

## Investigating The Role of Culture in Choosing the Cognitive Equivalence of (فوق: fawqa) in Ali's Translation of some verses of the Holy Quran

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### الخلاصة

يوجد ارتباط بين التفكير الانساني و الخبرة اليومية، ومعاني المفردات من حيث ان المفردة تحمل مفهوم الناس الذهني لخبراتهم اليومية المستحصلة من تفاعلهم مع الموجودات في العالم المحيط بهم. ان التصور الذهني لتفاصيل مشهد معين سيكون متماثلا عند الشعوب التي تعود لتقافات مختلفة اذا ماكان لها نفس طريقة التفكير في ذلك المشهد. وبالتالي سيكون للمفردة المعبرة عن ذلك المشهد والمعاني المرتبطة به في لغة ما مفردات مكافئة في لغة اخرى اما تطابقها في المعاني او ترتبط بتلك المعاني. يهدف هذا البحث الى تحري معاني (فوق) ومقابلتها في اللغة العربية وذلك للكشف عن دور الثقافة في اختيار المفردة التي تمثل المكافئ الادراكي في ترجمة علي يوسف لعدد من آيات القران الكريم. وخلص البحث الى ان التقيد الثقافي في ما يخص صياغة المفردة و حدود المفهوم نفسه في ثقافة ما له دور حاسم في اختيار المفردة التي تمثل المكافئ الافضل. الكلمات المفتاحية: علم اللغة الادراكي، مفهوم، تصور، الثقافة ، تعدد المعاني ، الخبرة اليومية ، الارتباطات، المعنى ، المشهد.

### Abstract

Humans' thinking, daily experience, and words senses are interrelated in that words are carriers of peoples' mental perception of their daily experience with objects in the world. When people of different cultures share the same thinking of a particular scene, the people of one culture will conceptualize the details of that scene in a way similar to that of the people of the other culture; and hence producing identical or related senses of the one word and its equivalence in the other language.

This paper intends to investigate the senses of (over) and its Arabic counterpart (فوق: fawqa), and to detect the role of the culture in choosing the cognitive equivalence in Ali's translation of a selected verses of the Holly Quran. It is concluded that cultural restriction both in terms of wording and in terms of the cultural limits of the concept itself are decisive in selecting of the best equivalence.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, perception, conceptualization, polysemy, daily experience, correlations, sense, scene

### 1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics views language as a tool of putting our mental understanding of the various scenes and things in the world around us into words. Through associating these words with the referents which have detailed pictures in our minds they will acquire meaning (Evans, 2007:22-3). To clarify this notion, a word like 'tree' for instance stands for a plant with wooden stem from which branches grow (Hornby, 2001:1386). Our brain creates a comprehensive representation of that referent (tree) and all the pieces of information related to it are unified in that mental representation. That representation is in fact a "concept" (or meaning) of a tree, while the process of creating that detailed image in

our mind is the “perception” of a tree. Once the word ‘tree’ is heard , its detailed mental picture (not the real entity in the world) is present in one’s mind. Thus words meaning are related to the concepts of things in our mind rather than things in the real world( Evans and Green, 2006: 6). Peoples’ cultural backgrounds are neither separated from their mental understanding of the world nor from their expressing of that understanding.

In this paper,we will investigate how different cultural backgrounds affect encoding the various meanings of ‘over’and its Arabic equivalence’fawqa’ within a frame of cognitive analysis of Ali’s choices in translating ‘ فوق :fawqa’ in some quranic verses.

## 2. Cognitive Polysemy in English

A lexical item is said to be polysemous when it has a number of meanings that are all derived by ‘extension” from a primary sense of an item (Yule, 2010:120). According to cognitive linguistics, the several meanings of an item comes from people’s conceptualization of their experiences with the various aspects related to an object represented by that lexical item.

These aspects may be physical (figures and dimensions) of the referent, psychological (effect of that referent’s shape, color, etc on people), or any other aspects. Continuous correlations between mental image of the referent and the different ways of perceiving its various aspects represent a rich resource of new pieces of meaning which are, through constant use by speakers of a language, come to be used as new individual words( Evans and Green, 2006: 45-6).

