

Comparative Study Of Pragma-Linguistic Losses In The Selected Translations: An Analysis Of Discourse Of Surah Al-Qasas

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ABSTRACT

The paper in hands strives to investigate the pragmalinguistic losses in the discourse of the Holy Quran. This research is inspired the previous researches in the interdisciplinary field of translation studies and discourse analysis. Researchers and scholars like (Abdul-Raof, 2006; Abdullah & Edris, 2021; Catford, 1965; Chesterman, 2000) have mentioned the problems faced by translators, particularly in translation of religious texts such as the Holy Quran. This study worked on the grounded theory of loss in translation to identify the pragmalinguistic losses in two English translations of the beginning verses of surah Al-Qasas (chapter 28) of the Holy Quran. For the said purpose, a comparative model has also been developed through conceptual framework including Newmark's criticism plan for the clear identification of individual instances of pragmatic loss. It has been concluded that both the translations bear instances of the said losses and are the direct result of both negligence or incompetent structures of English language. In the end, it is recommended that readers should stay aware of these problems with the translations. The translators also need to find ways to minimize the gap between the two languages for avoiding any misunderstanding.

Key Words: *Pragma-linguistics, Translation loss, Pragmatics, Discourse, Surah Al-Qasas*

1. Introduction

The importance of translation in recent decades, particularly in 21 century, has increased since the world has become a global village. It is an effective way to make the stock of knowledge available in one language accessible to the people of another language (Kapur, 2014). Translation is helpful in bridging the overall gaps between cultures and makes it a significant tool in terms of communication. But this communication is not always successful when sacred texts are translated and leads the readers astray. The religious texts have their distinguishing features which significantly make them different from other texts. According to (Aziz & Lataiwish, 2000, p. 134), religious texts have "the characteristics of sacredness, which is based on faith. Either the message or the word or both are believed to be holy." They further mentions that these texts are of two kinds: 1) texts like the Bible where the only the messages are holy and the words are not; 2) texts like the Holy Quran where both the words and messages are holy.

Further, most of the scholars are of the view that sensitive divine words may be distorted through translation. Referring specifically to the Holy Quran, Al-Farouqi (1986: 11) stated that in the translation process loss of meaning or change of meaning occurs. He mentioned that "the meanings imbedded in the Arabic Language of the Quran are a precious legacy which no man is at liberty to tamper with or change". It was also pointed out that there are many reasons which may make the translation of the Holy Quran problematic (Awad, 2005). First, the Holy text is unique both in its structure and content. Second, the accurate rendering of

meaning and spiritual concepts is beyond question. Third, replacing divine language with a human version is not easy and it does not provide a proper solution.

In addition, the translation of sensitive texts is a very challenging task since the translators are required to not only have total command of the implicit theological aspects but should also have command of inter-linguistic and cultural perspectives. The translation process requires much more (Bassnett, 1991) than the mere replacement of lexical and grammatical elements of languages. In case of discourse of the Holy Quran, (Abdul Raof, 2001) both Arabic and English are unequal languages. In his words, Quranic discourse has distinct linguistic characteristics which differs it from all other languages in terms of their semantics, pragmatics, and discourse.

Translators such as (Arberry, 1996; Ali, 1983) stated that they have faced many challenges while translating the Holy Quran. There is a consensus among the translators that the difficulties in translation arise from the general rhetorical semantic features of the Holy Quran. For instance Ali (1983: viii) pointed out that:

“The classical Arabic has a vocabulary in which the meaning of each root-word is so comprehensive that it is difficult to interpret it in a modern analytical language word for word, or by the use of the same word in all places where the original word occurs in the text.”

Many scholars believe that the difficulties in Quran translation are due to the complexities in its linguistic and prototypical features. In nature they are idiosyncratic. Language of the Holy Quran (Abdul Raof, 2005, pp. 92-95) is like “a rainbow of syntactic, semantic, rhetorical, phonetic and cultural features that are distinct from other types of Arabic discourse.” It is therefore, “one language can be semantically more than (sic) another.” For example, language of the Holy Quran has semantic subtleties in its morphological patterns which can be translated only through paraphrasing to cover the semantic gap.

