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THE WORD OF 'Al'nar' IN QURAN AND ITS SYNONYMS: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The Holy Quran is a divine book and is reckoned to be the most sacred text for all Muslims around the world. One of the distinctive features of the Holy Quran is its eloquence and unique style. The use of synonyms in the Quran is a common phenomenon that is widely discussed in Islamic literature. It refers to the use of different words to communicate the same or similar meanings. Synonymy is an essential aspect of the linguistic structure of the text and, therefore, it is a matter of great interest for semanticists. This article explores the use of the word Al'nar and its synonyms in the Quran. Moreover, the study makes use of three different translations for the comparative analysis of the selected word. For linguistic context, Ibn-e Kathir the exegesis of the Quran was consulted for all the selected verses to locate variations in the shades of meanings as rendered by the translators. It concludes with the understanding that the text of the Qura'n is linguistically rich, with lucidity of expressions conveying the nuances of meaning which the translators sometimes failed to transfer in the original.

Keywords: Synonymy, Alnar, Semanticists, exegesis, translations, translators

1. INTRODUCTION

The study is about the synonyms of just one word *Al'nar* and its variants as used in the Quran to convey the meanings of fire, torment, penalty, infliction, hell fire, torment of the fire, infliction of the scorching heat and so on. Since, Arabic is a rich language and with the change of linguistic and social context, the single lexical item can yield to multiple web of meanings which makes the task of the translators ever more difficult. The study delves to uncover range of meanings that the selected translators have used in their respective texts as per their understanding of the linguistic and social context. To further grapple with the context, the study makes use of Ibn-e-Kathir, the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The Quran is believed to be the word of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through Angel Jibril (Gabriel). It is written in Arabic which is considered a sacred language in Islam. Similarly, the language of the Quran is also distinctive and is characterized by its richness, expressiveness and depth of meaning. Moreover, it is considered to be the one of the most significant and complex forms of the Arabic language. The use of synonyms shows the rhetorical expressiveness of the speakers of a particular language. The text of the Quran is replete with the use of synonyms and there is a vast range of synonyms to express the same or similar meanings. Moreover, synonymy serves a variety of purposes, including laying stress on particular point, adding richness to the text, and creating a specific rhythm in the language.

Synonymy is generally categorized into two types: one is partial synonymy and the other is complete synonymy. The former refers to the situation where two or more words have a similar meaning, but each word has a definite connotation. For example, the word *Ar-Rahm* and *Ar-Raheem* are used synonymously to emphasize the extent of Allah's mercy, but the former is used to express the extent of Allah's mercy, whereas the latter is used to emphasize the continuity of Allah's mercy. The latter implies the use of two or more words that have the exact or same meaning. The purpose of using complete synonymy also means accentuating a particular point, creating a rhythmic pattern, or providing alternating expression. For instance, the words *ma'a* and *ma'een* both mean 'with' and they are used interchangeably in the Quran.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Qur'an is the supreme form of language that has been a point of research and discussion among the experts. Linguists and semanticists are divided about the nature of synonyms used in the Quran (Almakroob and Al-Ahdal, 2020). According to the authors, some Arab linguists (such as) oppose the use of complete or perfect synonyms in the Arabic language as there are clear differences in the use of seemingly similar words. Moreover, these words exist in their particular linguistic environment with their independent and are not replaceable. In other words, Bint al-Shati (1971) argues that The Qur'an is a word of Allah and no speech or language can be comparable to it. On the other hand, some linguists are of the opinion that it is possible for two words to have the same meaning (such as) and therefore, they are contextually replaceable. The supporters of this stance hold that the existence of synonymous expressions led to the different dialects of Arabic. For example, *hintah* and *qamh* (*wheat*) are used interchangeably among Arabs (Sibawayh, 1977, Ibn Jinnī, 1988). Ramzan et al. (2020) reveals that meanings are conveyed the effective employment of representative speech acts.