### 2.1. Cognitive basis of some senses of ‘over’

‘Over’, in the real word, denotes place and it expresses a relation between the “trajector” which is an entity at a higher level than the other entity, “the landmark”, which is the background. The “trajectory” is close to “the landmark”in such a way that it can be affected by it ( Tylor and Evans, 2003:48 ). While experiencing that relation in their real world, people start to store the details of that relation in their minds. Every single detail is stored as an individual sense in a mental category which allows the production of a number of senses all are derived from or associated to the mental ideation of being, physically, at a higher position and the way people interact with and perceive that relation. In the English language, higher position, which is the most salient part of the spatial relation encoded by ‘over’, is related with a number of everyday experiences that give rise to the following senses:

#### a. “More”

Human thinking always relates rising up of an entity to the increase amount of that entity. This thinking is profounded by daily experience. For example, when we put a book over another one, the vertical hight of the two books will be greater than that of one, and when a third book is added, the hight will increase more and so on. Thus, human minds come to associate between the “more” concept and the vertical rising; this association is embodied by the use of “over” to mean “more” (ibid.: 97-8):

1. *Over 3millions copies sold. (Hornby , 2001: 902)*

2. *He is over sixty.(ibid.)*

#### b. “Preference”

Socially speaking, people share the view that being in a high position is a positive thing, while being in a low position is a negative thing. As it’s human natural tendency to prefer what is positive and since the latter is connected with high position, “over” has been employed to encode the concept of preference (Tylor and Evans, 2003: 103):

3. *I like novel over drama.*

c. “Control”

It's a frequent scene that in any competition the winner stands in up position and the one who loses is in a lower position. Another experience is that after a battle, the triumphant ends raising their hands up showing their dominance. Humans, in fact, used to experience the concept of power in terms of being at a high position (those in high position control those who are in a lower position). (ibid. :101). Thus, “over” encodes that concept as in these instances:

ξ - *She has only the director over her.* ((Hornby, 2001: 902)

ϖ - *He has ruled over a great empire.* (ibid.)

3. Polysemy in Arabic

Polysemy means that one word is used to express several meanings. Hesanin (٢٠٠٦:95) mentions that one of the reasons behind the polysemous meanings of a word is the fact that these meanings have something in common with a central concept encoded by a particular word. Through analogy, the similar aspects between some referents allow the employment of the same word to express new meanings that are related to the central concept encoded by that word.

Of course, people's daily experience and interaction with their world, their perception of connections and similarities between things around them “experiential correlation” are essential in this process.

3.1. Cognitive basis of some senses of ( فوق : fawqa )

As it is shown above polysemous meanings of a word are associated to the basic meaning of a word. The Arab linguists depend on a semantic theory which states that there is a root material (of two, three, or four letters (phonemes) that has a general central meaning. This meaning is conceptualized within the word itself through clustering the phonemes of that word in a specific manner. This means that a phoneme which is at the beginning of an Arabic word mimes the beginning of the event intended to be encoded by that word, the middle phoneme mimes the middle of the event and the final phoneme mimes the end of the event (Al-Neami, 1980 :277)

Arab utilize the properties of their phonemes to picturize the details of the image of an event, object, activity, feelings, states ..etc. Concerning the word, ( فوق ), its three phonemes have the following meanings:

- ( الفاء : Fa ) this phoneme denotes separating and spacing from ground ( الفصل والتباعد )

(Abbas, 1998:132)

- ( الواو : Waw ) this phoneme denotes extending and moving a head ( الامتداد )

(ibid: 97)

- ( قاف : Qaf ) this phoneme denotes force, resistance, and cutting. ( القوه والمقاومه والقطع )

(ibid:144)

The three phonemes component contribute the state of: being separated from the ground moving ahead in the air forcefully resisting the gravity that may prevent the state of rising above, the phoneme ( ق : qaf ) at the end of the word connotes the cut of moving a head to stay at some point higher than the ground. Thus ( فوق ) as a word means to be in a high position; and it is used in Arabic spatially and non spatially.

