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Assessing and Translating the Verb Akhadha ‘أخذ’ in Quranic Texts into English

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Abstract

This study aims at assessing and translating the verb Akhadha ‘أخذ’ in the Glorious Quran into English. Since the verb in question has several meanings in the Glorious Quran according to the context, it should be well treated by the translator of the religious texts in general and Quranic texts in particular. Therefore, a number of Quranic ayas that contain the verb will be selected and will be subjected to translation assessment in order to measure the accuracy of the translations of the verb ‘Akhadha’ in English. If the translations of the verb are inadequate, the researcher will give the suggested translations pursuant to the contexts of the said ayas. It is hypothesized that the translators of the Quranic texts including the verb in question might encounter difficulties in translating the verb and as corollary might produce inadequate translations as a result of the various rhetorical senses the verb has. Those rhetorical senses of the verb might be deemed as difficult for translators.

Keywords: Adequate Translation, Suggested Translation, Translation Assessment



تقييم وترجمة الفعل "أخذ" في النصوص القرآنية إلى اللغة الإنكليزية

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خلاصة البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم وترجمة الفعل "أخذ" في القرآن الكريم إلى اللغة الإنكليزية. وبما أن الفعل المعني له عدة معانٍ في القرآن الكريم حسب السياق، فيجب أن يتعامل معه مترجم النصوص الدينية بشكل عام والنصوص القرآنية بشكل خاص تعاملًا جيدًا. ولذلك سيتم اختيار عدد من الآيات القرآنية التي تحتوي على الفعل، وإخضاعها لتقييم الترجمة لقياس مدى دقة ترجمات الفعل "أخذ" إلى اللغة الإنكليزية. إذا كانت ترجمات الفعل غير كافية، فسيقدم الباحث الترجمات المقترحة وفقًا لسياقات الآيات المذكورة. فرضية البحث هي أن مترجمي النصوص القرآنية التي تحتوي على الفعل المعني قد يواجهون صعوبات في ترجمة الفعل ونتيجة لذلك قد ينتجون ترجمات غير كافية نتيجة للمعاني البلاغية المختلفة للفعل. وقد تعد هذه المعاني البلاغية للفعل صعوبة على المترجمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة المناسبة، الترجمة المقترحة، تقييم الترجمة.

1. Introduction

The language of religion in general and of the Glorious Quran in particular is characterized by its uniqueness and sacred texts. The Quran is inimitable and unique; which Allah has protected from any corruption. Furthermore, the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, the most eloquent language. This paper deals with the assessment of the renditions of the Qur'anic ayas that contain the verb Akhadha أخذ to uncover the adequacy and accuracy of these renditions. The reason for the choice of this topic is due to the fact that the verb in question has several semantic and rhetorical senses accounting for the linguistic context in which it occurs. With the aim of achieving the purpose of this study, a theoretical part on the grammatical and semantic study of the occurrences of the Arabic verb أخذ will be introduced. Furthermore, the researcher will consult five published translations of the Glorious Quran concerning the verb under investigation in order to carry out the translation quality assessment. Reiss's model will be adopted in this study for the

purpose of translation assessment. Suggested translations will be given by the researcher where necessary in order to achieve adequate translations for the Arabic verb under investigation.

2. Linguistic Meanings of the Verb Akhadha ‘أخذ’

The verb ‘أخذ’ has been mentioned in the Glorious Quran so many times to denote a variety of meanings according to the context in which it occurs. The verb in question has two main senses in the Glorious Quran:

1. to express the meaning of seizing something willingly or unwillingly which is the original meaning of the verb (Al-Ani: 1965, Vol. 5, p. 312) as in the following aya:

"خذ من أموالهم صدقة تطهرهم وتزكيهم بها وصل عليهم" (التوبة: 103)

The verb, in this aya, expresses ‘seizing something willingly’.

