to take in consideration many points when interpreting such sentences. These points include: the relationship between language and meaning , language and culture , the addresser and addressee and context , text and context , ... etc. In fact, some interpreters do not care about these point and this makes them facing problems in choosing the suitable meaning from SL ( source language ) to TL ( target language). Thus, this study aims at investigating this linguistic phenomenon in Glorious Qur'an and English, determining the relationship between context and translation and its impact on determining the intended meaning, as well as explaining the role of semantics and syntax in the analysis of sentence meaning.

## 1.2 The meaning of garden-path sentence in both languages

In English, a garden-path sentence refers to a sentence that lead people to unintended explanation. That is, a person seems to wrongly analyze a part of a sentence and then, because of a later evidence, reanalyze or correct the misanalysis (Milne, 1982). Garden-path sentence leads the analyzer to a temporarily false analysis (Akmajian et al., 2001). It deludes the addressee into an interpretation, which is shown to be wrong when knowing another information (Crystal, 2008). This type of sentence is misleading, it leads to a wrong analysis by making certain inferences about it (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008). According to Aldama (2010), this sentence is often created by tricking the addressee to consider nouns as adjectives and vice versa, and excluding definite and indefinite articles that would otherwise guide the addressee to a correct interpretation.

In Arabic, the garden-path sentence (At-Tawrya) can be termed as "Al-Iham " Delusion , " Al-Takhieel " Imagination , or even as " Al-Tawjeeh " Orientation ( Lasheen , 1999 ; Al-Qzwini , 2003 ; Al-Hashimi , 1999). When using a word that has two meanings, the addressor focuses on one meaning and neglects the other one. However, s/he indeed intends the neglected meaning (Al-Masri, 1995; Lasheen, 1999). This type of sentence refers to uttering an expression that has two meanings by using metaphor or another relevant type of figurative language. Hence, one of these meanings is considered as the near meaning and the other one as the far meaning. In fact, the intended meaning is the far one hidden by the near meaning, which is understood by the addressee (As-Sayotti, n.d.). Linguistically, the garden-path sentence is a source of deluding the information by hiding the intended meaning and showing another one. Terminologically, it refers to uttering an expression with two meanings, i.e. intended and unintended. The addressee thinks that the unintended meaning is the real meaning, but this is wrong (Al-Hashimi, 1999).

Arabic has main types of garden-path sentence. They are as follows:

- a. Al-Mujarada (Abstract): It does not include information appropriate for the misleading near meaning.
- b. Al-Murashaha (Nominative): It is contained in the context that is appropriate for the misleading near meaning (Lasheen, 1999; Al-Qzwini, 2003).
- c. Al-Mubainah (Explained): It includes information related to the far meaning. It is so called because it explains the misleading near meaning by replacement. It has two kinds: one relates to the preceding replacement, and the other one relates to the post-replacement.
- d. Al-Muhai'ah (Preformatted): It has the misleading near meaning within a related context before or after it. It has two kinds: 1) preformatted by preceding expression, and 2) preformatted by post-expression (Al-Hashimi, 1999).

### **1.3 Literature Review**

The studies that relate to Glorious Qur'an are so sensitive to deal with because the person who undertakes such topics has to be educated and have a good background in Arabic language and Islamic studies , especially when the matter concerns translation of its meaning to another language . Many researchers in Arabic and English languages do their best to find out important issues related to At-Tawrya . Al-Kawaz ( 2012 ) in her research " Punning ( Tawriya ) in Arabic : A Semantic Study " used At-Tawrya as a bridge that relates rhetoric with linguistics and studied it semantically . She referred to the studying of word taking in consideration different readings for the same expression . In her study , she has focused more on semantics of this phenomenon linking its meaning with the homonymous expressions to be considered as two sides of a same coin , i.e. At-Tawrya reflects semantics and homonymous expressions reflect syntactic structure . The study contains comparison between them and a section to deal

with context and its role to clarify the meaning of the whole text . The main limitation of this study is that she did not mention the effect of syntax on intended meaning as well as lack the identification of whether it is found in Qur'an or not and what are the scholars' opinions about it .

