

Arabic Synonyms in Bilingual Arabic-English Dictionaries

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This paper investigates the meaning of two pairs of synonyms taken from the glorious Qur'an, and how the compilers of bilingual dictionaries treat them while giving their meaning. The amount of information given under each word will also be investigated. The two pairs of synonyms under investigation are: (Al gaiØ الغيث/ Al matarالمطر) and (Al khawf الخوف/ Al khashyahالخشية). The three bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries concerned in the present study are AL MAWRID: A modern Arabic English Dictionary (1997) by Dr. Rohi Baalbaki, A Dictionary Of Modern Written Arabic (1979) by Hans Wehr, and A Learner's Arabic-English Dictionary (1984) by F. Steingass. The results show that the three selected dictionaries equally treated the two pairs as complete synonyms, while they varied in the amount of information they provided for each item.

Key words: *Synonyms, Partial Synonyms, Bilingual Dictionaries, Arabic English Dictionaries.*

Introduction

This paper is particularly concerned with the utility of information about synonymous lexical items, in bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries, and how their lexicographers treat the two pairs of synonyms:

- Al gaiØ / الغيث Al matar/ المطر
- Al khawf / الخوف Al khashyah / الخشية

Bilingual dictionaries particularly target sets of learners: English speakers learning Arabic, and Arabic speakers learning English. As supposed by all dictionary users, bilingual dictionaries must provide information on how a certain lexical item is used, its exact meaning, its pronunciation, and sometimes, examples.

Al-Khawaldeh (1994) says, "*Dictionaries, like religious books, are part of home possession*". Within this framework, this paper investigates how the lexicographers of three bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries treat pairs of synonyms, and what information they provide to the dictionary users and learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Moulin (1979), a lexicographer, considers a broader view of learner's expectations with regard to dictionary usage. He claims that learners want to know what words mean, what they can do with them, and how they can use them to communicate. Pedagogical lexicographers bear more expectations, which relate to how to deal with synonymy, polysemy and collocation, to show the dictionary user that particular vocabulary items have a synonymous meaning or a restricted field of co-occurrence.

According to Frawley (1985), dictionaries, bilingual or otherwise, first and foremost "are a type of writing for the purpose of the continuation of writing and reading: they are texts for other texts". This definition shows that a dictionary is a meta-text, which is meant to provide access to other texts. The aim of this study is to report an initial attempt to discover how lexicographers treat synonyms, and what kind of information bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries provide.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the related literature. Then, the methodology of the study will be presented. After that comes a discussion and conclusion. Finally, recommendations are presented.

Review of related literature

a. synonymy

There are two aspects of meaning in its study. First, the meaning between words and the world; second, sense relation. According to Jackson (1945:64-72) there are three types of sense relation: synonymy, which deals with sameness of meaning; antonyms that deal with oppositeness of meaning; and hyponymy, which refers to the hierarchy among the meaning of lexemes, in which the meaning of one lexeme is included in the meaning of another.

The sense relation in this study is synonymy. It is not a new topic in either English or Arabic. It has received much attention by Arab and English linguists who considered it as a very important issue in both languages.

Many linguists have discussed the existence of synonymy and whether there is more than one type. Accordingly many linguists reject the idea of absolute synonymy. Jackson (1945:66-67) rejects it and replaces it with the idea of partial synonymy. Ullman (1962:141-142) also rejects absolute synonymy in natural languages but accepts the idea of scientific terminology, e.g. salt – sodium – chloride. Cruse (1986:268) defines absolute synonymy, as "*two lexical units would be absolute synonymy if and only if all their contextual relations were identical*". So, to the researchers it is clear that all semanticists, in terms of natural languages, reject the idea of absolute synonymy.

b. Bilingual dictionaries

All learners of languages especially EFL learners are advised to have a bilingual dictionary. However, Khanji (1998) stated that learners, unlike translators, refrain from referring to dictionaries probably because dictionary use requires both time and effort among other factors: "*these factors, may include difficulty in searching for words alphabetically, trying to reduce the multiple senses of a word and having to figure out the target definition of the word in order to incorporate it into the text of either listening or reading*". These difficulties encourage bilingual lexicographers, including and perhaps most especially those who compile pedagogical dictionaries, to provide information needed by dictionary users. Pedagogical dictionaries are the focus of the present study.

Therefore Cowie (1990) says of a pedagogical lexicographer, that the main goal of this kind of bilingual dictionary is to "*help the learner to be aware of and if possible, to avoid, common sources of errors in the language he is attempting to learn*".

Hamdan and Fareh (1997:213) concluded that "*the bilingual (English-Arabic) dictionaries under investigation do not, on the whole, provide satisfactory information on the syntax of the*

target verbs. Moreover, they sometimes constitute a potential source of problems for Arab EFL learners who think that equivalence in meaning always implies equivalence in syntax”.

Methodology

The corpus of this study consists of two pairs of Arabic synonymy, namely, (*Al gaiØ الغيث / Al matar المطر* / *Al khawf الخوف / Al khashyah الخشية*). The three selected bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries are: AL MAWRID: A modern Arabic English Dictionary (1997) by Dr Rohi Baalbaki, A Dictionary Of Modern Written Arabic (1979) by Hans Wehr (DOMWA), and A Learner's Arabic-English Dictionary (1984) by F. Steingass (LAED).