In order to check whether two words are near synonyms or complete synonyms, several linguistic means were used, including oppositeness and substitution (Palmer, 1986). In other words, the degree of synonymy depends on whether they are mutually substitutable in all cases without affecting the truth value of the sentence (Palmer, 1986, p. 167). In case of near

synonyms, the two words are considered to be synonyms if they have the same antonyms. Omari and Melhim (2014) conducted a comparative study on synonyms in Arabic and English language, particularly focusing on their use in the Quran. Another study was carried out by Ibrahim et.al. On the use of the word *basar* and its synonyms such as *ra'a* used in the Holy Qura'n. The study was based on comparing the *Quran Corpus* and *Mu'jam Mufahras Li Alfaz Al-Quran*. They found *Ra'a*, *Syahida* as well as *Nazara* are the synonymous expressions of the word *Basar*. Their findings showed that these words have the similar frequency in use except for the word *Ra'a*.

Several other studies have been conducted on the translation of synonymic expressions used in the Quran. For example, Saleh and Ahmad (2022) conducted a study on the translation of Quranic synonyms in Quran, They found that the number of studies regarding rendition of the synomys in Malay language is lower than the translation of the same in English. Similarly, Hizbullah and Ali (n.d) made their research on translating the concept of "Goodness" mentioned in the Quran into Malay Language. The came up with their findings that the general idea of "Goodness", expressed through the words *ḥasanat*, *khairāt* and *tayyibāt*. However, these words acquire their distinctive meanings in the context of the verses in which they are used. Also Al-Sowaid (2011) also conducted her research on issues concerning translation of near-synonyms from Arabic to English. She found that the intricacies involved in translating Qur'ān as a genre is a big challenge to the translator at both the lexical and textual levels, which leads to the misrepresentation of its true message. Accordingly, Kamil and Hasni (2014) conducted a contrastive study on Synonymy in English and Arabic concerning the Holy Qur'an. They concluded that an absolute synonym is not possible; it does not exist at all. In another study, Asmaa (nd) explored the translations of three near-synonyms in three different translations. She found that there was a void between the original and the translations in terms of transferring the meaning of the original. Ramzan et al. (2023) have confirmed there are not any significant statistical differences among ESL motivational gender levels. Chen and Ramzan (2024) have further stated that Facebook posts about learning English as a second language (L2) provide primary motivation for learners and promote their performance. Ramzan and Khan (2019) have stated stereotyped ideological constructions make meanings. Khan et al. (2017) described that media is tool to create meanings. Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) have claimed that collusive stance and pacifier agenda is powerful meaning making tool. Nawaz et al. (2021) that negative them and positive us make meanings.

He analysed the translations of T. B Irving and Yusuf Ali. She concludes that Qur'an is a complex genre which presents a huge challenge to the translators at both word level as well as textual level, and therefore, they are likely to misrepresent its true message.

3. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of the language and meaning of the Holy Book. There are many words in the Qur'an that are interchangeably used because they have the same or nearly the same meaning. By analyzing these relationships, the

study aims to have a more nuanced understanding of the concepts and ideas associated with the text of the Qur'an. Furthermore, understanding these synonyms will enable us to have a precise understanding of the message of the text of the Qur'an. Finally, the study will help learners of the Arabic language to become familiar with the various words of the Qur'an and their shades of meaning, and consequently, improve their language skills.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Holy Qur'an has various lexical items indicating the feelings of 'Fire' as the core meaning of 'Al'nar'. These include, na'r (نار), *shihab* (شهاب) *sa'eer* (سعير) *sa'moom* (سموم) and so on. The meanings of these lexical items have been analysed according to their occurrence in the relevant verses as well as keeping in view the context. Their meanings have been explored from exegesis of the glorious Qur'an such as Al Qurtubi () and Ibn Kahir (). Moreover, dictionaries of Arabic language and commentary books have also been consulted for the said purpose.

Three English translations have been selected for tracing the translational equivalents of the synonymous lexical items. These include Pickthall (1930), Ali (1937), and Shakir (1982). All these translations are widely used and more popular as compared to other translations. For instance, Pickthall's translation has twenty seventh editions. Being a native speaker, he was well versed in English. Moreover, he also embraced Islam and therefore, his translation is faithful and conveys the sense of the original text. Similarly, the rendition done by Ali (1937), who was an Indian Muslim scholar is equally widespread and widely readable in the English-speaking world. It is available in 35 editions. Finally, Arberry (1955) translation came seventeen years after Ali is also very well-known rendition since the time it was published.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

It has been noticed that exegesis of the Holy Book usually do not focus on distinguishing among lexical items because the authors of these books are only interested in explain and interpreting the meaning of the verses and the possible reasons behind their revelation. However, with Muslim scholars, lexicographers and linguists it is generally the case that they investigate the occurrence of the closely related lexical items in their contexts in the Holy Book and have come up with various findings. For instance, Al Jawzia (1970) is of the view that near synonyms are apparently similar in meaning but they stand out unique as each one of them has its distinctive meaning in Qur'an. Despite their common semantic features, they have unique individual features.