Cultural gap is another area where the translators face problems in translation of the Holy Quran since most of the times the presence of exact cultural equivalence is not possible. Catford (1965) and Bahameed (2008) mentioned that in the context of SL a situational feature would be functionally relevant but may be totally lacking from the target culture. It is very true of the Holy Quran since there are many instances where lexical items are very culture or religion specific and translating them falls totally beyond translator’s reach.

1.1 Pragma-linguistics

The relation of pragmatics with the field of translation studies is not new and it has its traces back in the late 20th century when (Nida, 1964) discussed the pragmatic equivalence of Bible in the translations. Linguists such as (Hickey, 1998) have also linked the classic pragmatic concepts such as relevance, deixis, politeness, and presupposition to the analysis of translations. Further, the study of met-linguistic elements and linguistic features of a text is covered in the field of pragma-linguistics. This field is concerned to provide an appropriate pragmatic force to an utterance (Farghal & Borini, 2015). Often, pragmatic failures have been considered as communication distortion (Thomas, 1983) and the translators have been criticized for their lack of competence in pragma-linguistics. The failure takes place when the arrangement of linguistic elements and the associated pragmatic forces are systematically different from its day to day use. “The deficiency in pragma-linguistic competence usually results in communication breakdown or, at best, distortion of the original message” (Farghal & Borini, 2015, p. 148).

To point out a major concern with translation processes and their outcomes that emphasize the pragmatic viewpoint of comprehending the transfer of language events intra-culturally and across cultures, which is why we speak instead about pragmatics in translation. It is for this reason that the a crucial question is asked as what happens to pragmatic meanings when they are transferred to another language. The aim is to explore to date pragmatic theories and perspectives that require more attention in the study of translations. Besides, this also helps in finding a number of other research questions which may serve as potential research gaps for future researchers. Instead of posing our research interest in contrastive disciplines like general translation studies or contrastive pragmatics, the focus of this paper is to study pragmatics in translation with particular emphasis on pragmatics rather than translation.

1.2 Statement of Problem:

As mentioned above pragmatic failures in the process of translation is inevitable. It means that when the associated pragmatic forces of an ST along with the linguistic elements are not transferred to a TT appropriately. This result into pragmatic losses of different categories such as gender, texture, grammatical category, culture/religion specific terms, textual meaning and so on. Nonetheless, the types of pragmatic failures in TT may vary from language to language. This may be because of the direct differences in pragmatic features between the ST and the TT.

Moreover, the focus of this research is not the translation of any ordinary text but the translation of the Holy Quran which makes the issue graver since it is not an ordinary book. All features of this godly book such as tone, style, rhythm, intonation, cadence, discourse structure, are unique for it is the word of Allah. A renowned scholar (Arberry, 1982) concluded that English translators fail to do justice with “the rhetoric, artistry, per-locution and iconicity of the Arabic text of the Holy Quran”. Despite this claim, his own translation of the Holy Quran into English language is also not free of problems and many researchers have reported different problems in his translation. In this regard the research of (Abdullah & Edris, 2021) is very crucial since they also analyzed the translation of Arberry and have compared it with other translations. They

concluded that there are many cultural and semantic challenges in the translation of Arberry which is the direct result of Author's background knowledge and exposure of the ST.

Nonetheless, this paper not only study the cultural and semantic challenges in Arberry's translation but also study other pragmalinguistic losses while comparing and contrasting them with the translation Taqi Usmani. The pragmalinguistic competence of translators is limited and differs among individuals. The consequent losses may alter the actual of ST (al-Amri, 2015). These losses may be minimized but may not be eradicated altogether. But it is still needed to specify explicitly in the text of the Holy Quran the elements which could lead to pragmatic losses in the English translations, and to highlight their implications through their discovery. The translations need to be compared and contrasted which will pave the way for future translators for more accurate and educated translations. That is why this research is particularly focused on the identification of instances of pragmatic losses in the selected verses of surah Al-Qasas through comparative pragmalinguistic analysis.