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Arabic lexicons list a number of senses for (فوق : fawqa ), showing that Arab people used that word to mean one of these senses:

- "الكثرة More" (Al-Asfahani, 1961:388) :

6- "كانوا فوق العشرين" (Omar, 2008:1754)

*They were more than twenty. (literal: They were over twenty )*

7- الثمانية فوق السبعة

*Eight is more than seven. (literal: Eight is over tthan seven)*

b- "الغلبة dominance" (Al-Asfahani, 1961:388) :

٨- "قال سنقتل ابنائهم ونستحي نساءهم وانا فوقهم قاهرون" (الاعراف: ١٢٧) -

"He said "Their male children will wev slay; (only) their females will we save alive;and we have over them (power) irresistible" (Ali, 1938:165).

c- "العلو superiority" (AlRazi, 1994: 556)

٩- "وفوق كل ذي علم عليم" (يوسف: ٧٦) -

"But over all endued with knowledge is One, the All-Knowing" (Ali, 1938:238)

d- "الاولوية والافضية Advantage and Priority" (Al-Asfahani, 1961:388)

10- "مصلحة الوطن فوق الجميع" (Omar, 2008:1754)

-The benefit of the nation comes first. (literal meaning: The benefit of the nation is over all)

11- "عبد الله فوق زيد" (Ibn Mandour,1994:240)

- Abdullah is better than Zaid. (literal meaning: Abdullah is over Zaid)

Infact, the "experiential correlation" and the set of clarifications presented in analyzing the various senses encoded by (over) seems applicable in the case of Arabic counterpart (فوق), this is due to the fact that these senses are derived basically from the the most prominent part of the spatial relation expressed by (over), and (فوق); i.e. that of "a trajector higher than the landmark". It has been mentioned earlier that conceptualization is highly shaped by the nature of human being and the way they perceive a scene. It is the nature of human being to look at people in a high position to be in a position of power and control, and this position is preferred by all humans. Thus, the similar nature of peoples' view of the scene stimulates related senses(control, dominance), (preference , priority and vantage), from the same scene "being in high position". Moreover, everywhere in the world the stable and factual experience is that putting more amount of something in a container leads to rising the level of hight of that thing, and more addition leads to even a higher level. This admitted experience let no way to ignore the correlation between (over), and (فوق) and the sense of "more" encoded by these words whose primary scene is the state "of being at high position". Sharing similar cultural perception of this experience produces the same sense in English 'over' and its Arabic equivalence ("Fawqa": فوق). Culture is the descisive factor in distinguishing between concepts as it mirrors the recognition and understanding of its people and it is that understanding which is included in the particular words.

Transfereing that understanding from one language to another is the perfect area where the role of culture in reflecting its people cognition appears salient. Thus, below is a discussion of translations of a selected Quranic verses which is intended to highlight the

role of cultural perception and cognition in determining the best equivalence.

#### 4. Discussion of Ali's translations of (فوق) in some Quranic verses.

Rendering a sacred text from a source text to a target one is the most difficult issue in the field of translation due to the subtlety of employing each single word in the source text that the inaccurate equivalence may violate the original text or ambiguate the whole intended message. What may further complicate the matter is the fact that equivalence in terms of wording may misrepresent the concept of the source text. In the following discussion, we will notice that cultural distinction in terms of concept wording has a sensitive impact in the accurate rendering of the source message into the target language:

- 'يوصيكم الله في اولادكم للذكر مثل حظ الانثيين فان كن نساء فوق اثنتين فلهن ثلثا ما ترك وان كانت واحدة فلها النصف'(النساء: ١١)

Ali: "Allah(thus) directs you as regards your children's (inherence):to the male, a portion equal to that of two femals: **if only daughters, two or more , their share is two – third of the inheritance**"(Al-Nisaa:11). (Ali, 1938 :82)

