

Inflectional Deviation of Number in the Qur'an

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Abstract

Inflectional morphology has its own rules that govern the combinations of morphemes in words and the relationships between parts of speech within a text. Yet, inflection rules including those of number can vary across different linguistic systems. Arabic and English notably contrast in number-based relations. More specifically and within Arabic itself, the Qur'an displays striking cases of number disagreement between grammatical categories within a text, which are only one facet of the Qur'anic multifarious utilization of rhetoric to convey or elucidate a particular message. Translationally, such deviant number-related forms, e.g. using the third person singular verb with the first person plural pronoun as a subject, a plural imperative verb with a singular pronoun or a dual verb with a singular noun etc., can cause unbridgeable a gap. The paper addresses this rhetorical device of number-based deviation linguistically and translationally as well as the functions it purports to perform in the Qur'anic discourse

Introduction

In most languages, there are three types of morphemes: lexical, derivational, and inflectional. The role of each type of morphemes can best be understood within the context of constructions. A sentential construction can be looked at as a set of slots that are interrelated, and where a lexical morpheme goes in each slot. In distinguishing between derivational and inflectional morphemes, Hall (1968) explains that morphology consists of two layers: an outer one involving inflectionally bound forms and an inner one as the layer of derivation.

Derivational morphemes that accompany the lexical ones serve to provide the necessary semantic and grammatical adjustments so that the lexical morpheme can fit into a given slot.

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Inflectional morphemes, however, embody the relations that connect the slots together. Thus, the function of an inflectional morpheme is to show how a given slot, i.e. a lexical morpheme, fits with the rest of morphemes occupying other slots in the construction.

More specifically, inflectional morphology, as one level of the hierarchical structure of language, addresses relations such as those of person, gender, number, case, possession, tense, mood and aspect. It is the body of rules that describe how a grammatical morpheme can be attached to the beginning or end of a lexical item to indicate the grammatical categories of number, gender, mood etc., mentioned earlier, in addition to transitivity and comparison. Within the linguistic system, inflectional morphemes serve to hold these various relationships of constructions together in a text. Yet, the rules governing the establishment of inflectional relationships among the components of a text can vary cross-linguistically. While some languages like Arabic are characterized as highly inflectional, others can have a minimal inflectional morphology. In gender-based relations, for example, and different from English where choices are somewhat logical and with little grammatical consequences, Arabic imposes a gender choice with every noun, verb, adjective, demonstrative, relative pronoun and numeral used in sentences. Besides, as is the case in English, some inflectional relations can be expressed by homonymous inflectional morphemes. For example, the inflectional morpheme [-s] can mark tense as in *draws*, the plural as in *books* and the possessive as in the *girl's toy*. In short, and as for the characteristics of inflectional morphology, it highlights the relationships expressed in a language, and is therefore never autonomous since inflectional morphemes are typically bound, besides other characteristics like being a closed class, obligatory, general, and semantically abstract, (cf. Bybee 1985 & Slobin 1997).

Semantically, an inflectional morpheme does not change the meaning of the word it is attached to nor syntactically does it change its grammatical category. It is true that the meaning of inflectional morphemes is difficult to describe, as they do not indicate absolute values or specific referents. Yet, while the meaning of a derivational morpheme pertains to the word and to what it means, the meaning of an inflectional morpheme relates to the meaning that exists between words occupying the slots of a construction.

That is, the meanings of inflectional categories are necessarily participatory, as they must interact with the meanings of the lexical items they are attached to in addition to other elements like prepositions in the constructions, as is the case in Arabic since prepositions are gender sensitive.

Since the number of inflectional categories even in highly inflected languages is generally quite small, though it might not be that small in Arabic, and similar categories are observed across languages, scholars tend to construct lists of universal categories for inflection (cf. Talmy 1985, Slobin 1997). For example, Talmy (2000: 37) puts forward “a privileged inventory, albeit perhaps a partially approximate one, of grammatically expressible concepts”, and further explains that at least part of this inventory may be “innate”. However, Slobin (*ibid*), in this vein, is more cautious, stating that some languages encompass unique inflectional categories, and since a small number of languages have been studied, there might not be enough information to construct a universal list.

Moreover, it is only on derivational morphemes, unlike inflectional ones, that rule productivity can be realized. That is, as Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007:89-91) explain, some morphological rules are productive in that they can be used freely to form new words from the list of free and bound morphemes. For example, in English the suffix *-able* is a morpheme that can be conjoined with any verb to derive an adjective with the meaning of the verb and that of *-able* to mean something like “able to be” as in *change + able*. Likewise, the morpheme meaning “not” having the form *un-* forms antonyms when combined with adjectives like free, afraid. Besides, it can be added to derived adjectives like *un + accept + able* and morphologically complex verbs consisting of a verb plus a particle, plus *-able* (*pick + up + able*) and produce a word like *un + pick + up + able*.