1.3 Research Objective:

- To identify the types of Pragmatic losses in the translation of Arberry in surah Al-Qasas.
- To specify the type of Pragmatic losses in the translation of Usmani of surah Al-Qasas.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Loss of Meaning and the Views of Scholars:

The translation of text from one language into another has always been a crucial task and translators are mainly focused on the imitation of ST meaning into the TT as clearly as possible. This is, nevertheless, not an easy task. The loss of meaning often occurs at different levels whenever a translator has tried to translate a text into a given TT. It is stated that "energy loss is inevitable; similarly the translators aim is to reduce translation loss" (Armstrong, 2005, p. 46). He acknowledges that the exact transfer of ST meaning into a TT is not possible for a translator. Nonetheless, the translators can only minimize the gap of meaning between the ST and TT. The translators, according to Armstrong, need to be fully aware of the situation and a good translator will always try to keep the difference of meaning between the two selected languages minimum. He mentioned that different strategies may be adopted by translators to achieve the element of maximal approximation and one such strategy is called "Compensation". By this word compensation he means "accepting the loss of one element in the Target Text and compensating by the addition of an element elsewhere" (ibid.46). The same point has been raised by (Dickins, Hervey, & Higgins, 2016) who mentioned that most of the translators face the challenge of "what features could most genuinely be sacrificed" (p.25). Translation is a field of study, according to (Cronin, 2003), which is struggling to achieve negotiation (arbitration) among different cultures and languages.

2.2 Loss in the Translation of the Holy Quran:

The above discussion has made it clear that the loss of meaning in translation is unavoidable, particularly, when translation of the Holy Quran is considered. The Holy Quran challenges the people and says, "And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant [Muhammad], then produce a surah the like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful"(2.23). The verse implies that a work like this can neither be produced again nor it can be copied. It also implies that all the work in this field will never be perfect and will always bear mistakes. The main reason is that it is the book of Allah (God) and humans cannot withstand with whatever is composed by God. The illiteracy of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) emphasized further the doctrine of Quran's miraculous-ness "since an unlettered person could not have been suspected to come up with such a marvelous work (Sophia, 2002). Moreover, both the languages i.e. English and Arabic are different culturally and linguistically. Both the languages have descended from two different families and Arabic, according to (Pereltsvaig, 2012), precisely Quranic Arabic has descended from South Central Semitic languages. English, in contrast, came from West-Germanic languages like Frisian, German, and Dutch which are members of Indo-European languages (Pereltsvaig, 2012). English currently holds the position of a lingua franca and this is why translations of the Holy Quran are significant. This language is useful in preaching Quranic teachings all over the world for its dominant status on the global stage.

Furthermore, considering pragmatic aspects in the translation process is important since most of the translators fail to transfer the met-linguistic elements into TT. Levinson (1983) defines pragmatics as "the scientific study of the relation between the structure of a semiotic system (notably language) and its usage in context, and along with semantics, forms part of the general theory of meaning". Pragmatics generally deals with intentional or contextual meanings of texts which is also called the illocutionary force. The correctness of illocution can be determined by the application of Grice's maxims. The maxims help in determining the violation or observance of the contextual meaning. Negligence of these elements in the process of translation could create serious problems and could result in misinterpretation of the ST. The chances of these losses increase when culturally and semantically two different languages like Arabic and English are involved (Abdullah, 2017). In this regard, there had been multiple researches to highlight the problems in the translations of the Holy Quran. In this regard the studies of (al-Malik, 1995; Abdul Raof, 2005; Khan, 2008;

Mahmoud, 2008; al-Salem, 2008; al-Jabari, 2008; Abu-Mahfouz, 2011; Ashaer, 2013; Hawamdeh & Khadim, 2015) are of significance.

