

Translation of the word (habl) in the Glorious Quran into English: Analytical Study

Lecturer: Fatin Izaldeen Yousif

Ministry of Education-General Educational Directorate in Nineveh

Email: fatinizaldeen1@gmail.com

Abstract

This study endeavors to explore the impediments faced by translators of the term (habl) in the Glorious Quran into English. The main challenges for translators of (habl) pertain to its contextual and metaphorical meanings, which differ significantly from its literal meaning. The research aims to analyze the various meanings of (habl) in different Quranic contexts. To capture the intended meaning of each verse, the study consulted Tafsir Ibn Kathir (2000) and Ibn Ashour (1997). It also aims to evaluate the renderings of four foreign non-Muslim translators, AL-Hilali, Arberry, Kassab and Palmer. To examine renderings by four translators, the study compares and analyzes six Quranic verses that use the term (habl). To achieve these goals, the research hypothesis states that understanding the metaphorical, cultural, and contextual meanings of (habl) leads to an exact rendering. Relying on Nida's and Taber's functional equivalent approach, the researcher describes and compares the four renderings to evaluate and determine the best renderings that maintain the intended meaning of the original Quranic verses. The study concludes that rendering Quranic terms requires two axes of contextual meaning, in addition to the exegetical background. Adherence to these two dimensions resulted in more precise renderings that retain the spirit of the sacred Quranic verses.

Key words :Glorious Quran, habl, religious translation, functional equivalence, contextual meaning

ترجمة كلمة (حبل) في القرآن الكريم الى الانكليزية دراسة تحليلية

م فاتن عز الدين يوسف

وزارة التربية\ تربية نينوى

البريد الالكتروني: fatinizaldeen1@gmail.com

ملخص البحث

تسعى الدراسة لاكتشاف الصعوبات التي يواجهها مترجمو كلمة (حبل) في القرآن الكريم الى الانكليزية . تكمن التحديات التي يواجهها المترجمون لكلمة (حبل) في معانيها الدلالية و المجازية والتي تختلف تماما عن معناها المعجمي. ويهدف البحث الى تحليل المعاني المتنوعة للكلمات في سياقات قرآنية مختلفة ولمعرفة المعنى المقصود لكل آية اعتمدت الدراسة على تفسير ابن كثير وتفسير ابن عاشور وتهدف الدراسة ايضا لتقييم اربع ترجمات لمترجمين اجانب غير مسلمين وهم الهلاي اربري وكساب و بالمر ولتقييم ترجمات المترجمين الاربعة قارنت الدراسة وحللت ست آيات قرآنية تتضمن كلمة (حبل). ولتحقيق هذه الاهداف تقترض الدراسة ان فهم المعاني المجازية والثقافية والسياقية تقود الى ترجمة صحيحة اعتمدت النظرية على نظرية المكافئ الوظيفي لنايدا وتببر قارن الباحث الترجمات الاربعة ليحدد الترجمة الافضل التي حافظت على المعنى المقصود في النص القرآني. واستنتجت الدراسة ان



ترجمة المفردات تتطلب الاعتماد على محورين المعنى السياقي بالإضافة الى التفسير القرآني والاعتماد على هذين المحورين ينتج عنه ترجمات دقيقة تحافظ على قدسية الايات القرآنية.
الكلمات المفتاحية : القرآن الكريم, حبل, الترجمة الدينية, المكافئ الوظيفي, المعنى السياقي

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The essential problem of the study lies in the multiple meanings of the term (habl). Literal meanings of (habl) are differ from its contextual and metaphorical meanings. Another problems dues to the fact that both Arabic and English are two different languages. Arabic has a wide range of meanings for the word (habl),opposite to English which has a narrower range of meanings for its corresponding term (habl).Thus, the translators should be aware of those problems in rendering (habl) into English to maintain the exact meaning of the Quranic verses.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The aim of the research is to find out an appropriate method that can be adopted in rendering the word (habl) in Quranic verses into English . Investigating the translators , accuarcy in using the exact equivalence while rendering this word. Besides , the study evaluates the faithfulness of the four translators and how do they make a balance between accuracy and conveying the sacred nature of intended meaning of Quranic verses.

1.3Methodology and Procedure

The current research has theoretical and practical parts. The former describes and makes a contrastive analysis to show the similarities and differences between Arabic and English languages in using the term (habl). The latter deals with analyzing six Quranic verses including (habl) for four ren derings for each verse by AL-Hilali, Arberry, kassab and Palmer .The researcher depends on tasfir Ibn-Ashour(1997) and Ibn-Kathir(2000) of the Glorious Quran to understand the exact meaning of the translated verse .To evaluate the four rendrings, the study depends on Nida's and Taber's method through applying functional equivalence to find out the best rendering that retain the intended metaphorical and contextual meaning of each Quranic verse.