The verb in the following aya expresses the same meaning unwillingly (ibid):

"وكيف تأخذه وقد أفضى بعضكم الى بعض" (النساء: 21)

2. The verb can express several meanings from its original one. They include the following:

- a. to make a promise and commitment (Al-Amili, 2000, Vol. 2, p. 156) as in the following aya:

"واذ أخذ الله ميثاق النبيين" (أل عمران: 81)

- b. to deprive people of graces and blessings

This meaning mentioned in the Glorious Quran expresses Allah’s anger with unbelievers who refuse to believe in the Islamic religion. The following aya will suffice in this respect:

"قل أرأيتم ان أخذ الله سمعكم وأبصاركم (الأنعام: 46)"

In this aya, Allah warns unbelievers that He can deprive them from the blessings of hearing and sight (Al-Matridi, 2005, Vol. 1, p. 485)

- c. to destroy unbelievers

The verb 'Akhadha' may express the image of perishing of unbelievers by Allah for their sins and evil as in the following aya:

"كذبوا بأياتنا كلها فأخذناهم أخذ عزيز مقتدر (القمر: 42)"

d. to get better or change into better situation

This sense the verb has is mentioned in the Glorious Quran as in the following aya:

"حتى اذا أخذت الأرض زخرفها وازينت (يونس: 24)"

e. to detain and abstain

This meaning has been expressed by the following aya:

"أينما تقفوا أخذوا وقتلوا تقتيلا (الأحزاب: 61)"

According to Al-Nahhas (2006, Vol.3, p. 224), the sense of the verb 'Akhadha' in this context expressing the detainment and imprisonment of unbelievers before killing them.

f. It may express the meaning of selecting the best thing and most useful (Al-Alusi, 2007, Vol. 2, p. 80) as in the following aya:

"وأمر قومك يأخذوا بأحسنها سأوريكم دار الفاسقين (الأعراف: 145)"

g. It may express, according to Ibn-Manzur, 1998, p. 392), the meaning of chastisement that occurred on unbelievers since they deserve this chastisement. The following aya will suffice in this respect:

"حتى أخذنا مترفيهم بالعذاب إذا هم يجأرون (المؤمنون: 64)"

h. to express the meaning of precaution and warning (Al-Sa'di, 2000, Vol. 1, p. 58) as in the following aya:

"يا أيها الذين امنوا خذوا حذرکم" (النساء: 71)

i. to express the meaning of obligation and obedience (ibid: p. 49) as in the following aya:

"يا يحيى خذ الكتاب بقوة وأتيناه الحكم صبيا" (مريم: 12)

3. The Verb Akhadha: Grammatical Analysis

Morphologically speaking, the morphologists of Arabic classify the verb Akhadha أخذ under the trilateral verbs (the Arabic verbs that are composed of three radicals). According to this type of Arabic verbs, an Arabic speaker can produce many words by “attaching one radical, two radicals or three radicals to the base” (Al-Fartusi, and Hussein, 1989: p.35). Moreover, “these newly derived verb forms have various meanings from those of the base forms because it is roughly generally held in Arabic morphology that expansion in word building leads to new meanings or semantic extension.” (Ibid, 1989: p. 60).

4. Translation Quality Assessment: Reiss's Model

Many studies have been conducted about translation assessment. In this regard, translation scholars have adopted many models and theories with the aim of conducting the assessment of translations of different types of texts such as literary, legal, scientific and others. Those models are well-known for their dichotomies: “Nida (1964) suggests formal and dynamic equivalence”, “Catford (1965) adopts formal correspondence and textual equivalence”, “House (1979) overt and covert translation”, “Newmark (1981) semantic vs. communicative translation”, “Reiss's potential and optimal translation” and others.