The books of explications mention that this verse states a particular equation to calculate the portion of heiresses of inheritance. As the outcome of that equation can be either a whole number or a number with a fraction ,the original text utilizes a word which is used to refer to the two types of number because the way of sharing the heritance depends on the type of the result number.(Al-Zemakhshari, 2009: 223-24) (details of the Islamic legislation in this aspect is out of the paper interest). The Arabic culture used to employ the word (over:فوق) to refer to both quantum expressed in whole number(1,2,etc) and quantum expressed in numbers with fractions (2.5, 1.3,..etc), while 'more than' is used with whole numbers only. Such a distinction is absent in the case of the English equivalent(over). The verse states that only if the outcome of that equation is a whole number i.e. three, four ,..etc the heiresses will share the two-third of the inheritance and as it is impossible to talk about heiress and a half and two heiresses and a third..etc

Another point that should be mentioned here is that an expression such as (over two: فوق اثنتين/فوق اثنتين) is used with a plural verb form in Arabic to mean (two or more than two) rather than (more than two). Arabs' cognitive justification is that (more:فوق) denotes a plural quantity and the plural means 'more than one'; as 'two' is more than one it can be included within the plural concept(Ibid:224). Hence, in some Arabic contexts like the verse in question, ( fawqa:فوق)is used to denote an inclusion sense i.e.the land mark( اثنتين) is included in the trajector(نساء).

Thus (فان كن نساء فوق اثنتين)in Arabic culture means two or more than two femals. Thus the subtle sense of (فوق)in this verse is 'two or more than two' and it can be touched only through the translation of the information itself as the English cognitive equivalence 'over' does not have the contextual properties imposed by the Arabic culture on the Arabic cognitive equivalent 'فوق'.

. 'وهو الذي جعلكم خلائف الارض ورفع بعضكم فوق بعض درجات لئلا يواكبكم في ما اتاكم'.(الانعام: ١٦٥)

Ali: "It is He who hath made you the inheritors of the earth:**He hath raised you in ranks, some above others:** that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you".(Ali,1938:185)

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The message is that the difference between people in terms of abilities, livings, thinking, beliefs and all other aspects is part of the peoples' test in this life (Al-Zemakhshari, 2009:355) Unevenness or difference is picturized as a sort of distance that separates people whose actions determine their levels. The plural form of the word (درجات: ranks\grades) depicts that the distance between these levels is far. The central sense of (over:فوق) is superior to. Here we should mention that English natives use "above" in expressions where the trajector is at a distance higher than and far from affecting the landmark. Consequently, the most suitable equivalence is "above" as it expresses the meaning of superiority which is a primary concept in this verse.

"وهو القاهر فوق عباده ويرسل عليكم حفظة". (الانعام: ٦١)

Ali: "He irresistibly, supreme over his servants and He set guardians over you". (Ali, 1938:137)

The Arabic interpretation of (القاهر: Supreme) is the Highest Being Who has the most authority that both servants(people) and the angles whether guardians or keepers are submissive to His will and can not violate His rules (Al-Zemakhshari, 2009: 331)The Arabic 'over:فوق' in this text is intended to connote the concepts of highness, authority and influence of God . In discussing the cognitive meaning of English "over", it is shown that the landmark is within influence of the trajector which is in a higher position. Then the translator chooses 'over' as the best cognitive equivalence.

"ان الذين يبايعونك انما يبايعون الله يد الله فوق ايديهم" (الفتح:١٠)

Ali: "Verily those who plight their fealty to thee plight their fealty in truth to Allah: the Hand of Allah is over their hands". (Ali, 1938:503)

The explicators say that this verse has two interpretations. The first one is that the word(Hand)refers to the force and power of Allah and the message of "the Hand of Allah is over their hands" is that God force and power is greater than the force and power of those who give their plight to the prophet and that God will add His force to those believers to support His prophet "more sense". While the second interpretation is that those believers by giving their pledges to support the prophet, they actually make this commitment with God(Al-Zemakhshari, 2009:1025) as He watches their deeds and rewarding them "examining sense".

As the two interpretaions indicate the powerful presence of Allah, then the equivalent word must implicate the proximaity of God. Cognitive meaning of "over" allows the two interpretations,while 'above' puts proximity sense aside.