Morphology of the word Annar

The selected word in the verse-17 of the second chapter (*Albaqara*) is an indefinite and feminine noun and in the verse it has been used in accusative case. Its root is *nūn wāw rā* (ن و ر).

Linguistically it implies an effective natural element represented by light and scorching heat, and the flame that appears to the senses as the scorching heat is called fires.

Idiomatically: It is what God, Glory be to Him, has prepared for those who disobey Him, and the Fire is the abode that God has prepared for those who disbelieve in Him, who rebel against His law and deny His Messengers, and it is His chastisement in which He tortures His enemies, and His prison in which the criminals are punished. It is the biggest shame. And the great loss, above which there is no disgrace, and there is no greater loss than it. And the names of the fire are *Gehenna*, Hell, *Al-Samum*, *Blaze*, *Laza*, *Safar*, Prisoner, The Abyss, and *Al-Hathma*.

Table.1

	Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Arberry	Verse
	Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindleth fire, and when it sheddeth its light around him Allah taketh away their light and leaveth them in darkness, where they cannot see, (Pickthal)	Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness so they could not see. (Yusuf Ali)	The likeness of them is as the likeness of a man who kindled a fire, and when it lit all about him God took away their light, and left them in darkness unseeing – A.J. Arberry	2:17 مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي أَسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلْمَةٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ

In the selected verse the word ‘Fire’ is not used in the sense of torture/ torment/ penalty or any other form of infliction of pain. Here Allah has related the condition of the hypocrites whose condition is the condition of people who light fire to illumine the surroundings; they remain in light as long as fire burns and lights the surrounding; the moment it extinguishes they once again come back to darkness. It is used in the sense of parable of the hypocrites who prefer misguidance over the right path and deviate from righteousness. Hypocrites believe and disbelieve their Creator.

Comparative Analysis of three translations.

The three translators have translated the word نَارًا (fire) while translating the first part of the verse. But, in the second part, the translation of the word ظُلْمَةٍ (darkness), which is the antonym

of نَارًا, Yusuf Ali has added the adjective ‘utter, which is much closer to the sense of the original, keeping in view the context of the verse. According Ibn-e- Faris Nun, waw, and rā’ are a true origin that indicates illumination, turbulence, and lack of stability from it, light and fire. Al-Raghib states that *An-Nur* means the diffused light that aids vision. The connection between light and darkness is that of opposites, so they do not meet, for light is a light that helps to see things, and darkness is not in it, just as the light is one and does not multiply, and the darkness is many and multiple. In other words, light and darkness are opposites, so they do not meet, for light is intense, illumination, and darkness is intense blackness.

Table.2

Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Arberry	Verse
But they who disbelieve, and deny Our revelations, such are rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein.	But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein.	And those who disbelieve and belie Our signs, they, shall be fellows of the Fire; therein they shall be abiders	Al-Baqarah (2:39) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

The seventh word of verse (2:39) is a feminine noun and is in the genitive case (مجرور). The noun's trilateral root is *nūn wāw rā* (ن و ر). The context of this verse is attached with the previous verse, 2:38 where Allah, the Almighty warns Adam that He will send His revelation to His Prophets for the guidance of Adma’s children. Therefore, they must seek guidance and if they go astray and follow the path of Satan then they will suffer in hell. In verse 2:39 the word Fire refers to Hellfire unlike to 2:17.

Comparative Analysis of three translations.

The three translators have rendered the word ‘fire’ in translating the word ‘na’r’ and have maintained the meaning of Hellfire in the first part of the verse.. However, in the second part of the translation, Pickthall has used the word ‘owners’ which deviates from the sense of the original. The context of the verse shows that those who will go the hellfire will be the companions or fellows of the fire as the translations of the Yusuf Ali and Arberry’s translation show. But considering them the ‘owners’ does not concur with the meaning and sense of the

word **أَصْحَابُ** used in the original. According to a well-known Arabic dictionary, *Almaani*, the word **أَصْحَابُ** means, the escort. Moreover, the Arabic word (أهل) means ‘native’ or “the owner of the place’ or of a populated city.”

