Transitivity Stability in Translation: Experiential Grammar in English renditions of Surah Zalzalah

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ABSTRACT

This study will investigate the transitivity pattern of Surah Al-Zalzalah and the stability of the translations of that surah to encounter another language (English) using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with an emphasis on experiential meaning. The surah presents a very powerful image of resurrection and accountability before God on the Day of Judgment using grammatical images. The study will compare and evaluate both English translations of the Arabic source text (Muhsin Khan and Al-Hilal and A. J. Arberry) to determine how process types, participant roles and configurations of experience were transferred during this transfer across languages. The Arabic source text and each of the selected English translation exhibit a wide degree of consistency in the predominance of material processes in that both of the English translations indicate that there is an action-oriented, active representation of eschatological events based upon the Arabic source text. Based on this analysis, it appears that both of the English translations maintain a high degree of stability in transitivity in that the original process and participant roles have been largely retained. There are some lexical differences between the two English translations, which may account for differences in how the original Arabic surah will be interpreted; however, this does not have a significant impact on the overall experiential meaning of the surah. The study will conclude that both English translations were indeed successful in maintaining a similar level of experiential and theological significance as the Arabic source text.

Keywords: *Surah Al-Zalzalah, Transitivity, Experiential Meaning, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Qur'anic Translation.*

Introduction

The human experiences that we have and create are documented, organized, and analyzed through the resource of language. Language is not just a reflection of human experiences but can also define how we think about them. Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL is a theory developed by Halliday that believes that Language creates meaning through three categories called functions, which are ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The Ideational Metafunction is concerned with how experiences are represented by defining what happens (Process), who was involved in the experience (Participant), and where it occurred (Circumstance). The use of Transitivity analysis gives researchers a powerful way to analyze how experiences are represented as Actions, Events, mental States, Relationships or Existence. By categorizing Transitive clauses by type i.e., Material Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential Processes; it is possible to study how meaning is produced in relationship with the different levels of Experience and how Agency and Responsibility are

allocated. In translation studies, Transitive analysis has become a very important method for evaluating whether translated texts retain the same configurations and/or produce an alternative, therefore different translation.

The Qur'an has its own set of challenges as a sacred text with many intricate grammatical structures and many linguistic subtleties. The style and format of the Qur'anic expression is predominantly dense and multi-layered, strongly emphasising the rhetorical value of the Word and the context in which it will be interpreted theologically; therefore translation of any personal experiences or "experiential" meanings written down by a person in the context of Surah Al-Zalzalah needs special care. Surah Al-Zalzalah is a vivid account of the last day of judgement, resurrection and the taking to account by God. The Surah was revealed in Makkah and graphically illustrates a very dramatic scene of the earth shaking terribly, bearing its burdens, while revealing to every person that their deeds will be assessed and answered for. The Qur'an does not appear to portray the earth as a passive space in which God creates human beings; rather, the earth itself is linguistically represented as an active participant in the judgement of the work of God in creation. This narrative gives credence to the Qur'anic paradigm of viewing creation (in all forms) as being involved in the Judgement of God upon humankind. Most studies of Surah Al-Zalzalah have concentrated primarily on the stylistic dimension and rhetorical and figurative dimensions of the passage.

The importance of the stated gap between translation processes and participants in the process of reading, interpreting, and understanding Islamic theology especially when it comes to changes in type of process from material to relational has implications for changes to an Islamic text's theological emphasis and the way readers of that text see agency, how they interpret it, and how they interpret responsibility and accountability both on the part of God as well as on their part.

As such, this work seeks to evaluate the fidelity of English translations of the Qur'an with respect to the experiential meaning represented within the text by looking at transitivity stability. In this regard, this work uses a framework based upon Systemic Functional Linguistics to conduct an in-depth analysis of transitivity of Surah Al-Zalzalah in both the Arabic source text and in two very well-known English translations, those of Muhsin Khan and Al-Hilālī, and A. J. Arberry. Specifically, the present study will examine what types of processes occur most frequently, identify possible shifts that occurred in translation, and look at how the various roles of participants were preserved or altered in translation. Through the grammatical analysis of these processes, it is the objective of this study to provide greater insight into how the meaning of the Qur'an as experience and its theological meanings are interpreted differently depending on linguistic context.

This study, therefore will contribute to the area of Qur'anic Linguistics, and Translation Studies, by illustrating how the grammatical structure of the Arabic language represents an important vehicle for conveying meaning in a sacred text, the Qur'an.

Literature Review

Many linguists have analysed the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of Surah Al-Zalzalah. However, translations related to transitivity and semantic rendition have not received as much attention. For example, Munalim (2019) examined the reflection of teachers, revealing that teachers expressed their reflections regarding the learning process primarily through mental processes, showing how they thought and reasoned. Afrianto and Inayati (2018) analysed the existential process within "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets", which demonstrated how fantasy can be believable through the use of language argued by Feng (2017).