2.1 Introduction

The main goal of any translation is to convey the exact meaning of a source language.Rendering the Glorious Quran into English precisely and faithfully cannot be achieved easily.Quanic rendering is restricted to its ideological principles, faith, heritage, deeply ingrained culture and the Arabic language is the language of the Glorious Quran as an essential part of Islamic religion.This miraculous language is characterized by the richness of its multiple vocabularies

that are used metaphorically in certain contexts. Figarative language is widely used in the Glorious Quran their translation into foreign languages requires deep understanding to their usage. The word (habl) has various metaphorical images in six Quranic verses . This pratical part deals with translation of the term (habl) in six Quranic verses into English .The study attempts to detetmine how the translators convey the metaphorical and contextual meanings of the term (habl). It also measures the ability of the four translators to use the functional equivalent to convey the intended meaning of the source text and its impact on the target language readers. The researcher evaluates four renderings for each verse to discover whether the translators preserve or distorte the multiple metaphorical meanings of (habl) through Quranic verses. Finally, the researcher opts the best rendering that meets the intended meaning of the Quranic verse.

2.2 Meanings of (habl) in Arabic and English Language

The Arabic word (habl) is a noun its plural form is (habl). The equivalent word is (rope or cord) in English language .Arabic language has literal , contextual and metaphrical meaning .The former refers to a physical object which is made from natural and artifitial fibers like palm –date fibre ,vegetable or coir material and its used for pulling things. The latter relates to the contextual and metaphorical meanings . They are vary among covenant ,bond ,connection , fishing line ,hungman's rope, jugular vein, Allah's support , protection and umbilical cord. (Mustafa and AL-Zayat (1992: 153) and AL-Usdi (1988:363) .According to Cambridge

Dictionary (2026) , in English language a rope is a tool which is made from different types of materials wire, fibers , or hemp. It is also used metaphorically as a symbol of connection . Collins (2026) defined the word rope physically as a thick strong cord designed for binding, lifting, or pulling usually made from various kind of materials. Both languages do not have the same symbolic images and cultural possess . These different connotations of (habl) creat a great challange for translators . They may face a dilemma of maintaining various meanings of (habl) particularly when rendering Quranic verses into English . The translator must be aware of these meanings and creat a balance in using the exact equivalence to retain the real meaning and he must be faithful to the source language .

2.3 Data Analysis

To analyze and evaluate renderings of (habl) in six Quranic verses the researcher goes along the study by certain steps:

- a- The researcher presents the original Quranic verse (Arabic text).
- b- The study adopts Quranic exegesis by Ibn-Ashour (1997) and Ibn-Kathir (2000) to recognize the real and exact meanings of (habl) in each verse.

c. Four renderings for each verse are chosen and ordered alphabetically they are as follows:

- 1.AL-Hilali
- 2.Arberry
- 3.Kassab
- 4.Palmer
- 5.The researcher examines the four renderings to show whether the translators retain the intended meaning of the source language or not.

1- SL Text:

(ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ أَيَنْ مَا تُقْفُوا إِلَّا بِحَبْلِ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلِ مِنَ النَّاسِ)\112

- 1.AL-Hilali and Khan: Indignity is put over them wherever they may be except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah ,and from men.
- 2.Arberry:Abasement shall be pitched on them, wherever they are come upon , except they be in a bond of God , and a bond of the people
- 3.Kassab:They are stamped by humility wherever they are found , except when they are under Allah's covenant or are under a covenant with other people.
- 4.Palmar: They are smitten with abasement wherever they be found save for the rope of God and the rope of man.

Interpretation

In this Quranic verse ,Allah Almighty addresses the disbelievers who rejected faith in Allah's signs and killing prophets.Their bad deeds lead them to a divine punishment .This disobedience brings humiliation and indignity upon them as a natural outcome. They could get ride of this humiliation without turning to Allah and beseeching closeness to Him. They found no honor except through support of Allah.Thus,they need covenant with Allah by convert to Islam,and covenant with people by paying the jizye.(Ibn-Ashour(1997:56) and Ibn-Kathir(2000:93).

Discussion

The term (habl) is used metaphorically in this Quranic verse to mean (covenant).Each translator tried to use an exact equivalent to express the intended maning of (habl).Both Hilali and Kassab renderings hold the exact metaphorical meanings of the source language .They used (covenant) target reader. Arberry rendered it into (a bond) which is not the real meaning as it is used in legal contexts rather than religious one.Palmer opts (a rope) which is a literal meaning of (habl), but not the intended meaning .To concluce,AL-Hilali and Kassab are succeeded in their renderings as they used a functional equivalent, whereas Palmer are failed in both using the exact equivalent and retain the meaning of the original text.