3. Research Methodology

This paper combines a number of disciplines such as linguistics, pragmatics, and translation studies. They are different but relevant fields of study. The researchers have selected qualitative approach for the analysis of data. They have compared and contrasted the data for the identification of pragmatic losses in Surah Al-Qasas. There are around seventeen types of manifestations (Abdullah, 2017) of pragmatic losses have been identified which are the following:

1. loss of textual
2. loss of genre
3. loss of texture
4. loss of word order
5. loss of syntactic pattern
6. loss of culture-specific terms
7. loss of contextual meanings
8. loss of ellipsis
9. loss of grammatical category
10. loss of tense
11. loss of the exaggerated form
12. loss of gender
13. loss of the referential versatility of the Qur'ānic words
14. loss of prevalence or "taghlib"
15. loss of cohesion
16. loss of coherence
17. loss of absolute object or cognate

This is a descriptive study which strives to identify the above mentioned losses in the following pattern:

- The chapter 28—surah al-Qasas of the Holy Quran has been taken as a sample representative of pragmatic losses in translations of the Holy Quran.
- Two English translations of Surah al-Qasas have been taken i.e. Translation of John Arthur Arberry and Translation of Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani.
- Newmark's criticism plan and pragma-linguistics have been taken as conceptual framework for identification of different dimensions of pragmatic losses in the selected translation of the Holy Quran.
- A comparative pragma-linguistic model has been created for analysis under comparative model of translation rubric.
- Discussion on instances of pragmatic loss in the selected translated verses of surah al-Qasas.
- Drawing conclusion and formulation of suggestions and recommendations to minimize the losses in the English translations of the Holy Quran.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

All linguistic components, states Newmark (1991), like verbs, adverbs, nouns, pronouns, prepositions, interjections, and conjunctions bear their own pragmatic force in the form of certain cultural, situational, and linguistic meanings. There might be difference in literal and contextual meanings of a given linguistic expression. Therefore, a translation theory puts some standards for the realistic appraisal of ST meanings. This is why the researchers believe that Newmark's criticism plan is a suitable model for the identification of pragmatic losses in translation and their solution. This overlaps with the mode of this study since it also aims to pinpoint the problem of pragmatic loss in translations of the Holy Quran.

Thus, Newmark's plan of criticism has been taken as module for the analysis of the translations and source text. The plan states that proper criticism of a translation can be done through considering the following five points: a) "brief study of SL focusing its implicature and function, b) translator's method of translation and the interpretation of SL text's purpose, c) detailed comparison of SL and TL, d) evaluation of the translation from both the translator's and critic's perspective, e) and the future of the translation in the target culture, language or discipline" (Newmark, 1988, p. 186).

The analysis of the data has been done according to the following rubric.

Verse no. 1

S.no	Words of SL	Translation 1 (T1)	Translation 2 (T2)
Elements of Pragmatic Loss in TTs along with evaluation of ST through Newmark's criticism plan			

4. Data Analysis

This Makkan surah presents a detailed account of the story of Musa (Moses) and Phiraon (Pharaoh) and explains how the forces of the latter have been destroyed by Allah and how the followers of the former have been protected. The surah implies that those who believe on the oneness of Allah (Towheed) will be rewarded with protection and grace by Allah. The name of the surah which has been taken from verse 25 means “sequential narration of events”. Thematically, the chapter can be divided into three sections while sequentially the surah has 88 verses which are divided into 9 sections (Rukus).

The comparative pragma-linguistic analysis of the surah is the following:

Verse no. 1			
S.no	SL	T1	T2
1	طسّم	Ta Sin Mim	Ta Sin Mim.

The ST shows the disjoined letters which are called *muqatta'at* in Arabic which have been phonetically translated into English language by both the translators. The letters apparently do not carry any meanings and a total of 29 chapters in the Holy Quran begin with them. Scholars and commentators like (Kathir, 2003; At-Tabari 1:208) mentioned that through these letters “Allah is teaching people to recite all the letters but He mentioned only few”. The texture of the ST is lost in the TT since they are not represented as symbols of the ST and a TT reader may not understand what they mean.

