

Translating the Connotations of Allah's 'Makr' in the Noble Quran

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the mistranslation of the original connotations of 'Makr' in the Noble Quran. Although it currently tends to carry a negative sense, the word is connected to Almighty Allah in six verses and misinterpreted by some non-native speakers of Arabic as plotting or, even, deception. Therefore, several relevant factors are investigated, such as semantic change, the attributes of Allah in the Noble Quran, the contextual meaning and, most importantly, the Arabic style of Mushakala. Finally, choices by ten translators are subject to dictionary analysis to guide to those with the appropriate connotations.

Keywords: Quran translation; mistranslation; connotation.

Introduction

Cultural differences constitute a major challenge to translation. Habits, beliefs, jokes, among other aspects, are subject to mistranslation, especially when it comes to conveying the intended connotations. A very relevant example is the word Makr in the Noble Quran. Although the term of Makr in Modern Arabic often indicates evil plotting, it is attributed to Almighty Allah in different times. For instance, a translation of verse 8:30 like "Allah is the best of deceivers/greatest deceiver" found online clashes with the Muslim belief that such a negative concept cannot be associated with Allah.

The problem of the study is how to convey the true meaning of Makr to the English language. To this end, the issue will be addressed on different tracks. The first is semantic change, which seems to account for some developments in the senses of Makr over more than 1,400 years. The second is related to the meanings of the word, traced in major Arabic dictionaries. The third explores the style of Mushakala, which applies to Makr and similar words in the Noble Quran. The fourth is associated with the perfect image of Allah, Who has revealed the Noble Quran. The sixth discusses the grandeur of the language of the Noble Quran and some guidelines for its translation. The seventh analyzes the contexts of the six different verses where the word Makr and its derivations are connected to Allah. They are investigated in ten English translations to find out how they are rendered into English. The choices made by the translators are assessed according to credible British and American dictionaries.

Semantic change

As it is extensively established, word meanings change overtime as a result of developments in temporal and spatial contexts. However, no theory of language has been put forward to cover all the facts and reasons behind semantic change. For instance, while sound inevitably evolves over time, grammar and lexis are subject to slower change. Thus, the change in form and meaning necessitates the study of the history, or 'etymology', of the word.

According to Yule (2010), we should keep in mind that etymologies have been at work in language for sometime, and a lot of words in the daily use today were, at one time, considered as "barbaric misuses of the language". For instance, a word like 'handbook', which has become one of the most frequent words used nowadays, was considered 'tasteless' in the 19th century when it was used for the first time.

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Etymology can be traced by unabridged specialized dictionaries. Learning the history of a word helps to identify the different stages where the word in question has undergone different semantic changes.

Rowe and Levine (2006) provide several examples of how words in English have changed in their meanings over time. For instance, Middle English (spoken between 1100.C.E and 1500 C.E) had the word 'butcher' mean the one who slaughters goats exclusively. However, the word in modern English generalizes its literal meaning to cover the one who slaughters all kinds of farm animals and prepares their meat. There is also the word 'girl', which meant a young person of either sex, but now it is used to narrowly refer to a young female. Other examples of meaning change involve the word 'silly', which meant 'happy', but it has undergone semantic derogation to convey a negative connotation. In addition, the word 'nice' used to mean 'ignorant'. However, its meaning has undergone semantic elevation to convey a positive connotation.

Arabic shows a similar tendency to change in meaning. For example, the Arabs used to call the one who is bitten by a snake سليم, which originally means 'healthy' under a euphemistic deviation of optimistic anticipation that the one 'bitten' will be soon healed.

A comprehensive study conducted by Abu-Oda on semantic change argues that it is an inevitable phenomenon, as it reflects the development of social, economic, political and other aspects of life (1985).