Table-3

Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Arberry	Verse
Lo! We have sent thee (O Muhammad) with the truth, a bringer of glad tidings and a warner. And thou wilt not be asked about the owners of hell fire.	Verily We have sent thee in truth as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. But of thee no question shall be asked of Companions of the blazing fire.	Verily We have sent thee with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner, and thou shalt not be questioned of the fellows of the Flame.	Al baqarah (2:119) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا ۗ وَلَا تُسْئَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْجَحِيمِ

The tenth word of verse (2:119) is a feminine noun and is in the genitive case (مجرور). The noun's trilateral root is *jīm hā mīm* (ج ح م). In this verse 2:119 Allah Almighty addresses His Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, that He has given him truth and happy news and He has also appointed him as a warner. Muhammad, peace be upon Him, is a warner for those who disbelieve the signs of Allah that they will be the owner of terrible place, Hell. Here the original word in the text of the verse 2:119 is *Jaheem* not *Naar*. However, all three translators have conveyed the meaning of *Jaheem* in a slightly different shade. The synonymy is not perfect here.

Comparative Analysis of three translations.

According to a well known Arabic dictionary, *Lisan ul Arab*, the word *jaheem* means one of the names of fire. Moreover, Hell has been mentioned repeatedly in more than one place in the *Ahadith* and it is one of the names of Hell, and its origin is that of the fire whose flames are intensified. As for the etymology of the word *Jaheem*, it is debatable whether it was Arabic or non-Arab. Those who are in favour of, and whoever made it Arabic said that its origin is “Jahannam: which means the far bottom. As for its non-Arabic origin, it is Hebrew, and it is a compound word of two, “Ji” meaning “Valley” and “Hinnom”, which is the name of a man, and “J-Hinnom” meaning the Valley of *Hinnom*, or the Valley of *Bani Hinnom*, is a valley in the

outskirts of the city of Jerusalem, It is mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible, and its name to this day is the Valley of Hell.

Keeping in view the meaning of the original ie the word *Jaheem*, the comparative analysis of the three translations show that Pickthall and Arberry have respectively translated it as ‘Hell fire’ and ‘flame’ which do not reflect the depth of meaning associated with the word. However, Ali’s translation, ‘blazing fire’ is closer to the sense of the original.

Table-4

Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Arberry	Verse
<p>Verily Allah heard the saying of those who said, (when asked for contributions to the war): "Allah, forsooth, is poor, and we are rich!" We shall record their saying with their slaying of the Prophets wrongfully and We shall say: Taste ye the punishment of burning!</p>	<p>Allah hath heard the taunt of those who say: "Truly Allah is indigent and we are rich!" We shall certainly record their word and (their act) of slaying the Prophets in defiance of right and We shall say: "Taste ye the penalty of the Scorching Fire!</p>	<p>(3/181) Assuredly Allah hath heard the saying of those who say: verily Allah is poor and we are rich. Surely We shall write down that which they have said and their slaying of the prophets without justice, and We shall say taste the torment of the burning.</p>	<p>Surah Al-Imran (3:181) لَقَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَقِيرٌ وَنَحْنُ أَغْنِيَاءُ سَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَالُوا وَقَتْلَهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَنَقُولُ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ</p>

The same subject 3:181 runs through the following verses 3:181-3:184. Here Allah the Dominator states about the peoples who slew their prophets without justice and disobeyed Him. They challenged the sovereignty of Allah, the All-Prevailing One. The record of the disbelievers is maintained and they will reap what they sow in this world and for them He has prepared torment of burning. In the verse 3:181 the word in the original text is *Hareeq* which is the synonym of *Al'naar*. *Hareeq* refers to *Naar* but it conveys a more intense or severe form of fire, often associated with burning or scorching.

Comparative Analysis of three translations.