Verse no. 2			
S.no	SL	T 1	T 2
1	تِلْكَ	Those are	These are
2	ءَايَاتٍ	the signs	Verses
3	الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ	of the Manifest Book	of the clear book

The ST word in serial one is a demonstrative pronoun, according to (Zahoor, 2008), which may be translated as ‘those’ or ‘that’ in English. Arberry’s translation as ‘those’ is literal and has lost the contextual or implied meaning since the word ‘تِلْكَ’ is a reference to the verses the same verses. This also bears the loss of referential versatility since he is unaware of the contextual referential meaning. Fatani (2006) mentions that “translators are found inclined toward simplification and they try to simplify the huge tribulations prevalent in the way of understanding and transferring the accurate referential and connotational meanings of multifaceted and intricate words.” Though Usmani has employed the implicature and has rendered the contextual translation, he also also faces the issue of losing the textual meaning. In the instance, Arberry’s use of article ‘the’ is redundant since the word ‘that’ or ‘those’ already specifies the item being pointed at. He also mistranslated the word by representing its contextual meaning ‘signs’ which is not referred to in this context. Usmani has rendered the correct translation at the point. The word ‘الْكِتَابِ’ in both the translations shows loss of gender for in ST it acts as a genitive masculine noun which is presented as neuter gender in the TT. They also shows the loss of ellipsis on part of the particles ‘ال’ in ST. The particle means ‘the’ which may have been redundant had they translated it in both the words. Similarly, the capitalization of both words ‘Manifest’ and ‘Book’ by Arberry is his way of representing the exaggerated form which is not part of the ST thus representing the loss of texture again. Finally, both the translators have changed the word order of ST in the serial 3 which shows the loss of word order.

Verse no. 3			
S. No	SL	T 1	T 2
1	نُنَادُوا	We will recite	We recite
2	عَلَيْكَ	To thee	To you
3	مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ	Moses and Pharaoh	Musa and Pharaoh

The translation of Arberry shows the loss of tense since he has used the auxiliary ‘will’ which is against the tense of ST i.e. present tense which has been observed by Usmani. According to David Crystal (2008) tense is “a grammatical description of verbs, which primarily refer to the way the grammar marks the time” (p.479). In the next serial, both the translators have lost the element of gender since the particle ‘كَ’ with upper accent means (masculine + you) where the element of masculine has been lost in both ‘thee’ and ‘you’. Nonetheless, both the translators have also misrepresented the ST in serial 3 which shows the loss of religion and cultural specific term ‘Phiraon’ as ‘Pharaoh’.

Verse no. 4			
S.No	SL	T1	T 2
1	إِنَّ	Now	Indeed
2	عَلَا	had exalted	had become high-handed
3	وَجَعَلَ	and had divided	“and had divided
4	وَيَسْتَحْيِي	And sparing	and keeping their women alive

The above verse shows that the emphatic sense of ST has been lost in Arberry's translation for he has opted for a more rhetoric word 'now' instead of the words *indeed*, *verily*, and *surely*. This counts as a loss of textual meaning since Zahoor (2008) that such words are used in beginning of nominal clauses and indicates emphasis. The second instance of ST can occur in different forms such as 'عَلَا', 'أَعْلَى', and 'عَلُو' which roughly means *rising oneself above others* in the Arabic language. There is a loss of ellipses in both of the TTs since the ST word does not bear any reflexive pronoun and an adjective as *himself* and *high-handed* respectively. In addition, the ST word does not correspond to the translations as *divided* since the word means *made* or *turned* which is different from the translations. Both of them have copied the contextual meaning but have lost the grasp of textual meaning. Similarly, they have also translated the ST word in serial 4 differently. Arberry has lost the tense and textual meaning of the word while Usmani has accurately translated but with the help of lexical extension since English language does not have any substitute word which can substitute the word accurately.