Number inflection, the main concern of the present paper, is the inflection of nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives and determiners to show singular, dual or plural forms, which in some languages like Arabic, intersects with gender inflection, as will be shown below. Of course, the grammatical category of number in all languages operates through subject-verb agreement and pronominal references.

In English, for example, number inflection requires that every noun form be understood grammatically as either singular or plural, where “singular relates to the quantity ‘one’, to the unique referent for most proper nouns (e.g.: Tokyo), and to undifferentiated mass for non-count nouns”, Greenbaum & Quirk (2004:93).

Plural number, on the other hand, relates to the quantity of two or more for count nouns and to the unique referent for some proper nouns like *the Azores*, and to individual operational units that are viewed as reflecting plural composition like *binoculars*, (ibid).

As stated earlier, morphological inflection including that of number is rule-governed, though may reflect variations within different linguistic systems. In Qur'anic Arabic, however, the treatment of number displays exceptional cases of deviation from the rules that govern the number-based relations or agreements between parts of speech in a text. Such disagreements are rhetorically employed to draw the reader's attention to a variety of functions the text lends itself to. The functions carried out by utilizing various types of number-based disagreement cannot be perceived by all readers alike, nor can the achieved linguistic power on the readership be felt similarly, either. Because this linguistic phenomenon of number-related deviation is Qur'anic discourse specific since rhetorically utilized, and is not similarly employed by the English inflectional morphology, translation loss at the rhetorical level is very likely. In the parts to follow, a brief account of number inflection in both Arabic and English morphology is provided to highlight the differences that pose difficulties in translation, in addition to those problems resulting from the Qur'anic deviating uses within Arabic inflectional morphology itself.

Statement and Purpose

Many languages, including Arabic, exhibit different morphological systems wherein grammatical classes are also inflected differently. In fact, Arabic has a large space of morphological variation since its inflectional morphology requires prefixation, infixation and suffixation. For example, the large number of forms to be generated constitutes a problem in generating its verbal morphology, and thus morphologically, Arabic is characterized as a concatenative language. Verb conjugations as well as noun, pronoun and adjective declensions are number sensitive in addition to gender, person, and mood.

Of course, number inflection, like other types of inflection, is rule-governed. Yet, the Qur'anic discourse depicts a variety of deviations from those rules governing Arabic inflectional morphology including those of number. For example, the third person singular verb is used with the first person plural pronoun as a subject, a plural imperative verb with a singular noun, a dual verb with a plural noun, a dual verb with a singular noun, etc., and thus breaking the number-based agreement between parts of speech within a sentence.

Establishing such types of disagreement relations in terms of number is only one facet of the Qur'anic multifarious utilization of rhetoric to convey or elucidate a particular message. The various rhetorical features employed to carry out a host of functions in this divine text are very unlikely to occur in other genres of Arabic. Translationally, moreover, the functions achieved through this linguistic phenomenon of deviation can pose an unbridgeable gap. Thus, the present endeavor addresses itself to investigating this rhetorical device of number-based deviation linguistically and translationally as well as the functions it purports to perform. To do so, some examples from the Qur'an are selected, analyzed and discussed with reference to some commentaries of the Qur'an. Besides, to show how this linguistic phenomenon is mistranslated, three translations of the Qur'an are examined.

Number Inflection in Arabic

The three forms of number that Arabic has are the singular, dual and plural where the singular denotes only one, dual denotes two individuals of a class or a pair of anything and plural denotes three or more. The parts of speech that are marked for number include nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns, relative pronouns and demonstratives. Yet, the definite article is not marked for number. With regard to number-based agreement between the components of a construction in Arabic, subjects and verbs, demonstratives and nouns, adjectives and nouns, and relative pronouns and nouns show number agreement. Moreover, demonstratives must agree with the noun they precede, as well as adjectives and relative pronouns with the noun they modify. As for the subject-verb agreement, singular subjects take singular verbs; dual subjects go with dual verbs and plural subjects take plural verbs. In what follows, a brief account of number relations is provided.

The noun and adjective classes are inflectionally number sensitive. A dual suffix and a plural one are attached to the base form, which is singular to convert it to dual and plural. Unlike the dual suffix, the plural one has a large number of allomorphs. For example, the dual morpheme has the variants of 'ānī' that is added to the singular base form of nouns and adjectives in the nominative case and 'ān' attached to the base form in the nominative case before a pause. Another variant is the 'ā' that is added before another apposed noun as well as 'aini' and 'ain' which are joined to the base form of the noun in the accusative or genitive case as in بنتان بنتين بنت.

Collective nouns denoting two groups of something take the dual suffix ‘ān’ like جيشان and the ة changes to ت before the dual suffix, if the singular base form ends with it as in طالبة to become طالبتان. Besides, the ي changes into و before the dual suffix, when the singular base form ends in this quiescent ي as in مبنى to become مبنيان. The feminine ‘ة’ is changed to ‘و’ before the dual suffix, if the singular base form ends in it like حمراء to become حمراوان. Yet, the “ي” is restored before the dual suffix, if a final ي is deleted from the singular base form as in قاض becoming قاضيان or قاضيين (cf. Al-Jurf, 1995).