"اذ قال الله يا عيسى اني متوفيك ورافعك الي ومطهرك من الذين كفروا وجاعل الذين اتبعوك فوق الذين كفروا الى يوم القيامة". (ال عمران: ٥٥)

Ali: "Behold! Allah said: O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehood) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject Faith, to the Day of Resurrection". (Ali, 1938:60)

The word(fawqa:over)is used to indicate highness in values and beliefs, dominance,and superiority of the followers of Jesus as compared to the disbelievers; this will be the state of the believers till the day of judgment(Al-Zemakhshari, 2009:174) While it is possible to use (فوق:fawqa)in Arabic to denote both dominance (which suggests the effect of trajector on the landmark)and superiority(which implies that the landmark is distant from the influence of the trajector), the English language use 'over' to encode "control" which is one of the senses implied in the concept of dominance, and 'above' to encode

superiority. Neither 'over' nor 'above' can combine the sense of proximity and distal as their Arabic equivalence can do. The reason is attributed to the cultural difference in concept definition and concept wording. Superiority encoded by 'above' involves the sense of unsusceptibility. A sentence like:

12- "*He is above (not \*over) such behavior*". (Quirk et al, 1985:686)

means he is a very good person that can not do something wrong. While the Arabic concept of superiority encoded by (فوق: fawqa) involves, in addition to the sense of unsusceptibility, the senses of being in high rank, being independent, being in a position of strength, and being better than others. In the light of this difference, the translator again focuses on transferring the information by choosing 'superior to' to substitute (فوق: fawqa) in the target language.

### 5. Conclusions:

1. Conceptualization is an endless process which is in action every single moment of human life. The world where we live enriches our perception with the raw material represented by the huge number of objects and scenes around us, and the variety in terms of interacting with and understanding of these objects and scenes is the dynamic originator of new concepts.

2. The unified way of perceiving a particular scene by the speakers who belong to different cultures justifies the emergence of either related or identical concepts in these cultures. The correlation between vertical height and increase quantity of something is an experience that is shared by the English natives and the Arabic ones. Thus, the same concept "more" is encoded by both the English "over" and its Arabic equivalence (فوق: fawqa).

3. However, full symmetry is impossible as the different strategies of wording these concepts may vary from one language to another. It is noticed that English uses two words "over" and "above" to describe the scene of a "trajector in a position higher than the landmark". The possible influence of the trajector on the landmark is encoded by (over), and the absence of this influence is encoded by (above). As a result, the concept of superiority is associated with "above" only while Arabic language uses the same word (فوق: fawqa) to indicate dominance (where the influence of the trajector on the landmark is present) and the concept of superiority (where that influence is absent).

4. It is mentioned earlier that a particular concept is in fact a sort of mental category which involves a set of meanings some of which are central meanings within that concept and others are secondary since they come from analyzing the central meanings. At this point culture emerges as essential factor in the process of concepts formation in that what seems a central meaning for one culture is only minor in another one simply because people of different cultures develop different tendencies in interacting with the scene from which that concept is derived. Thus we speak of the concepts of "control" and "preference" in English and of "dominance" and "advantage and priority" in Arabic though all these concepts are derived from the same scene "that of a trajector being in a position higher than the landmark). However, relatedness between these concepts still apparent but it seems that Arab people tend to perceive the image of being in a higher position in terms of intense power in ruling, controlling, and overriding entities in a lower position. Thus Arab natives choose a (dominance concept) to cover these meanings. While English natives conceive the same scene in terms of overlooking, monitoring, and supervising which are implied in "control concept". The preference concept encoded

by the English 'over' involves the notion of favourable option, while in Arabic, the advantage and priority concepts are dealt with as two distinct senses of being upgraded, and of primacy. Of course, the special structure of each society has its word in the way of thinking of its people, their cognitive conceptualization, and consequently in their languages.

5. The best level of communication requires finding the best equivalence on the cognitive conceptual level as words' use and connotations are highly restricted by and submissive to the cognitive perception of the natives of a language. Finding equivalence in terms of wording may be misleading as words are in fact only carriers of the speakers concepts thus the transference of the exact message requires finding the target word that cognitively equivalent to its counterpart in the source language.

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