Another more study in Arabic is made by Al-Hajjaj and Ali ( 2013 ) . In their study " Pun in Arabic Classical Rhetoric with Reference to Translation " they referred to At-Tawrya and illustrated its nature in traditional Arabic rhetoric . As they mentioned , At-Tawrya is used to make the text more vivid and valuable . In addition , they indicated that the translation of such sentences has obstacles that are faced by translators especially those who treated Qur'anic and poetic texts because it depends on the culture-specific theory . In fact , they have not mentioned the method according to which these sentences in Glorious Qur'an are translated , just mentioned the translation of statements and poetic texts . Also , they have not defined the causes that obstacle the translation of Glorious Qur'an being contented with explaining the notion of cultural and linguistic differences.

Regarding translation , in 2013 , Saleem undertook his study about " The English Translation of the Holy Qur'an " . His study gave information about the history of Qur'an translation into many foreign languages like Latin and French till the occurrence of English translation . The study depicted the problems that happen in translation and the most important translators dividing them into two groups : Muslims and non-Muslims , then mentioned the role of context and Arabic use of words in choosing the suitable translation . But there is no section for symmetric Ayas " Verses " and how they are being translated .

In a developed study , Patson , Darowski , Moon , and Ferreira ( 2009 ) investigated the notion of paraphrasing role in making linger misinterpretations in garden-path sentences . The study is titled as " lingering misinterpretations in garden-path sentences : evidence from a paraphrasing task " .It focused on the mental ability of addressees to treat these sentences while being processed at

first time . Their study did not identified the problems relating to this topic and the way to tackle them .

## **1.4 Results and Discussion**

### **1.4.1 Structural ambiguities of garden-path sentences**

In English, the analysis process requires memory limitations and comprehension of sentence structure. Memory limitations refer to understanding about six words of the sentence at a time attempting to categorize them as nouns, verbs, and so on, and to combine as many words in a phrase as its limited capacity allows. Regarding comprehension, it examines the structured phrasal packages and attempts to build a coherent syntactic structure for the whole sentence (Akmajian et al., 2001).

For example:

1. The horse raced past the barn fell (Akmajian et al., 2001).

At the beginning, this sentence may be confusing due to the misleading information that is an initial interpretation of its syntactic structure. Firstly, one may interpret (raced) as the main verb, and then discover that (fell) is the main verb. Therefore, the syntactic structure of this sentence at the first sight is as this one: The horse (subject) raced (verb 1) past (adverb) the barn (object) fell (verb 2). Let us look at the reason for confusion in this sentence by comparing it with the following sentence:

- (1a). The horse that was raced past the barn fell.

In (1a), the relative clause (that was raced past the barn) modifies the subject (The horse). In this case, the relative clause is the agentless passive counterpart of someone raced the horse past the barn. While the sentence in example (1) has a reduced relative clause where the relative pronoun (that) and the auxiliary verb (was) have been omitted (Parker and Riley, 2005). The problem with this

sentence in example (1) is that the verb in the relative clause (raced) is ambiguous at first reading as whether it is a past tense or past participle with the lack of the structural cues for a relative clause. This means that the addressee firstly misinterprets the verb (raced) as the main verb, i.e. it is interpreted as the main verb for the subject (the horse). That verb slot has already been filled by (raced), so the addressee has to reanalyze the sentence in order to find a role for the verb (fell) (Parker and Riley, 2005).

#### **1.4.2 Syntactic problems of garden-path sentences**

In fact, subjects could be influenced by prior context as well as the nature of the lexical items in the sentence. For example:

∇a. The teachers taught by the Belitz method passed the test.

∇b. The children taught by the Belitz method passed the test.

The example in (∇a) is classified as ungrammatical more frequently than (∇b) because the phrases (The teachers) and (The children) have different semantic features. Subjects are given the following types in contexts that are recognized discourse referents:

a) Non-Minimally Attached (NMA).

b) Minimally Attached (MA).

c) Late Closure (LC).

Consider the following sentence:

∇a. [The editor {played the tape}] agreed the story was big. (NMA)

∇b. [The editor played the tape] and agreed the story was big. (MA)



If the addressee follows the minimal attachment principle in spite of context, then s/he should have had difficulty with (ʔa) compared to (ʔb) (Akmajian et al., 2001).

Concerning late closure principle, it predicts that a person will assign the (incoming) information to the phrase processed. For example:

ξ. The man talked to the father of the girl who was at the store.