Plural forms in Arabic can be sound or broken. Sound plural forms are either masculine or feminine and has a large number of variants that include ‘ūna, ‘ūn’, ‘ū, ‘īna’, ‘īn’, ‘ī’ for the masculine. For example, the suffix ‘ūna’ is attached to the singular masculine base form in the nominative case to change it to sound masculine plural as in مهندس ‘muhandis’, ‘engineer’ becoming مهندسون ‘muhandisūna’, ‘engineers’ while ‘īna’ is used in the accusative and genitive case as in مهندسين ‘muhandisīna’, ‘engineers’. Likewise, the suffix ‘ūn’ is used in the nominative case before a pause as in ‘muhandisūn’, but ‘īn’ is used in the accusative or genitive case as in ‘muhandisīn’. Besides, the feminine plural suffix is ‘āt’ and attached to the singular base form of a feminine noun or adjective to change it to plural as in بنت ‘bint’, ‘girl’ becoming بنات ‘banāt’ ‘girls’. Yet, in some cases, to add the sound feminine plural suffix requires an internal change in the base form such as changing the ‘ā’ into ‘w’ as in صفراء ‘ṣafṛā’, ‘yellow’ becoming صفرات ‘ṣafṛāwāt’. Of course, there are other internal changes in the base form to produce other several number allomorphs. Broken plurals, however, unlike sound masculine and feminine ones, are not formed by adding a plural suffix, but by many irregular allomorphs, though involve internal changes in the base form that include addition, deletion of a consonant, or a vowel change.

In some cases, a singular stem is replaced by a wholly different plural stem as in امرأة ‘imra’ah’, ‘woman’, and the plural of which is نساء nisā’, ‘women’ (cf. Al-Jurf, ibid).

Moreover, adjectives in Arabic are number sensitive; an adjective can be singular, dual or plural. To form dual adjectives in the nominative case, the suffix ‘ān’ is added to the singular form while the suffix /-ayn/ is attached to it in the accusative or genitive case as in ولد ‘walad’, ‘boy’ which becomes ولدان ‘waladān’ or ولدين ‘waladain’, two boys, alternatively. Plural adjectives, like plural nouns, can be sound or broken.

Sound masculine plural adjectives are formed by adding the plural suffix ‘ūn’ to the singular form in the nominative case while in the accusative and genitive one the suffix ‘in’ is added. Yet, to form sound feminine plural adjectives, a different suffix ‘āt’ is affixed to the singular form as in بنت ‘bint’, ‘girl’ that becomes بنات ‘banāt’, ‘girls’. Nouns and their modifying adjectives must show number-based agreement in that a singular noun is modified by a singular adjective, etc.

Likewise, verbs in their perfect, imperfect and imperative forms are inflected for number. A pronominal suffix is used to mark perfect and imperative verbs for number whereas imperfect verbs are marked by a pronominal prefix and suffix which have a variety of allomorphs. For example, in perfect verbs, the suffixes ‘tu’, ‘ta’, and ‘ti’ are singular whereas ‘tumā’ is dual for both masculine and feminine, and ‘nā’ is used with first person plural. In terms of gender, ‘ta’ is used with the second person singular masculine while –‘ti’ with the feminine. The suffixes ‘tum’ and ‘tunna’ are used with the second person plural masculine and feminine alternatively. In the imperative form, verbs are number-inflected in the second person only. For example, the suffix ‘ā’ is used with the second person masculine and feminine dual as in ‘ursumā’, ‘draw’ while ‘ū’ is used with the second person masculine plural and ‘na’ with the feminine plural. Yet, in the imperfect tense, the imperfect prefix has three allomorphs. The prefix ‘a’ is used with the first person singular as in ‘arsum’, ‘I draw’, but ‘na’ with the plural, and ‘ya’ and ‘ta’ are used with the third person singular masculine and feminine alternatively. Fully inflected verbs in Arabic are categorized into sound, doubled and verbs having a glottal stop.

When a pronominal suffix is added to a sound perfect or imperfect verb, no changes take place in the radicals of the base form as in ‘rasamtu’, ‘I drew’, ‘tarsumūn’, ‘you draw, second person plural’ and in the imperative plural ‘ursumū’, ‘draw’, to mention a few. Besides, the subject-verb agreement is obligatory in terms of number. That is, a singular verb goes with a singular subject, a dual verb with a dual subject and a plural verb goes with a plural subject.

Pronouns, relative pronouns and demonstratives are marked for number. Number distinctions take place with independent and pronominal suffixes in the first, second, and third person in addition to the nominative, accusative and genitive forms.