The researcher will adopt Reiss's potential vs. optimal translation in the renditions of the ayas comprising the verb Akhadha due to the fact that optimal translation mainly focuses on the impact of context in language on the meaning of words when they are contextualized. Moreover, Reiss gives much attention to the impact of co-text on producing lexical and semantic equivalence between the ST language and the TT one, which has made the model more applicable in the study. As for potential translation, it deals with introducing translation equivalences without the impact of the co-text. In this respect,

Reiss (2000: 49) holds that “the translator can achieve translation and make it possible since there are parallels between languages on the level of langue (language as system)”. She adds that “the process of translation is a matter of selecting the optimal equivalent from among the potential equivalents on the level of parole (language as actually spoken)”.

Reiss (ibid: 51) also states that “any work of translation lies in regulating the potential equivalents, and later on choosing the equivalent which is best adapted to the particular context in addition to examining to what extent every element in the translation unit can well suits with the entire context.

On the other hand, Munday (2012; 114) affirms that “Reiss mentions a number of linguistic and extralinguistic criteria according to which the adequacy and accuracy of a TT is evaluated”. He also states that “the linguistic components consist of: semantic equivalence, lexical equivalence and grammatical and stylistic features while the extralinguistic determinants is composed of situation, subject field, time, place (characteristics of country and culture), receiver, sender and affective implications (humour, irony, emotion, etc.)”.

Furthermore, Reiss attempts to make a relation between text-types and translation methods. She argues for “the need to keep the predominant function of the text in the process of translation”. With regards to informative texts, including religious texts, the translator's principal priority lies in meaning relations. On the other hand, the aesthetic values and connotative meanings of informative texts “occupy a secondary concern for translators of religious texts” (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 181).

Therefore, the translator can determine a certain translation method according to the text type that the translator seeks to adopt in rendering a certain text. Furthermore, the translator must give priority to the translation of religious texts since those texts belong to legal ones.

5. Translation Assessment of the Qur'anic Ayas Involving the Verb

This section deals with the analysis of Arab theologians and scholars' coverage of the verb 'Akhadha'. This is due to the fact that lexical units in the Quran are given special attention since these units such as nouns, main verbs and others have special effect on the rules and regulations that Muslims must adhere. Thus, the verb in question that exists in the holy texts of the Glorious Qur'an has various meanings. Every meaning will be provided together with its renditions. The researcher will consult five published renditions of the Quran. They are translated by Ali, A. Yusuf (1989), Arberry, A. J. (2003), Irving, T.B. (2003), Pickthall (1996) and Shaker (2002).

In what follows, translation assessment are carried out according to the model suggested by Reiss's (2000) potential vs. optimal equivalence dichotomy. This model has been adopted in this study in order to investigate the adequacy and accuracy of translation. For the sake of the space limitation, the researcher will give one Qur'anic aya only that expresses one meaning of the verb for analysis. In the event that all the translators fail to give the optimal translation, the researcher will give the suggested translation. That can be attributed to the fact that "Constructive translation criticism must also offer satisfactory alternative translations, substantiated with convincing evidence" (Reiss, 2000: 15).

The verb Akhadha and its senses as mentioned in the Glorious Quran include various ayas:

1. To take a promise, commitment and obligation.

This meaning can be expressed as in the following aya:

"وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ" (أل عمران: 81)

Ali: "Behold, God took the Covenant of the Prophets"

Arberry: "And when God took compact with the Prophets"

Irving: "So God accepted an agreement from the prophets"

Pickthall: "When Allah made (His) covenant with the prophets"

Shakir: "And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets"

The verb 'Akhadha' in this aya gives the meaning of taking promise and making a covenant with somebody. As for the translations, it seems that all of the translators have succeeded in achieving the lexical equivalence of the verb under investigation since the meaning of this verb in the aya above has been conveyed to the TL successfully.