According to Ibnul-Arabi, the word *الْحَرِيقُ* means “The burning of fire with its flame”. And the Arabic dictionary, Lisan ul Arab shows the meaning of the same as “ Flame” . Moreover, the morphology of the word *Alhareeq* fits with the structure of the word *fa’eel* which communicates exaggeration. In this context, the analysis of the three translations shows that the translators have understood the meaning of the word *الْحَرِيقُ* in different ways. Pickthall has used the word ‘burning’; Ali has used ‘Scorching fire’. However, Arberry has used the word ‘torment’ alongside burning which conveys the added meaning of intensity and therefore, reflects the spirit of the original.

Table-5

Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Arberry	Verse
Lo! Those who devour the wealth of orphans wrongfully, they do but swallow fire into their bellies, and they will be exposed to burning flame.	Those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans eat up a fire into their own bodies: they will soon be enduring a blazing fire!	(4/10) Verily those who devour the substance of the orphans wrongfully, only devour the fire into their bellies, and anon they shall roast in the Blaze.	Surah An-Nisa (4:10) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا ۖ وَسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيرًا

The thirteenth word of verse (4:10) is an indefinite masculine noun and is in the accusative case (منصوب). The noun's trilateral root is *sīn ‘ayn rā* (س ع ر). The verses 4:7 to 4:10 share the same context. It explains the law of inheritance. The law is given, the boundaries are set. The work of the believers is to follow the law given by Allah, the All Compelling. Those who disobey shall be punished with fire. In the verse 4:10, *naaran* is translated as fire however, *saeeran* is translated as flame, fire, and blaze by the three translators respectively.

Comparative Analysis of three translations.

It means, an intense, blazing fire or flame of fire. The analysis of the three translations show that there are differences in the English equivalents of the word *سَعِيرًا*. Pickthall and Ali have

respectively used the words ‘flame’ and ‘fire’ while using the adjectives blazing and burning before these nouns. On the other hand Arberry has used the single word ‘Blaze’ which encompasses the meaning of the word سَعِيرًا . In other words, where Pickthall and Ali have used two words to clarify the meaning of the single word سَعِيرًا , Arberry has used a single word which shows his skill as a translator.

Table-6

Pickthall	Yusuf Ali	Arberry	Verse
But Allah hath been gracious unto us and hath preserved us from the torment of the breath of Fire.	"But Allah has been good to us and has delivered us from the Penalty of the Scorching Wind. 5061	Wherefore Allah hath obliged us, and hath protected us from the torment of the Scorch.	52:27 فَمَنْ أَلَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقْنَا عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ

The subject of the verses 4:21 to 4:28 is the same. Allah, the Exalted, states His generosity and favours to His servants. He has given countless blessings to man and one of them is that He protects His servants from torment of heat even of small amount. *Samoom* in the verse 4:27 is similar to heated wind that is translated with a little difference by the three translators as the breath of fire, ‘the scorching heat’, and ‘ the torment of the Scorch’, which is again not perfect synonymy.

The sixth word of verse (52:27) is a masculine noun and is in the genitive case (مجرور). The noun's trilateral root is *sīn mīm mīm* (س م م). According to Al tafsir ul waseet, *samoom* refers to the very hot wind which enters the pores of the body, as if it were a deadly poison. Now, looking at the three translations, it appears that Pickthall and Ali’s translations are close to the meaning of the word *samoom* whereas Arberry has used the word Scorch unlike the other two translators who have used the words breath of Fire and Schorching wind.

6. CONCLUSION

Synonymy has been one of the widely discussed topics among classical as well as classical Arab linguists. Since Qura’n uncovers the shades of meaning associated with every word, therefore, sense relations become extremely significant. Like many other words used in the Qura’n, *Al’nar* has a variety of other related words which have unique meanings associated with them, though they have a single semantic field. This phenomenon becomes more significant when it comes to the translation of Qura’n in other languages including English, which is the

focus of the present work. The study reveals that Qura'nic text is rich with words having multiple meanings which have similarities with other words in terms of meanings, but maintain their uniqueness at the same time. This is a tricky area for the translators as they sometimes fail to understand and differentiate different connotations associated with them. Consequently, it leads to semantic losses as we have seen in translation of some verses. As the present study focused on the synonymy of *Al'nar*, further research may be conducted to explore the synonyms of other words used in the Qura'n and their translations in different languages.

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