For example, the independent nominative singular pronouns include ‘anā’, ‘I’, ‘anta’, ‘you masculine’, ‘antī’, ‘you feminine’, ‘huwa’, ‘he’ and ‘hiya’, ‘she’, while ‘antumā’, ‘you’, and ‘humā’ ‘they’ are dual, but ‘naḥnu’, ‘we’, ‘antum’, ‘you’, ‘antunna’, ‘you feminine’, ‘hum’ ‘they masculine’ and, ‘hunna’, ‘they feminine’ are plural. Relative pronouns and demonstratives alike must agree in number with the nouns they modify. For example, ‘allathī’, ‘who’ is used for masculine singular whereas ‘allathīna’, ‘who’ goes with the plural, and ‘hātha’ ‘this’ is used with the masculine singular while ‘hā’ulā’, ‘these’ goes with the plural, (Al-Jurf, *ibid*), to say nothing of the dual both masculine and feminine.

Discussion

One of the features that characterizes the Qur’anic discourse as strikingly idiosyncratic is number deviation. Different from man-composed texts which follow the normal grammatical rules of the language, the Qur’an displays deviations from these rules at almost all levels of Arabic grammar. These deviations aim at achieving certain linguistic functions that not all readers can similarly realize. The present endeavor, as stated above, concerns itself with identifying and explaining some of these functions in order to practically make clear that the linguistic deviation of number in the Qur’an, through the disagreement between the verb and the noun, noun/pronoun and its modifier, etc. is not only serviceable but also a semantically enriching device. That is, it aims at creating a message, the understanding of which can incur more language power on the audience of the text.

To achieve this objective, examples from the Qur’an are selected, analyzed and discussed with reference to some commentaries in order to highlight the untranslatability of this Qur’anic distinct utilization of number-related disagreements.

Example 1

5:22 *وَنُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا*

Arberry (1980:27) “And We establish in the wombs what we will, till a stated term, then We deliver you as infants”.

Pickthall (2002:306) “And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward we bring you forth as infants”.

Ali (2003:822) “And We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then we bring you out as babe”.

Allah causes whom He wills to rest in the wombs of women for an appointed time, a fact that He had decided on the day of creating earth and heavens. This includes the gender of the babe, his appearance as ugly or fair, and his conduct as good or rebellious, besides the date and place of death. In Arabic, ‘tīfīl’, ‘child’ or ‘babe’ refers to newly born males and females, and the span ends when s/he becomes able to rely on him/herself in doing the simplest tasks.

The rhetorical feature of the Qur'an in the verse is clear in the disagreement between the clause ‘nukhrijukum’, ‘We bring you (second person plural) out’ and the singular noun ‘tīfīl’, ‘child’. What supports the idea that the number deviation is functional in the verse is the use of ‘aṭfāl’, ‘babies’, the plural of ‘tīfīl’, ‘baby’ in the verse (وإذا بلغ الأطفال منكم الحلم فليستأذنوا) which Ali (2003:822) translates as "But when the children among you come of age, let them also ask for permission". Interpreters of the Qur'an have explained the feature differently and according to immediate and broader contexts. For example, Az-Zajjāj (1988:412) maintains that the singular ‘tīfīl’ in the verse means the plural ‘aṭfāl’, an interpretation that can display disagreement between the number and the noun described by it.

Similarly, Al-Naḥḥās (1988:87) justifies this deviation by providing the same interpretation and adding that the meaning of ‘tīfīl’ in the verse is that each one of you is brought out at the time of delivery as a baby. However, (Tāfīsh 1995:87) points out that the number deviation in the verse is functional, as singularizing the noun ‘tīfīl’ aims at stressing the fact that Allah has created all people without distinction since pluralizing the noun may show differences between the born babies at the time of birth.

Translating the above verse into English poses a translation challenge, though no deviation can be noticed in the receptive text due to the agreement between the number and verb. The translation loss arises when the rhetorical function of the original text is not relayed in English, a fact that requires the translators to refer to, either within the body of the text, or in a footnote form. As far as the translations are concerned, it can be clearly seen that the three translators have made no reference to the point, neither co-textually nor in footnoting.

The three translators have rendered the singular ‘ṭifl’ ‘child’, as ‘aṭfāl’, ‘children’, allegedly making reference to exegeses that have made reference to this linguistic fact, such as those consulted above. It is worth noting that there are other examples in the Qur’an wherein the singular form is used instead of the plural one to convey the same message as shown in the above example (cf. 24:31; 40:67).

Example 2

77:22 (فَأَنَّهُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِّي إِلَّا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ)

Arberry (1980:68) “They are an enemy to me, except the Lord of all Beings”.

Pickthall (2002:344) “Lo! They are (all) an enemy unto me, save the Lord of the Worlds”.

Ali (2003:918) “For they are enemies to me; not so the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds”.

The preceding and the following verses are discussing the argument between the Prophet Abraham, on the one hand and his father and people, on the other who were remaining constantly in attendance of the worshipped idols.