2. To deprive people of graces and blessings

"قل أرأيتم ان أخذ الله سمعكم وأبصاركم (الأنعام: 46)"

Ali: "Say: Think ye, if God took away your hearing and your sight"

Arberry: "Say: What think you? If God seizes your hearing and sight"

Irving: "Say: Have you considered whether, if God snatch away your hearing and your eyesight"

Pickthall: "Say: Have ye imagined, if Allah should take away your hearing and your sight"

Shakir: "Say: Have you considered that if Allah takes away your hearing and your sight"

In the aya above, the verb under study has the sense of 'depriving somebody of blessings and graces'. Only Arberry and Irving have successfully rendered the sense of the verb according to the context and conveyed the exact meaning of this verb in this aya. One can say that Arberry and Irving have achieved the optimal equivalence while others have met the criteria of potential translation.

3. To destroy and punish unbelievers

"وكذلك أخذ ربك اذا أخذ القرى وهي ظالمة" (هود: 102)

Ali: "Such is the chastisement of thy Lord when he chastises communities in the midst of their wrong"

Arberry: "Such is the seizing of thy Lord, when He seizes the cities that are evildoing".

Irving: "Even so will your Lord seize things when He takes over any towns while they are doing wrong"

Pickthall: "Even thus is the grasp of thy Lord when He graspeth the townships while they are doing wrong"

Shakir: "And such is the punishment of your Lord when He punishes the towns while they are unjust"

According to the context, the verb under study has the meaning of punishing unbelievers in this aya. In respect of the translations, Ali and Shakir have succeeded in their translations because they have conveyed the exact meaning of the verb in this aya because their translations stand for the optimal equivalence which takes into account the meaning of the verb according to the context.

4. To wear better clothes

"يا بني ادم خذوا زينتكم عند كل مسجد" (الأعراف: 31)

Ali: "O Children of Adam, wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer"

Arberry: "Children of Adam, take your adornment at every place of worship"

Irving: "Children of Adam, wear your best clothes to every place of worship"

Pickthall: "O children of Ada, look to your adornment at every place of worship"

Shakir: "O children of Adam, attend to your embellishments at every time of prayer"

The verb here expresses the meaning of 'wearing better clothes'. As for the translations, it seems that Ali and Irving have successfully conveyed this meaning according to the context in

which it occurs. By doing so, they have achieved the optimal equivalence in their translations while other translators have met with the criteria of potential equivalence.

5. To detain and abstain

“أَيْنَمَا تَقْفُوا أَخْذُوا وَقَتْلُوا تَقْتِيلًا (الأحزاب: 61)”

Ali: “Wherever they are found, they shall be seized and slain” (without mercy)

Arberry: “wheresoever they are come upon they shall be seized and slaughtered”

Irving: “Wherever they are encountered, they will be seized_and completely routed”

Pichthall: “They will be seized wherever found and slain with a (fierce) slaughter”

Shakir: “wherever they are found they shall be seized and murdered a horrible murdering”

According to the context, the verb has the meaning of detaining in the aya above. As for the translation, all the translators have successfully conveyed this meaning due to the fact that the verb ‘seize’ means detention. Thus, all of the above-mentioned translations have met with the criteria of achieving the optimal equivalence.

6. Selecting and keeping the best thing and most useful

“خذ العفو وأمر بالعرف وأعرض عن الجاهلین” (الأعراف: 199)

Ali: “Hold to forgiveness, Command what is right, but turn away from the ignorant”

Arberry: “Take the abundance, and bid to what is honorable, and turn away from the ignorant”

Irving: “Practice forgiveness, command decency, and avoid ignorant people”

Pichthall: “Keep to forgiveness and enjoin kindness and turn away from the ignorant”

Shakir: "Take to forgiveness and enjoin good and turn aside from the ignorant"

Contextually speaking, the verb, in the aya above, means 'to select and keep to the best thing and most useful' which refers to forgiveness. Only Pickthall has succeeded in his translation because he has conveyed the accurate meaning of the verb in question to the TL. Thus, Pickthall's translation is the soundest one as the accurate lexical equivalence between the SL and the TL has been achieved.