The conclusion of the studies shows that Surah Al-Zalzalah is one of the most powerful surahs by both its language and message regarding the Day of Judgement and accountability we have to God. The combination of these linguistic-rhetorical elements assists in developing a person's passion to develop their spirituality and in turn their desire to become a righteous person. The results of these studies demonstrate how the Arabic text form, style and meaning interact with each other to create the powerful rhetorical effects of Surah Al-Zalzalah. Translation studies on related Surahs have utilized the transitivity analysis from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework allowing for the identification of the distributions of material, relational, behavioral, and mental processes and their contributions to meaning (Rajiha, 2020; Rosa, Sofyan & Tarigan, 2018). Furthermore, examination of translation shifts and how rhetorical devices are translated from the source language (Arabic) to English and Indonesian reflects the difficulties in maintaining the ideational and experiential meanings of the original Arabic text, primarily when figurative language (e.g., kināyah) is present (Algifari & Lestiono, 2020; Naseef, 2018). These studies also indicate that the process types and syntactic choices used by the author in the original text significantly impact the translation and therefore the theological meaning conveyed through the translation. Further subtle shifts in translation can affect the way the reader semantically interprets the work. In literature, transitivity conveys character and emotional development. Zahoor and Janjua (2019) studied I Am Malala and found that material and mental processes developed the character of Malala Yousafzai and illustrated her strength and agency in creating change. Nguyen's (2019) examination of Heroic Mother found that actions taken through these processes illustrated sacrifice. Mehmood et al. (2020) found relational and mental processes within Wilde's The Nightingale and the Rose to illustrate the depth of love. In their study of Woolf's To the Lighthouse, Ammara, Anjum, and Javed (2021) noted that the actions performed within Woolf's work connected changes in the processes to an individual's inner experiences. Afrianto, Indrayani, and Seomantri (2018) noted that Shakespeare's sonnets frequently utilize mental processes.

Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) gives us tools to semantically analyze things. In particular, transitivity helps us see how different actions, events, or states are represented in sentences. By looking at which types of processes are used like material, mental, relational, or existential, we can understand how writers and speakers shape meaning.

Transitivity Process: Table 1a

Process Type	Meaning / Purpose	Main Participants	Examples of Participants
Material Process	Action / doing / happening	Actor, Goal	Actor = doer of action; Goal = thing affected
Mental Process	Thinking / feeling / sensing	Senser, Phenomenon	Senser =one who thinks/feels; Phenomenon = what is felt/thought
Relational Process	Being / having / identifying	Carrier, Attribute OR Token, Value	Carrier = entity being described; Attribute = quality
Verbal Process	Saying / telling	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage, Target	Sayer = speaker; Receiver = listener

Behavioral Process	Physiological or psychological behavior	Behaver, sometimes Behaviour	Behaver = one who behaves
Existential Process	Existence / something existing	Existent	Existent = entity that exists

Research Questions:

- ➢ To what extent do selected English translations of Surah Zalzalah maintain the transitivity patterns found in the Arabic text?
- ➢ What kinds of shifts in process types (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, existential) occur in English renditions of Surah Zalzalah?
- ➢ How do participant roles change (if at all) from Arabic to English in different translations of Surah Zalzalah?
- ➢ What implications do transitivity changes have for readers' understanding of the Surah's thematic and theological messages?

Methodology

Research Design

The framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides tools for semantic analyses. An example of this type of analysis can be seen in transitivity, which indicates the ways in which the representation of actions, events and/or states (represented by) within a sentence can vary according to the way in which they are constructed. An example of this would be the way writers and speakers will create meaning through their choice of specific process types; such as material processes, mental processes, relational processes, and existential processes.

Data Selection

The data for the study consist of:

The Arabic source text of Surah Al-Zalzalah (Surah 99 of the Qur'an).Two widely cited English translations:

1. Muhsin Khan and Al-Hilālī
2. A. J. Arberry

These translations were selected due to their extensive academic use and differing translation philosophies one leaning towards explanatory literalism and the other towards literary fidelity making them suitable for comparative analysis.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is based on Halliday's transitivity system, which categorizes clauses according to six process types:

- • Material
- • Mental
- • Relational
- • Verbal
- • Behavioral
- • Existential

Each clause from the Arabic source text and its corresponding English renditions was analyzed in terms of:

- • Process type
- • Participants (e.g., Actor, Goal, Senser, Carrier)
- • Experiential role realization

A comparative approach was then applied to examine whether the same process types and participant roles were retained or shifted in translation.