2- SL Text:

(وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا) ال عمران\ 103

1.AL-Hilali and Khan: And hold fast , all of you together ,to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Quran), and be not divided among yourselves and remember Allah's favour on you.

2.Arberry :and hold you fast to God 's bond, together , and donot scatter.

3.Kassab:Hold fast to Allah's " rope ", and do not disperse (therefrom) .

4.Palmer: Take tight hold of God's rope altogether, and donot part in sects

Interpretation

In this Quranic verse Allah Almighty addresses two Arab tribes,AL-Aws and AL-Khazraj to unity and hold fast to the Allah's religion .In Pre-Islamic Era,they used to fought battles against each other .They migrated to AL-Madina and embraced Islam.Islam united them .Jews in AL-Madina tried to separate them by instigating troubles. That is why Allah called him to adhere to the Islamic religion and the Quran.(Ibn-Ashour (1997:55 and Ibn-Kathir(2000:80) .

Discussion

The word (habl)is used metaphorically in this Quranic verse.The four translators used different expressions to achieve the metaphorical purpose of (Allah's rope). AL-Hilali has retained the metaphorical imagery precisely when he rendered (Allah's rope) to the rope of Allah(i.e. this Quran). Alhilali's rendering illustrates that a translator his translation when rendering Quranic verses. Arberry has rendered it literally as he rendered it to (Allah's bond) , It is obvious that Arberry realized that (habl) means a bond of a man towards his creator rather than an abstract noun. Kassab adopts word- for –word translation as he has rendered (حبل) into (الله) into

(Allah's "rope"). He put the word "rope" between. The four renderings are varied in their accuracy.

The translators are succeeded in their renderings. They tried to retain the exact metaphorical purposes of the original text. Hillali's rendering is the best one. It is a clear translation which can be understood by non-muslims and non- Arab readers .This is due to Hillali's additional explanation for (habl) when he used (i.e. this Quran) to keep the impact of the source language on the target language readers.

3 - SL Text:

(قَالَ بَلْ أَلْفُوا مَا إِذَا جِبَالُهُمْ وَعِصِيَّتُهُمْ يُحَيِّلُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ سِحْرِهِمْ أَنَّهَا تَسْعَى) طه\ 66

Interpretation

For Ibn – Kathir(2000:457) this verse narrates how prophet Moses challenged the magicians. They throw their ropes and sticks in front of people. The ropes and sticks moved people astonished to see inanimate object moving here and there like snakes. At the beginning Moses was afraid of the horrible situation, but he throw his sticks and turned into real snake. At this crucial moment people and magician realized that prophet Moses be honest in his call to them for the worship of Allah. (see also Ibn – Ashour (1997:257).

Discussion

The word (habl) in this Quranic verse is used in the plural form (hebal)

The four translators have rendered the word (hebaluhom) into (their ropes) as if there is in agreement among the translators that (habl) holds a physical meaning rather than metaphorical meaning. This is due to the fact that this religious context describes magical tools. This verse illustrates a visual scene in which ropes moved here and there very fast. This dramatic scene shows the horror of the situation to the readers of the target language. The four renderings reflected the intended and real meaning of the Quranic verse.

It is worth mentioning that Kassab was able to explain the role of the (ropes were moving here and there). So he used a functional equivalent to express the exact meaning of the original context.

4 - SL Text:

44/ (فَأَلْقُوا جِبَالَهُمْ وَعَصِيَّهُمْ وَقَالُوا بِعِزَّةِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْغَالِبُونَ) الشعراء

Interpretation

This Quranic verse shows that the dramatic scene between the prophet Moses and the magicians. The magicians throw their ropes and sticks by perceived might of paraoh. They believed that they cloud not be defeated and they turned into snakes moving from one place to another. They deceived people's eyes. Finally, the prophet Moses throw his stick, it swallowed up all the flashhoods. The magicians fell down in prostration. It seems as if the magicians are tightened by their magic. Finally, they believed in Allah, the truth triumphed over untruth. (Ibn- Ashour(1997:126) and Ibn-Kathir(2000:458).

1. AL-Hilali and Khan: So they threw their ropes and their sticks, and said by the might of fir'aun (Pharoh) it is we who will certainly win !
2. Arberry : So they cast their ropes and their staffs, and said, By they might of Pharaoh we shall be the victors.
3. Kassab: So they dropped their ropes and wands and said, " with Pharaoh 's might we shall be the victorious party".
4. Palmer: So they threw down their ropes and their rods and said, By Pharaoh's might, verily, we it is who shall gain the upper hand.