In the pre-Islamic age, for example, there were various Arab tribes who spoke different dialects. However, contact through literary 'markets', religious events and commercial seasons, which attracted people from Arabia, Yemen, Levant and Iraq, made these dialects trade influence and so close to each other (Ibid). When Islam came, the major repository of the Arab culture and language shifted from poetry to the Noble Quran, leading to tremendous semantic change with reference to almost all walks of life (Ibid).

Al-Jbouri (2005) argues that there are four 'aspects' of semantic change: phonetic, social, connotative and marginal.

'Factors' of semantic change are said to be summarized as follows: 1. Usage of vocabulary: like moving from general to particular (e.g. الصلاة prayer, الحج pilgrimage and الإيمان faith to be Islamic concepts) and from particular to general (e.g. بأس from war to any dilemma), 2. Shifting from real to metaphorical meaning (e.g. غفر from covering to forgiving sins), 3. Clarity of a term to the mind 4. Phonetic change, 5. Grammar rules (e.g. masculinity of ولد childmaking it associated only with males), 6. Social and psychological impact on language inheritance from a generation to another (e.g. بهلول from noble man to imbecile), 7. Shifting values (e.g. reference to sexual process or organs), 8. Shifting from one language or dialect to another, 9. Change in the nature of a referent's function (e.g. ريشة feather as a writing device taken from birds' feather which vanished in favour of a metal tool), 10. Difference of class or group (Ibid).

For others, 'forms' of semantic change are said to be as follows: 1. Specification (e.g. الصحابة from companions in general to companions of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)), 2. Extension (e.g. بأس from war to any dilemma), 3. Elevation (e.g. بيت from small tent to big house), 4. Degradation (e.g. سيد from noble man to any man), 5. Shifting (e.g. بحث from looking for something in sand to any search) (Meerhaji and Qanbari, 1437H).

More particularly, forms of semantic change in the Noble Quran are: 1. From general to particularly religious (e.g. فسق from the palm date's exit from peel to people's evasion of Allah's obedience), 2. From particular to general: (e.g. الدأب from perseverance to habit), 3. Obvious relation: like metaphor (e.g. السبيل road) and metonymy (e.g. الرفث obscenity) (Al-Rayahna, 2015).

For Al-Jbour (2005), the word Makr here seems to have gone through the same process. In other words, it used to have a general sense of covert planning, whether positive or negative, as will be explained in the next section. However, in modern Arabic, the term is almost limited to one particular concept of negative connotation.

Furthermore, a verse in the Noble Quran (35:43) specifies a negative type of Makr by stating: "(In) behaving proudly in the land and in Makr of evil; and the evil Makr shall not beset any save the authors of it." Thus, if there is evil Makr, then there could be good Makr, which serves good intentions or purposes.

Meanings of Makr

Abdul-Wahhab (2012) cites six original major meanings for Makr in the basic traditional Arabic dictionaries like Al-Ain, Al-Qamous Al-Muheet, Mukhtar Al-Sihah, Lissan Al-Arab, Al-Muheet fi Al-Lugha, Tahtheeb Al-Lugha and Mu'jam Maqayees Al-Lugha. The first one is 'swindle and deception'. The second is 'planning to do something in return'. The third is 'nice circularity of legs'. The fourth is 'a type of plant'. The fifth is 'colouring and dying'. The sixth is 'land watering'.

According to Ibn Manthour (1978), for example, the first meaning of Makr is about trying in secret. In the second one, a *Mamkour* or *Mumtakar* dress is one that is dyed. A third is land watering. So, it is said: '*Umkuru* (water) the land and then cultivate it because it is solid now'. In the fourth one, *Makra* is a plant which grows in plains and sand, but which has no leaves nor blossoms. In the fifth meaning, *Makra* could be a nice leg, and a *Mumkoura* woman is one with circular legs. In the sixth, *Makra* indicates planning, especially for war. Finally, *Makra* can be an unripe palm date which is not yet sweet.