Such assiduously devoted- for objects are not worth being worshipped in this manner, and thus are perceived as enemies by Abraham.

Number deviation in the verse is illustrated in violating the standard rule of Arabic which necessitates the congruence between different parts of speech. Thus, any disagreement can be taken as a shortcoming or defect of the discourse if enough justification is not provided. In the verse under discussion, the third person plural ‘hum’, ‘they’ which is attached to the affirmative ‘innā’, ‘verily’, does not grammatically agree with the first person singular ‘adu’, ‘enemy’. Different interpretations have been conducted for the deviation; Az-Zamakhsharī (2005:762) maintains that “adu’, ‘enemy’, and ‘ṣadiq’, ‘friend’ have the meaning of unity and group, a fact that is confirmed by Al-Andalusī (1992:164) who says that ‘adu’ is used for both singular and plural, which thus justifies what might be a disagreement between the plural pronoun ‘hum’, and the singular noun “adu’, ‘enemy’.

In his turn, Ṭāfish (1995:89) justifies this number deviation by stating that the sect of unbelievers is only one, as they always oppose the truth and support the mischief and falsehood; they are equal in disbelief and denying the truth, a feature that makes it appropriate to be denoted by the singular ‘adu’, ‘enemy’.

Though literal translation of the verse does not pose a translation problem, the rhetorical function implied in the number deviation is lost in translation. Arberry and Pickthall have failed to illuminate the rhetorical style in the verse which is functional, and aims at creating a rhetorical forcefulness on the audience. Ali has translated the singular ‘adu’ as the plural ‘adā’, ‘enemies’, a translation that can show Ali’s understanding of the relationship between the plural pronoun ‘hum’, ‘they’, and the plural noun ‘a‘dā’, ‘enemies’. He could have also considered Qur’anic interpretations that have explained this linguistic feature such as the exegeses above, a consideration that has not been gained by the other translations of the study, causing the feature to pass unnoticed in the target language.

Example 3

(ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ)

11:41

Arberry (1980:185) “Then He lifted Himself to heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, “come willingly and unwillingly!” They said, “We come willingly”.

Pickthall (2002:459) “Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said unto it and unto the earth: Come both of you, willingly or loath. They said: We come, obedient”.

Ali (2003:1232) “He Comprehended in His design the sky, and it had been (as) smoke): He said to it and to the earth: “Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly”, they said: “we do come together, in full obedience”.

The scientific fact in the verse is that the sky had existed as smoke, and the earth was spread out after the sky was made. The verse confirms the fact that all elements are obedient to Allah, including the earth and the sky.

Allah has shown His ability to have control over all His creatures, including the earth and the heavens and what is in between them. This is clear in using the third person plural ‘*ṭā’īn*’, rather than as ‘*ṭā’ain*’ the dual for the earth and heaven in the verse.

Two inflectional deviations are clear in the verse; the first is gender-based deviation, where the earth and the sky are feminine, but designated and connoted by the masculine ‘*ṭai’ īn*’, ‘obedient’; the second is that the dual ‘the earth and the sky’ are connoted by the plural masculine. This deviation of the dual to the plural can be due to the fact that what is meant by ‘the heaven’ and ‘the earth’ is ‘heavens’ and ‘earths’ and as such the connoted by ‘*ṭā’īn*’ at the written form, and ‘*ṭā’āt*’ at the semantic form (Az-Zamaksharī 2005:966); however, Az-Zajjāj (1988:381) maintains that ‘*ṭā’īn*’ is implemented in the verse due to the fact that Allah has addressed the sky and earth as rational elements. It is thus the full obedience of the sky and heaven and all that is between them. Ṭāfish (1995:97) also supports this point by saying that what is meant by the obedience includes the sky, the earth, and what is in or on them, and what is customary of creatures is the obedience, and disobedience is does not come within the rules, and what basic in the verse includes all the creatures. He adds saying that gender deviation in the verse springs from the divine intention of expressing extreme power, which can more clearly observed if applied on the masculine.

Translating the above verse into English results in a real translation loss as the source and the target languages have two different if not contrasting linguistic systems. While the Arabic ‘*ṭā’īn*’ is used to refer to the plural masculine in Arabic, the English ‘obedient’ can be used with the singular, the dual and the plural feminine and masculine in English. The three translations of the study have not shown the syntactic rule of Arabic which is deviated at the gender and number levels for achieving a rhetorical function; such a feature could have pass unnoticed by the translators, as their first language is not Arabic, or as they could have consulted Qur’anic exegeses that have not pointed out this unique linguistic feature.

Example 4

78:21 وَدَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ إِذْ يَحْكُمَانِ فِي الْحَرْثِ إِذْ نَفَسَتْ فِيهِ غَنَمُ الْقَوْمِ وَكُنَّا لِحُكْمِهِمْ شَاهِدِينَ

Arberry (1980:32) “And David and Solomon-When they gave judgment concerning the tillage, when the sheep of the people strayed there, and we bore witness to their judgment”.