Verse no. 5			
S.No	SL	T 1	T 2
1	وَنُرِيدُ	Yet We desired	while We intended
2	نُفَعِّنَ	be gracious	Favor

In the first serial both the translators have neglected the translation of particle 'و' which is a cohesive link between verse number 4 and 5. Although they have used the words *yet* and *while* to draw the link between the two verses, this is incorrect since the ST particle means *and* in the English language. Thus, there is loss of cohesion and coherence in both the translations. Further, the capitalization of pronoun *We* by both the translators presents the loss of genre despite their effort to imply Almighty through the reference. Besides, 'ريد' has been translated as *desired* or *intended* whereas its literal meaning is *wanted* and *determined* thus manifesting the loss of textual meaning. In the second serial both the translators presents the loss of ellipsis since they have not rendered the translation of emphatic pronoun *We* because of the English structure where one subject proceeds two verbs and the second verb is in a subjunctive mood. It also shows the loss of grammatical category. According to (Catford, 1965, p. 80) "intra-system shifts occur when SL and TL possess systems which approximately correspond formally as to their constitution, but when translation involves selection of a non-corresponding term in the TL system, for instance, when the SL singular becomes a TL plural and vice versa."

Verse no. 7			
S.No	SL	T 1	T 2
1	أُمُّ مُوسَى	Moses' mother	mother of Musa
2	فَإِذَا خَفْتِ	then, when thou fearest	Then once you fear
3	فَأَلْقِيهِ	cast him	cast him
4	وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي	“and do not fear, neither sorrow,”	“and do not fear and do not grieve”
5	رَأَوْهُ	return him	bring him back
6	مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ	one of the Envoys	one of (our) messengers

In the first serial T1 presents the loss of word order since it mentions *Moses' mother* and foregrounds *Moses* while the ST clearly shows foregrounding of the *mother*. Nonetheless, in serial 2 both the translations show the loss of gender in the second person pronoun *you* and *thee* which also carry the meaning of feminine gender. In the following serial the loss of syntactic pattern and loss of cohesion is visible since none of the translators has transferred the resumption particle 'ف' as *then* and the second person feminine *you* (*singular female*). The same TT pattern continues in the next serial and again the loss of gender and pronoun is visible thus, affecting the ST meaning. The serial 5 shows that Usmani's translation is redundant for the word *bring* already connotes *return* or *back* and the use of the word *back* was not required consequently resulting in the loss of genre and texture. T1 in the final serial depicts the loss of religion specific term which is also part of Arab culture for the word *envoy* may be one of the meanings of the word but it does not collocate with the word *Moses/Musa* as all the scholars of Islam know.

5. Conclusion

The above analysis can be concluded with the following points:

- There are pragma-linguistic losses in the translation of Arberry.
- The translation of Usmani is also not free of pragma-linguistic losses.
- In the very few verses which have been analyzed, most of the 17 types of losses have been identified in both the translations.
- The identified losses contain textual meaning, genre, gender, contextual meaning, syntactic pattern, word order, ellipsis, grammatical category, cohesion, coherence, tense, texture, and culture/religion specific terms.
- These losses occurred because of the difference in linguistic systems of the two languages.
- Although the losses cannot be eradicated totally, they could be minimized.

5.1 Suggestions for Readers, Researchers, and Translators

- The readers are advised to read more than one translations along with commentaries of the renowned scholars for understanding the accurate meaning of the Holy Quran.
- They should be aware of all the mistranslations of the Holy Quran and should seek the guidance of expert scholars in the field.
- The future researchers need to focus more on these problems and along with highlighting the issues with translations; they should also devise a more suitable mechanism of translation.
- Particularly, a research on devising a method of translation religious texts is essential which could minimize the meaning and linguistic gap between STs and TTs.
- The translators need to consider Newmark's plan while translating a text into TT since it will keep them under check and will not allow them to free translate the ST.
- Specifically, the non-Muslim translators should study the religion/s and the religious culture before or while translating for it will make them compensate better for the unequal terms.

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