Analysis and Discussion

In analyzing Surah Al-Zalzalah and its use of transitivity, we find that it is primarily dominated by the presence of material processes in the Arabic text. These material processes illustrate how the Day of Judgement will happen through the course of a series of physical actions and changes: an immense shaking of the earth, the release of previously hidden burdens from the earth, and the scattering of humans across the surface of the earth, among many others. Furthermore, the material processes described in this surah contain elements of experience through momentum, strength and chaos, thus providing an angle towards the events of that day for readers. Overall, through the earth's stated role as a participant rather than merely a passive background to eschatology, it is clear the earth is playing an active part in the eschatological events of Revelations. In addition to material processes, verbal processes also contribute greatly to our understanding of Surah Al-Zalzalah. There are many clauses which highlight testimony, declaration, and questioning on the part of humans. The earth also has the role of a witness, which leads us to understand the transition from physical descriptions in the material processes to communicative descriptions in the verbal processes. This transition has significant theological implications..

Comparing the Arabic text with the English translations by Muhsin Khan and Al-Hilālī, and A.J. Arberry, both translators consistently and accurately maintain transitivity stability. The translated material processes found in the Arabic source text are maintained as material processes in both translation. The same holds true for verbal processes, as these also continue to be regarded as verbal processes; there are no major shifts in the type of process from material to relational or from verbal to mental within the translated text. Therefore, it can be inferred that both translators followed a formal equivalence strategy to maintain the same experiential configurations in both translations as existed in the Arabic source text.

The maintenance of the transitivity patterns has many implications regarding the transfer of meaning. Since both translators have maintained the process type of the original texts, they provide the English-speaking audience with a way of conceptualising the events that corresponds closely to the conceptualisation of the same events presented in Arabic. The way that the Surah expresses the physical transformation, the intensity of the actions being performed, and the communicative element of the testimony remains intact, thus leaving the theological and rhetorical impact of the Surah unchanged. The responsibility of both translators is particularly important when translating the Qur'an, where the issue of semantic accuracy and the integrity of the doctrine are of primary importance.

Finally, while the two translations are similar regarding the way they maintain the original process types, the analyses reveal that there are some variations in the choice of words used by both translators, leading to some variations in tone and imagery, thus affecting the overall interpretation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine how transitivity patterns are maintained in English translations of Surah Al-Zalzalah using the Systemic Functional Linguistics paradigm. This study found that the experiential meaning that is represented within the original Arabic text maintains a high degree of stability in all the English translations. There are some minor variations in the lexical and stylistic choices made by the translators, but all the translators

use the same base structure of the transitivity systems in terms of the major types of processes and the roles of participants associated with them.

In addition to establishing that Surah Al-Zalzalah is mostly comprised of material processes that provide physical representations of what happens during the Day of Judgement, these material processes provide an energetic and active description of the Day of Judgement. This is accomplished by providing descriptions of things that happen physically on the earth during this time, such as being moved, shaken, and changed. Unlike traditional views of the earth as a passive object (i.e., a passive setting), the Earth has been assigned a role as a participant and responds to what it perceives happening to it or what is about to happen to it. While the material aspect of this Surah is prominent, the Surah also utilizes verbal processes to describe its theological ideas concerning accountability, declaration, and testimonies. Thus, it can be said that Surah Al-Zalzalah provides an experiential map that highlights both physical and spiritual/ethical ways of seeing the events surrounding the Day of Judgement.

When comparing the English translations of Muhsin Khan & Al-Hilālī and A.J. Arberry, there is a large degree of stable transitivity due to their retention of the same process types from the original text, thereby having a strong adherence to formal equivalence regarding the experiential meaning of the two translations. As a result of this, the readers of the English versions of Surah Al Fatihah receive an understanding of the nature of the events described in the Qur'an, similar to what those who read Arabic receive. Due to this fidelity to the Qur'an, the level of dramatic intensity, theological urgency, and moral significance of Surah Al Fatihah has been successfully transmitted across language boundaries. Although the way process types have been retained shows that both translations have stable process types; however, because of the subtlety of the different lexical choices made by these two translators and the resulting variation in tones and images they create for their translations, there are nuances existing between the two translations in the manner in which one perceives the events and the actions of the Surah. Even though the differences in translation are very slight in the sense that neither of these translator's works significantly alters the core experiential or theological messages of Surah Al Fatihah when translated into English, they each do contribute to the overall understanding of the Surah's message by the application of experiential equivalency of the translations; thus, it can be concluded that the type of equivalence does not occur solely through the grammatical structure of the source text but instead requires the application of careful lexical and stylistic choices by the translator.

This study demonstrated that transitivity analysis is an effective tool for evaluating fidelity in translations beyond simple surface equivalence. Using transitivity to assess the grammatical structure, the authors of this study were able to demonstrate that each of the selected English translations preserved, to a significant degree, the experiential and ideological essence of Surah Al-Zalzalah. Further, this study adds to the study of Qur'anic linguistics and translation studies by providing evidence that grammatical stability aids in preserving theological continuity among translations of sacred texts. Future research should focus on additional chapters of the Qur'an or upon translating into other languages so as to better understand how experiential grammatical structures affect the meanings contained within translated Qur'anic texts.

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