Ibn Zakariyya (1991) refers to two different indications: swindle and cheating, on the one hand, and circularity of legs, on the other. It is said: 'a woman of *Mamkoura* legs', i.e., they are beautifully rounded.

As for Al-Fayrouzabady (2012), it has several meanings: trickery, good circularity of legs, whistling, sound of the lion's blowing, land watering, a plant of dust colour, a decayed ripe palm date and a pretty hard leg.

More specifically, Abdul-Wahhab(2012) concludes an inclusive study on Makr in the Noble Quran in four fundamental points. Firstly, all the cases of Makr in the holy book refer to the concealment of arrangement, whether by creatures or the Creator. Secondly, Makr is of two types: positive (for a good purpose) and negative (for a bad purpose). Thirdly, negative Makr is only done by creatures, while positive Makr is only done by the Creator or those He assists to do, if any. Fourthly, the Makr of Allah is different from that of creatures. He does not initiate it, but He does it only for the purpose of punishment in return for evil action.

To sum up, it is not an easy task to identify the meaning of a certain item in isolation of the time, originator, receiver and environment where the item is used. With regard to Makr, the aforementioned circumstances, especially in relation to the agent of the action, influence the comprehension of its sense.

Mushakala

This is believed to be the key issue according to the Noble Quran interpreters. For instance, with reference to verse 3:54, Al-Aloussi (1425H) argues that using the same attribute of those evil people to Allah is called the style of Mushakala.

In Mushakala, two different referents are labelled the same for coming in company (Al-Suyouti, 1999). Examples (with fairly literal translations) are "وجزاء سيئة سيئة مثلها" (A bad deed is paid back with a bad deed.); "فاعتدوا عليه بمثل ما اعتدى عليكم" (So offend him as he offended you.); "ويسخرون منهم سخر الله منهم" (They mock them, so Allah mocks them.); and "إنما نحن مستهزؤون، الله يستهزئ بهم" ("We are just having fun", so Allah makes fun of them.). It is aimed at connecting the referents in the mind and producing a rather cohesive structure (Ibid).

This rhetorical tool is said to be of two types: lexical and mental. An example of the former is "ومكروا ومكر الله" (They made Makr and Allah made Makr.), where the word Makr is repeated. An example of the latter is "صبغة الله" (the colouring of Allah), in which صبغة replaces the word تطهير 'cleansing' because it is closer to the Christians' baptism of children (Ibrahim, 2008). It is argued that the eloquence of this device lies in consolidating the meaning in the receiver's mind so it would not be forgotten. An instance from pre-Islamic poetry is:

ألا لا يجلهن أحد علينا
فنجهل فوق جهل الجاهلينا

(Let nobody act with *ignorance* against us, lest we act with *ignorance* over ignorance against them.)

In this context, it is obvious that the meaning of the second mention of ignorance is not the same as in the first mention, indicating that the poet and his tribe are able to strongly react to any hostile action (Ibid)

The beauty of lexical Mushakala is believed to arise from the surprise made by the originator in making such a

formal similarity (Ibid). It also expresses the retribution to an act with the same term as they hold some resemblance. Another example is the Quranic sentence: "نسوا الله فنسيهم" (They forgot Allah, so Allah forgot them.) (Hashem, 2010).

Search has been conducted for a similar form of pun in the English language. Interestingly, it has been found that there is a rhetorical device called 'truductio'. It is defined as "the use of the same word in different connotations or a balancing of homonyms" (Preminger, 1986).

The originally Latin word, which refers to "subtype of pun," is "very rare in contemporary English, not used by other than rhetoricians and hardly mentioned in any general English dictionary" (Delabastita, 1997).

According to Thoughtco. Website,

"In *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593), Henry Peacham defines *truductio* as "a forme of speech which repeateth one word often times in one sentence, making the oration more pleasant to the eare." He compares the effect of the figure to "pleasant repetitions and divisions" in music, noting that the aim of *truductio* is to "garnish the sentence with oft repetition, or to note well the importance of the word repeated."