Pickthall (2002:301) “And David and Solomon

Ali (2003:811) “And remember David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night: We did witness their judgment”.

The verse under discussion is talking about the two prophets, David and Solomon, when the negligence of the shepherd has caused the sheep to eat up the tender shoots of the crop. As a just king and judge, he awarded the owner of the field the whole sheep in compensation of the damage. Wise enough, however, Solomon, the eleven-year-old son has suggested that the sheep be detained by the owner of the vine field for a time that the owner can be compensated from the milk, wool, and possibly young sheep, after which the whole cattle is returned to the shepherd; the inspiration of Allah has helped that young boy to give this judgment, in cooperation with his father, in a manner that can only be performed by a large number of mentalities. This is approved by the number deviation implemented in the verse, where the two prophets are connoted by the plural form of the verb.

Inflectional deviation in the verse is in the reference of the plural pronoun in ‘li-ḥukmihim’, ‘their judgment’ to the dual ‘David and Solomon’. Different interpretations have been provided in order to find an outlet for this deviation. For example, Az-Zamakhsharī (2005:683) maintains that Solomon, David and the litigants are included in the pronoun ending ‘ḥukmihim’, ‘their judgment’ a reference that is not exclusive to the two prophets, David and Solomon. Other interpreters have argued that the deviation in the verse differently as ‘shāhidīn’, in the verse refers to Allah, as a judgment witness (cf. Abu Ḥayyān 1992:455); the point is similarly supported by Ṭāfiṣh (1995:100) who states that the judgment is not for the two prophets, but also includes the fighting parts, the shepherd and the owner of the vineyard.

Translating the verse into English would not pose a translation problem, since there is an agreement between the dual ‘David and Solomon’, and ‘their judgment’, since the third pronoun plural ‘their’ agrees with dual and plural in the target language.

However, the reason behind pluralizing ‘ḥukmihim’, ‘their judgment’ cannot be preserved in the translation, as the rhetorical function behind the pluralizing of the duality such showing the wise judgment that can only be made a collective decision, where many views are considered to arrive at such a wise decision of justice between the ruler and the people. This linguistic fact which is completely ignored in the translations is a real translation shortcoming that can be compensated, if the translators consult Qur’anic exegeses that have made reference to it, such as the exegeses above.

Example 5

9 :49 (وَإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا)

Arberry (1980:231) “If two parties of the believers fight, put things right between them; then, if one of them is insolent against the other, fight the insolent one till it reverts to God’s commandment”.

Pickthall (2002:508) “And if two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them”.

Ali (2003:1341) “If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them”.

Individual quarrels are easier to compose than group quarrels, and thus, the collective community of Islam should be supreme over groups or nations. It would be expected to act justly and try to compose the quarrel, for peace is better than fighting (Ali 200:1341). The verse under discussion calls those in office to conciliate between the fighting parties on the basis of justice and fairness, as in order to maintain on a certain system, equality and justice should dominate among all social groups, regardless of their belongings and social affairs.

In Arabic, the plural noun ‘ṭā’ifatān’ is the dual of the singular noun ‘ṭā’ifah’, ‘party’ or ‘group’. The verse under discussion denotes this feminine dual by the use of ‘iqtatalu’, a verb that denotes third person masculine plural. The rhetorical function in the verse springs from the disagreement between the dual ‘ṭā’ifatān’, ‘two parties’, and the verb ‘iqtatalū’, ‘they fought’, which denotes a fighting that take place between more than two parties.

In an ordinary text, ‘*ṭāʾifatān*’, as dual should be connoted the Arabic dual verb ‘*igtatalatā*’, ‘they both fought’. This deviation is functional in the verse but cannot be grasped by all readers alike; only readers who enjoy enough linguistic competence can notice this deviation, as a feature going against the ordinary linguistic flow of Arabic. However, the meanings that can be taken from the deviation is that the two parties in the verse refer to the people and men (Az-Zamaksharī 2005:1037; Abu Ḥayyān 1992:455); the deviation cannot be completely justified as such, as the verse is concluded by ‘*bainahumā*’, ‘between both of them’ which refers to duality (Ṭāfish 1995:101). He (ibid:101) adds that an examining look in the verse can lead readers to understand the secrecy of the Qur’an, where fighting between two parties involves all individuals, and each one does fight by his own; that is why the verb ‘*igtatalū*’ is used in the plural form. In conciliation, however, each party has only one ‘say’, which justifies the use of the dual ‘*bainahumā*’, ‘between both of them’.

Translation loss in the verse lies in ignoring this Qur’anic linguistic feature which deviates the standard rule of Arabic, where agreement between verbs and nouns at the level of number is necessary for preserving the standard syntactic and grammatical rules.