The meaning of the target pairs of synonymy will be provided as reference information, against which meaning and information will be given in each of the selected dictionaries. The target synonymy will be looked up in a sample of the bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries. Information provided by each of the three dictionaries will be compared and contrasted.

Discussions and conclusion

In this section we will examine the three dictionaries, and compare them to each pair of the target synonymy. First we will examine (*Al gaiØ الغيث / Al matar المطر*), then move on to the second pair, which is (*Al khawf الخوف / Al khashyah الخشية*).

Al Momani (1999) stated that the Qur'an uses *Al gaiØ الغيث* to mean rain, but in addition to that cognitive meaning, it connotes relief, help and mercy, which accompanies long-awaited rain. He also discussed *Al matar المطر*, which means rain cognitively but also conveys a passive meaning, punishment and revenge. So *Al gaiØ الغيث* unlike *Al matar المطر* in its connotative meaning although they have the same cognitive meaning, which is rain. He also discussed the second pair, which is *Al khawf الخوف* and *Al khashyah الخشية* saying that “*الخشية 'al khašya connotes power and mightiness of the thing feared and it is often combined with God; on the other hand the item 'الخوف' alkhaḥf is used..., to express the weakness, either in both sides, the person who fears and the thing feared, or the weakness in only one side...*”. So we notice that both pairs are not considered as absolute synonymy and they differ in their connotative meaning.

Hamdan and Fareh (1997) stated that “*monolingual dictionaries vary in the amount and quality of information provided on verb argument structure*”.

Table 1 below demonstrates the same finding that Hamdan and Fareh concluded for monolingual dictionaries. However, in our study the first finding is that bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries vary in the amount of information they provide, but they equally treat pairs of items that are not absolute synonyms. For example, the AL MAWRID dictionary gives the least information; it provides only the meaning of the item without mentioning pronunciation, part of speech... etc. Then comes the LAED dictionary, which gives more information; such as pronunciation, part of speech, senses and usage for each lexical item. Finally comes the DOMWA dictionary, which provides the most information for each lexical item; e.g. pronunciation, examples, senses, part of speech and usage. See Appendix 1. for more details.

The second finding, which is very important in the present study, is that the three selected dictionaries equally treated the two pairs (*Al gaiØ* الغيث / *Al matar* المطر) (*Al khawf* الخوف / *Al khashyah* الخشية) while giving their meaning by treating each pair as an absolute synonym that in this case, as we explained, may cause confusion for the two sets of learners as the target

| Dictionary | Meaning | Organization | Information |
|------------|---|----------------------|---|
| AL MAWRID | <i>Al gaiØ</i> / الغيث / <i>Al matar</i> المطر | Rain (synonymous) | Entries are arranged alphabetically from right to left without any derivations for both items. |
| | <i>Al khawf</i> الخوف / <i>Al khashyah</i> الخشية | Fear (synonymous) | |
| DOMWA | <i>Al gaiØ</i> / الغيث / <i>Al matar</i> المطر | Rain (synonymous) | Entries are arranged alphabetically from left to right with derivations for both items as run-ones. |
| | <i>Al khawf</i> الخوف / <i>Al khashyah</i> الخشية | Fear (synonymous) | |
| LAED | <i>Al gaiØ</i> / الغيث / <i>Al matar</i> المطر | Rain (synonymous) | Entries are arranged alphabetically from left to right with derivations for both items. |
| | <i>Al khawf</i> الخوف / <i>Al khashyah</i> الخشية | Fear (synonymous) | |

users of bilingual dictionaries: Arabic speakers learning English and English speakers learning Arabic. And as to translators, especially those who translate the meaning of the Qur'an, for example, the three dictionaries give the same meaning (rain) as the meaning for both *Al gaiØ* الغيث and *Al matar* المطر without remarking on the connotative meaning for each item. The same result is found for the second pair *Al khawf* الخوف and *Al khashyah* الخشية. It is treated as an absolute synonym in the three dictionaries which give fear as one meaning under both items.



It is important to state that AL MAWRID Arabic-English dictionary was compiled by a native speaker of Arabic. This explains why he supply only the meaning. But the compilers of the other two dictionaries were non-native speakers of Arabic. This explains why they give extra information for each lexical item.

Another point is that the AL MAWRID Arabic-English dictionary is set for native speakers of Arabic (i.e. EFL\ESL learners). This explains why its compiler does not give the pronunciation for example, and other information that may not be necessary for them from his point of view. The remaining two dictionaries are set for non-native speakers of Arabic (i.e. AFL\ASL learners). Their compilers concentrated on pronunciation and other necessary information for this set of learners.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that compilers of bilingual dictionaries consider providing more information on synonymous meaning, especially the connotative meaning, and that they give more information, e.g. pronunciation, syntax ... etc, which are very important for both sets of learners mentioned above.

The second recommendation is for translators and interpreters who translate the meaning of the Holy Qur'an to take into consideration the connotative meaning, which is completely neglected by the compilers of bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries.



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