7. the meaning of chastisement that occurred on unbelievers

"ولقد أخذنا آل فرعون بالسنين ونقص من الثمرات لعلهم يذكرون (الأعراف:130)"

Ali: "We punished the people of Pharaoh with years (of drought) and shortness of crops, that they might receive admonition"

Arberry: "Then seized We Pharaoh's people with years of dearth, and scarcity of fruits, that haply they might remember"

Irving: "We gripped Pharaoh's household with years (of trial) and a shortage of fruit so they might bear it in mind"

Pickthall: "And We straitened Pharaoh's folk with famine and the dearth of fruits, that peradventure they might heed".

Shakir: "And certainly We overtook Firon's people with droughts and diminution of fruits that they may be mindful".

In the aya, the meaning of the verb intended expresses punishment and chastisement. All the translations, except Ali's, mentioned above have proved inaccurate since they have not given the exact meaning of the verb. Ali translated the verb into 'punished' which represents the optimal equivalence while the others have attained potential translations.

8. the meaning of precaution and warning

"يقولوا قد أخذنا أمرنا من قبل ويتولوا وهم فرحون (التوبة:50)"

Ali: "They say, "We took indeed our precautions beforehand," and they turn away rejoicing".

Arberry: “they say, we took our dispositions before, and turn away, rejoicing”

Irving: “They say:” we already took our matter in hand previously”. They stalk away rejoicing”

Pickthall: “They say: We took precaution, and they turn away well pleased”

Shakir: “they say: Indeed we had taken care of our affair before, and they turn back and are glad”.

According to the intended meaning of the verb in this aya, only Ali and Pickthall have successfully rendered the verb while the other translations are inadequate for the translators did not give the optimal equivalence of the Arabic verb in the TL. Thus, Ali and Pickthall have achieved the optimal equivalence while others have attained potential translation.

9. the meaning of obligation and obedience

يا يحيى خذ الكتاب بقوة (مريم: 12)

Ali: “Oh Yahya, take hold of the Book with might,”

Arberry: “O John, take the Book forcefully”

Irving: “John, hold firmly to the Book”

Pickthall: “O John, hold fast the Scripture”

Shakir: “O Yahya, take hold of the Book with strength”

In the aya above, one can easily recognize that all of the translators have succeeded in their translations because their translations have expressed the accurate sense that the verb has according to the linguistic context. Thus, these translations have achieved the optimal equivalence.

6. Results

As for the results of the translation assessment carried out above, some of the translators of the Qur'anic ayas dealing with the verb Akhadha have adopted literal translation of these kinds of texts. This is clearly seen in their translations that have

produced inaccurate translations of the senses of the Arabic verb that has been translated into English. Those translators lack the deep linguistic knowledge on the many senses the verb Akhadha has in the ayas of the Quran. Furthermore, the texts rendered have also lacked the necessary footnotes on the exact rhetorical meanings of the verb. That is why some of those translators have resorted to over translation in dealing with religious texts, especially Quranic ones, in order to achieve accurate translations. On the other hand, some translators have successfully conveyed the accurate meaning of the verb in question as a result of their good linguistic competence and background and for being specialists in Islamic religion.

7. Conclusions

In light of the translation assessment conducted in this paper, several conclusions have been drawn. It is very important to acquire deep knowledge on the main lexical items in the Qur'anic texts with the aim of achieving accurate and adequate translations. Furthermore, it is sometimes inevitable to resort to footnote and paraphrase in the translation of the meanings of the Qur'anic ayas including the verb. This has become evident in providing the suggested translations for the ayas which include the verb Akhadha where some translators have failed in their translations. In addition, some translators have failed to convey the exact meaning of the verb Akhadha as mentioned in the Quranic texts and their renditions are inadequate on the basis of the translation assessment conducted by the researcher. As a result, the hypothesis of this study has been proved. Finally, it has become clear that context has played an important role in translating the various meanings of the verb in these Qur'anic ayas.

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