Since English does not have the same rules of Arabic, and the number is not deviated in the translated text, readers would not have any understanding problems. And for conveying more credit of the source text, translators should provide the target text with supporting details that can illuminate the Qur’anic feature which lies in the deviation at the level of number. Translation loss in the three translations arises from this linguistic point which is not made clear in the three translations that could have not consulted Qur’anic interpretations that have made it clear.

Example 6

15: 26 (قال كلا فاذهباً بآياتنا إنا معكم مستمعون)

Arberry (1980:357) “Said He, ‘No indeed; but go, both of you, with Our signs, and We assuredly shall be with you, listening’”.

Pickthall (2002:341) “He said: Nay, surely. So go you two with our tokens, Lo! We shall be with you, Hearing”.

Ali (2003:910) “Allah said: “By no means proceed then, both of you, with our signs: We are with you, and will listen (to your call).

In the verse, Allah is addressing the two brothers, Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh to inform him that they are sent to him the Lord and the Cherisher of the worlds. As Moses has the shortcoming of the smooth speech, Aaron was sent with him to assist in conveying the mission of the Lord. Moreover, Moses was afraid of being taken avenged for smiting an Israelite before fleeing to the Sinai Peninsula, where he received the divine message. The addressees in the verse are Moses, whose impediment of speech was turned into a form of power, and Aaron, whose rhetoric has helped in showing the oppressor the signs of Allah.

Number deviation is one of the rhetorical linguistic features of the Qur’an. The verse in question illustrates the feature in breaking the Arabic rule where the number agrees with verbs and nouns. The verb ‘ithhabā’ ‘you both go’, is used in Arabic with dual addressee, males and females, and thus should agree with the prepositional phrase ‘ma’akum’, ‘with you’ as a second person plural. Disagreement between the verb of duality ‘fathhabā’, and the prepositional phrase of the plural ‘ma’akum’ is functional in the text.

Some exegetes have provided justifications for the deviation; Az-Zamakhsharī (2005:756) has stated that what is the plural pronoun ‘kum’, attached to the preposition ‘ma’, ‘with’ refers not only to Moses and his brother Aaron, but also includes the people to whom the two brothers were sent, i.e., the Israelites. One can argue that the plural form in the verse is used to show duality as the preposition ‘ma’, ‘with’ shows the partnership of Allah with the unbelievers which cannot be accepted; the two brothers were addressed in the form of plural to show their high position and status. Ṭāfish (1995:103) has added that Allah has given the two brothers a high position, and supported them with His signs to strongly defend their view; on the basis of this, the plural pronoun refers not only to Moses and Aaron, but also to the signs with which they were supported.

What makes translation loss in the verse inevitable is not the literal translation but the rhetorical function of number deviation. As mentioned elsewhere in the discussion, the target language (English) does not have any incongruence between number and noun, a fact that can prove one’s successful translation of the Arabic text. However, target text would suffer from this linguistic shortcoming, which would lead to the reader’s misconception of the source text function.

Conveying a meaning such as the high position and esteem given to Moses and his brother when addressed as plural cannot be conveyed in the target text through the literal translation of the verse as shown in the three translations of Arberry, Pickthall, and Ali; in order to enhance the translated material, the translator should support the text with explanatory details that explain the unordinary feature of the source text.

Example 7

99:23 (حتى إذا جاء أحدهم الموت قال رب ارجعون)

Arberry (1980:44) “Till, when death comes to one of them, he says, ‘My Lord’, return me”.

Pickthall (2002:321) “Until, when death comes unto one of them, he says: my Lord, Send me back”.

Ali (2003:860) “Until, when death comes to one of them, he says: “O my Lord! Send me back”.

One has to make sure that death is approaching him, and as such should avoid evil doings. Thus, making the righteous doings is the only way that can save man from the miseries on the Day of Resurrection. As the verse shows, unrighteous people at dying moments wish to go back to life in order to follow the instructions and the commandments of Allah, a desire that comes too late, and the time of repentance will then have passed. The only thing they will soon find after death is the Barzakh, which is a partition which refers to the place or state in which people will be before judgment (Ali 2003:860). The Lord of mankind is addressed in the form of plural, which indicates that the power of Allah is unparalleled.

Linguistic deviation in the verse is clear in connoting the singular ‘rab’, ‘lord’ with the plural form in the verb ‘irji‘ūn’, which indicates the second person plural. The language deviation is rhetorical and aims at incurring a linguistic power on the readers of the text. Qur’an exegetes have justified the deviation by providing different interpretations.

Az-Zajjāj (1988:21-22) maintains that deviation in the verse aims at showing the high position and standing of the Lord, an interpretation that is supported by Az-Zamakhsharī (2005:715). Al-Andalusī (1989:584) has gone further in his interpretation to say that deviation in the verse shows that the dying unbeliever is appealing to Allah to give him another chance to back to life in order to do good deeds; the unbeliever could have sought help from death angles to leave him for a while to have a new life full of good deeds. These interpretations show that addressing the singular in the form plural show glorification, adoration and veneration of Allah and the angles. However, Ṭāfish (1995:108) states that when the dying unbeliever became certain that he is giving up the ghost, he starts to petition from Allah to award him more time; and since response can be more possible if asked from a group or a revered side, the number deviation has been used.