This sentence is ambiguous as whether the relative clause (who was at the store) modifies (the father of the girl) or simply (the girl). Late closure predicts that the addressee will prefer the latter reading since (the girl) is the noun phrase being processed when the addressee reads (who was at the store) (Parker and Riley, 2005). In addition, consider the following example:

ο. The old man the boat .

At first reading this sentences looks like having the following syntactic structure :-

- ( the old man = subject [ article + adjective + noun ] ) , ( the boat = noun ) .

From its form , this sentence leads us to expects a noun to follow the article " the " and the adjective " old " . Thus , the initial reading of "man" is as a noun . It is only when reaching the noun phrase " the boat " , on realizes that s/he has been led down the garden-path . Hence , one has to go back and reanalyze " the old " as a collective noun derived from an adjective , which serves as the subject and " man " as the verb , so the syntactic structure of this sentence will be as this one :-

- ( the old = subject ) , ( man = verb ) , ( the boat = object ) .

Thus , initial conditions can affect the life of the language , the prior discourse of language use , and even the interpretation of a single utterance ( Larsen-Freeman and Cameron , 2008 ) .

### 1.4.3 Problems in comprehending the meaning of garden-path sentences

Many people might suppose that garden-path sentences are rather unusual. There would be pauses in regular speech and commas in written language. These are usually used for avoiding the ambiguity. Deletion of the complementizer (that) can also make misleading explanation. There is a proof that the proper use of punctuation marks like commas can reduce the extent of the garden-path effect by enhancing the addressee's awareness of the phrasal construction (Harley, 2001).

To solve the problem of ambiguity, the addressee benefit from using not only syntactic strategies but also semantic information. In some cases, the addressor asks the addressee to listen to ambiguous sentences like the following one where the addressor has certain meaning in mind:

٦. The steward [greeted {the girl} with a smile].

It is observed that when the addressee disambiguated the sentence correctly and got the intended meaning of smiling girl, the addressor paused between the crucial words. Thus, the addressor gives the addressee a cue to what is meant (Akmajian et al., 2001).

Consider the following sentences:

٧. The detective hit the criminal with an umbrella.

This example creates syntactic ambiguity for the different syntactic structures convey different meanings. This sentence carries two meanings; the first is that (the detective using an umbrella hit the criminal). While the second meaning reflects that (the detective hit the criminal who is carrying an umbrella) (Jia-li and Ping-fang, 2012).

Regarding Arabic, there is no ambiguity in meaning as that in English if the addressee knows the intention of the addressor. However, the context has an effect on determining the intended meaning of expressions. For example:

٨. ﴿الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى﴾ (طه: ٥)

- ( The most Gracious ( Allah ) rose over ( Istawâ ) the ( Mighty ) Throne ( in a manner that suits His Majesty )) (Al-Hilâlî and Khân , Taa-Haa: 5).

" الاستواء " here in this verse has two meanings ; one of them is to settle in the place and this is the unintended meaning which misleads the hearer not to understand the intended meaning . The second meaning is relating to the meaning of possession and throne , and this is the intended meaning which is misled by the unintended meaning. This is abstract garden path sentence because it does not include any information appropriate for the misleading meaning within the context of the verse.

٩. ﴿وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ﴾ (الذاريات: ٤٧)

- ( With power did We construct heaven . Verily , We are Able to extend the vastness of space thereof ) (Al-Hilâlî and Khân , Adh-Dhaariyat: ٤٧ ) .

Here in this verse , the meaning of " ايد " has two meanings. One of them is related to prey, which the unintended meaning, and the other is meaning is showing the ability and capacity, which is the intended meaning. It is related to type of the nominative garden-path sentence because it contains information related to the misleading meaning according to the context of the whole verse (As-Sayotti, n.d.; Lasheen, 1999).

## 1.5 Conclusion

It is concluded that garden-path is a linguistic phenomenon found in both languages, i.e., Arabic and English. The context and the syntactic structure affect the determination of the intended meaning. Additionally, English

sentences are more understandable than Arabic ones due to their syntactic structure. Learners of English as foreign language may have difficulty in understanding the intended meaning of English garden-path sentences unlike Arabic ones due to the different syntactic structures and roles of nouns and verbs in the sentence. In Arabic, this linguistic phenomenon is used to hide an information or as an aesthetic tool.

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