A relevant example is a saying attributed to Benjamin Franklin in 1776, which goes: "We must indeed all *hang* together, or most assuredly we shall all *hang* separately" (Ibid).

Allah in the Noble Quran

The Noble Quran is viewed by Muslims to be Almighty Allah's direct word, revealed in Arabic to Prophet Mohammad. Hence, how could Allah depict Himself in such a negative image of deception and cheating! In fact, He is given the Greatest Names, which show that He is totally impeccable and infallible. For instance, He is the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, the Guardian, the All-Forgiving, the Utterly Just, the Generous, the Wise, the Loving, the Truth, the Pardoner, the Compassionate, the Rich, the Bestower, the Grateful, the Bountiful, the Loving and the Incomparable.

On the other hand, as the Noble Quran stresses its Arabic nature, Muslim scholars believe that any attempt to translate it cannot be more than an approximate interpretation, intended only as a tool for the exploration of the original 'miraculous' Arabic text. Therefore, it is argued that Makr needs to be translated with a neutral, if not positive, connotation which suits the image of the Creator in the holy book.

Translating the Noble Quran

Scriptures are more difficult to render than other texts. As they contain sacred propositions, they must be translated with a great deal of accuracy. Translators need to "stick more closely to the original" (Al-Khawalda, 2004).

Among these, the Noble Qur'an is a very special text. For Muslims, it contains unique miracles in science, legislation, history, etc. For rhetoricians, it is the top standard of eloquence of Arabic, and it has preserved the language for centuries (Abdul-Rahim, 1981). The form and meaning of the Noble Quran are extraordinarily intertwined in a particular relationship, as it expresses ideas "in an inseparable identity with how it says it and that its literary power belongs squarely with its religious intent" (Zebiri, 2003).

Another characteristic to be considered is the common use of persuasion, presented in parenthetical phrases, interrogation, apologetic allusion, exhortation or rebuke (Ibid).

The Noble Qur'an is believed to be "inimitable", it "can only exist in its original language", and it "cannot be understood fully by non-Arabic speakers" (Al-Kharabsha and Al-Azzam, 2008). Even those who have already rendered the Noble Qur'an, like Arberry and Irving, come to a conclusion that it is untranslatable "because each time one returns to the Arabic text, he finds new meanings and fresh ways of interpreting". No language can find equivalent expressions to its lofty language (Al-Jabari, 2008).

Therefore, literal translation of the Qur'an is opposed by many. It is said to have "produced ponderous and laboured style in English" and, thus, created "a difficulty in readability and understanding" (Abdul-Raof, 2001).

Translators of the Qur'an are challenged by the basic question of equivalence, which has already seen heated

debates among translation scholars. As absolute synonymy cannot be found between words of the same language, since each has its own connotations and associations, then how could there be complete equivalence between different languages! Furthermore, if such equivalence cannot be achieved between texts produced by humans, it is impossible to materialize between Allah's word and its human translation. Hence, the translator is expected to try to accomplish equivalence on certain levels or in particular aspects of the ST, taking into consideration the original contexts and intended audience, among other factors.

For Khalidi (2013), there are two 'burdens' on the Noble Quran translator. The first is associated with the decision on the best rendition of each word and phrase. That is, how can he/she tell what Almighty Allah means in His own book? The second is that no matter the translator thinks he/she has captured the purpose of the original, he/she feels regret that more eloquent options could be made.

Procedure

Three steps are taken in this section. Firstly, the indications of Makr when connected to Allah in the six contexts are examined according to three exegetes who are mainly interested in linguistic issues, namely: Ibn Ashour (1984), Ibn Hayyan (2010) and Al-Zamakhshari (2019). While interpreting a context, these scholars often cross-refer to the other contexts with regard to the term in question.