Translating the verse without acknowledging the reader of the linguistic deviation would result in a target text shortcoming. This translation defect of Arberry and Pickthall may not be noticed by target language reader who does not have enough knowledge of the original text, which is linguistically different if not contrasting of the translated one.

Therefore, the translator of such a text-type should provide the target language version with footnoting that can illustrate the linguistic feature of Arabic. This translation strategy is adopted by Ali (2003:869) who footnotes his translation by maintaining that the verb for ‘send me back’ is in the plural in Arabic, which is construed either as an emphatic form, as if the singular were repeated, or as a plural of respect, though such a plural is not ordinarily used in addressing Allah, or even as a plural addressed to the angels, after the address to Allah in “O my Lord”.

Example 8

16: 26 (فَاتَيْنَا فِرْعَوْنَ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ)

Arberry (1980:65) “So go you to Pharaoh, and say, “Verily, I am the messenger of the Lord to all Beings”.

Pickthall (2002:341) “And come together unto Pharaoh and say: Lo! We bear the message of the Lord of the Worlds”.

Ali (2003:910) “So go forth, both of you, to Pharaoh, and say: ‘We have been sent by the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds’”.

Moses, the Prophet, and Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, were always disputing over political and religious issues. And in order to convince Pharaoh of the truthfulness of the prophecy, Allah has given Moses the miracle of magic, where his rod was turned into a serpent, clear to those who can see, and his hand became white, without a stain after it was moved into his bosom. In addition to these materialistic miracles, Moses’ brother was too helpful due to the rhetoric he enjoyed, and the extraordinary ability of his convincing speech. The verse under discussion clearly shows that only Moses and his brother were sent to Pharaoh to convey the message of Allah on that challenging day, as shown in the duality of the imperative verb ‘fa’tiya’, ‘you both come’, and ‘fa qula’, ‘you both say’.

Inflectional deviation at the level of number is clear in the singularity of the noun ‘rasūl’, ‘messenger’, which refers to both Moses and his brother, as addressed in the two verbs ‘i’tiyā’, ‘you both come’, and ‘faqūlā’, ‘you both say’.

In explaining the deviation, Az-Zajjāj (1988:85) maintains that the meaning of ‘rasul’, ‘messenger’ in the verse is ‘risala’, ‘message’, which is singular, a fact that is confirmed by Az-Zamakhsharī (2005:756) who also adds that ‘rasul’ in the verse may also mean ‘mursal’, ‘messenger’, which is again singular. Not only this, Az-Zamakhsharī adds, as the brothers have totally agreed on one thing, which is conveying the message of Allah to Moses, they are considered as one person, and thus addressed as singular. Similarly, Abu Ḥayyān (1989:145) maintains that the meaning of ‘rasūl’, in the verse is ‘message’ or both have the same mission and are consequently addressed as one messenger. Ṭāfish (1995:116) supports these arguments and added that since the two brothers have the same mission, the same style of delivering the message, and the same functions, they are considered as one person, which can also be seen in the verse (قال فمن ربكما يا موسى), which Ali (2003:773) translated as “(Pharaoh) said: “Who then, O Moses, is the Lord of you two”.

Translating the verse into English is not a hazardous task at the literal level, as English does not have the same language number-noun or number-verb disagreement of Arabic.

The translators have rendered the verse differently. Arberry has mistakenly rendered 'innā', 'surely, we are' as 'I am', thinking misguided by the written form of (نَا), 'surely, we are', and (أَنَا), 'I am'. Pickthall and Ali have not rendered 'rasūl', 'messenger' into English, neither singular, nor plural, which is the theme of this study.

In other words, their translation has not illuminated the number deviation of the implemented noun 'rasūl' in the verse; they have not also provided their translation with supporting details to point out this rhetorical feature of the Qur'an.

Conclusion

The study has shown that Arabic and English inflectional morphologies remarkably contrast, as pointed out in number-based relations between parts of speech within a sentence. Though these relations are formed according to certain rules, exceptional cases do exist in both linguistic systems. As shown in the study, the Qur'an displays outstanding cases of number disagreement between grammatical categories or participants in a text. The deviating forms or relations are Qur'anic Arabic specific, and thus are very unlikely to appear in non-Arabic text genres. The Qur'an is uniquely utilizing inflectional deviation of number, as a rhetorical device to create certain effects or achieve a linguistic power on the audience.

Number deviation of the source text, which functions as a rhetorical device, is likely to be lost in translation, a consequence attributed to the target language system, which does not have the same inflectional system of Arabic.

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