Discussion

The four translators have rendered the plural form (hebal) into (their ropes).In this verse the word (hebal) is used physically not metaphorically .Thus,the four translators are faithful to the source language as they keep the sense of the original text.

5 - SL Text:

16 / وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ(ق)

Interpretation

In this Quranic verse the word (habl) is used metaphorically not literary . The metaphorical image affirms the highest degree of intimacy of our creator Allah towards human beings .This metaphor symbolizes and connotes Allah's constant watching , absolute knowledge and moral awareness rather than any physical closeness.(Ibn-Ashour (1997: 300)and Ibn Kathir(2000:397).

1.AL-Hilali and Khan:and indeed we have created man , and we know that his ownself whispers to him. And we are nearer to him than his jugular vein (by our knowledge).

2.Arberry : We indeed created man ; and we know what his soul whispers within him , and we are nearer to him than the jugular.

3.Kassab: We are nearer to him than his jugular.

4.Palmer: But we created man,and we know his soul whispers ,for we are nigher to him than his jugular vein.

Discussion

In this Quranic verse the expression (habl)is rendered to (jugular vein) by the four translators.Their renderings implies a suitable functional equivalent which make their renderings very representative.They retain the intended meaning , the impact and the metaphorical purpose of the source language on the target language readers.The translators are successful and faithful in conveying the exact meaning of the Quranic verse.

6 - SL Text:

(وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ (4) فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِنْ مَسَدٍ)المسد\5

1.AL-Hilali and Khan:In her neck a is a twisted rope of Masad (palm fibre).

2. Arberry: The carrier of the firewood , upon her neck a rope of palm- fibre.

3.Kassab: (by means of) a fire-stranded rope which (hangs) from her neck .

4.Palmer :and his wife carrying faggots ! on her neck a cord of palm fibre.



Interpretation

According to tafsir Ibn-Ashour(1997:600) and Ibn-Kathir(2000:514) this Quranic verse narrates the story of Um-Jamil Abu-Lahb's wife .This woman called a bearer of firewood as she holds firewood and put them in the way of the prophet Mohammad.Her hostility towards prophet Mohammad and muslims resulted in her punishment in the day of Judgement.The literal meaning of (habl) in this Quranic verse explains how our creator Allah will punish and torment this woman with rope made from palm fibre around her neck .The imagery uses of (habl) embodied in her sins as she harms the prophet Mohammad The divine justice is emphasized in the verse as a return to her bad behaviours and enmity towards Allah's justice.

Discussion:

In this verse word (habl) is rendered into (rope) by AL-Hilali , Arberry and Kassab , whereas Palmer used (cord).Both English word (rope and cord) retain the meaning of the Arabic word (habl), although that (rope) is stronger than (cord).It is worth noting that all translators succeeded in using functional equivalent to maintain the metaphorical purposes of (habl).They keep the same effect of the original verse on the target language readers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that rendering Quranic word (habl) into English language is contingent on two essential factors. Understanding the intended meaning of the metaphorical images of each verse through exegesis books. Nida's and Taber's functional equivalent method in rendering the word (habl) in Quranic verses is

an appropriate way to hold and maintain the intended meaning of

(habl) correctly without distortion. This method reproduce the closest natural equivalent of the source language into the target language readers .

Approximately the four translators are combined form and meaning of the word(habl) in their renderings which reflect their faithfulness.

References

- AL-Hilali, M. and Khan, M. (Trans) - (1996): The Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran in English Language. Reyadth: Dar Us-Salam.
- AL-Usdi, I.A (1988). AL-Mungid Fi Al-Lugha. ALamu AL-Kutub. Cairo.
- Arberry, A. J. (1998). The Koran Interpreted. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cambridge University Press. (2026). Rope. In Cambridge academic content dictionary (2026 ed.).



- Collins English Dictionary. (2026).HarperCollins Publishers.
- Ibn-Ashour, AL-Tunisi. (1997): AL-Tahreer wa AL-Tanweer. Tunis, AL-dar Al-Tunisya Le AL-Nasher.
- Ibn-kathir, A.I. (2000). Tafsir AL-Quran AL-azim. Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifa for Printing and Publication.
- Kassab, R. (Tran). (1994). The Translation of the Meanings of the Glorious Quran. Amman: AL-Iman Press.
- Mustafa, I. and AL-Zayat, A. (1992). AL-Muajam AL-Wasseet. Dar Al-Kahera. Egypt.
- Nida, E, and Taber, C. R. (1969). The Theory and Practice of Translation. London: United Bible Societies.
- Palmer, E. H. (1994). The Koran (Quran). Oxford University Press.