For Ibn Ashour, the essence of Makr is to cause someone harm indirectly or in a way that seems to be beneficial to them, which sometimes refers to the 'grace period' they are given by Allah to act appropriately. It could also refer to Allah's thwarting of the wrongdoers' plots, which they thought had succeeded. Although their planning is almost equal to zero in contrast with His, the style of Mushakala is employed for the purpose of eloquence.

For Ibn Hayyan, the Makr attributed to Allah is about the different forms of punishment to those who fight against the prophets, as the Arabs sometimes call the penalty the same way they do with the sin itself. It is a metaphor of seizing them without them being aware, although they have been warned.

For Al-Zamakhshari, the Makr of Allah could take place in saving the prophets who were subject to the wrongdoers' conspiracies, as is the case with Jesus and Mohammad. Due to His inclusive knowledge of their evil actions, the Makr of Allah secretly precedes and outshines theirs.

Secondly, an overview is presented on each of the chosen Noble Quran translators:

1. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall is a British Muslim man of letters. He tends to adopt literal translation and provides a little explanation and background information. His version was published in 1930 (Jabari, 2008; Moradi and Sadeghi, 2014).
2. Abdullah Yusuf Ali is an Indian Muslim jurist. He opts for semantic translation and uses hard and deserted vocabulary. He sticks to the SL culture but also adds annotations. His version was published in 1937 (El-Khatib, 2010).
3. Mohammadali Habib Shakir is an Egyptian Muslim judge. He chooses modern English. He adopts literal translation but without explanatory notes. His version was published in 1982 (Nassimi, 2008; Refai, 2014).
4. Thomas Irving is a Canadian-American Muslim linguist. He adopts communicative translation in modern English. He assigns themes for sections and does not use explanatory notes. His version was published in 1985 (Al-Jabari, 2008; Refai, 2014).
5. Muhammad Abdel-Haleem is an Egyptian-British Muslim professor of Islamic studies. He uses contemporary, communicative English. He adds notes on personal, historical and geographical aspects. His version was published in 2004 (Al-Jabari, 2008; Refai, 2014; Shah, 2010).
6. Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali is an Egyptian Muslim linguist. He adopts easy English and focuses on the differentiation between synonyms. His version was published in 1997 (Sadiq, 2010; Hassan, 2014).
7. Arthur Arberry is a British Christian linguist. He attempts to reflect the rhythm of the original even over accuracy. He avoids the Biblical style and does not resort to explanatory notes. His version was published in 1955 (Sadiq, 2010; Khan, 2017).

8. Edward Henry Palmer is a British Christian orientalist. He adopts literal translation and uses archaic vocabulary. His version was published in 1880 (Khalidi, 2013; Refai, 2014; Bidwell, 1986).

9. John Rodwell is a British Christian clergyman and naturalist. He follows 'literal beauty' and Biblical language. His version was published in 1861 (Nassimi, 2008; Khalidi, 2013).

10. Nessim Joseph Dawood is an Iraqi Jewish translator. He adopts communicative translation to produce simple English. He does not use explanatory notes. His version was published in 1965 (Nassimi, 2008; Refai, 2014, Khalidi, 2013).

Thirdly, each of the six original contexts is investigated in detail, along with two different renditions as samples of the above 10 versions. All the derivations of Makr attributed to Allah are italicized.

Context One (3:52-55):

"فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّ أُمَّنًا مَسْلِمُونَ (52) رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ (53) وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ الْمَاكِرِينَ (54) إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ خُذْ إِلَيْنَا مَا نَدَّيْنَاكَ فِي الْهَيْمَةِ نَسْفَعُ عَنَّا ذُنُوبَهُمْ إِذْ يَسْتَفْتُونَكَ قُلْ إِنِّي أَخِيفُ اللَّهَ مَا كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ (55)".

Here, Jesus Christ found that most people at that time did not believe in his message. So, he asked for support and the apostles pledged to stand with him. His opponents plotted to torture and kill him, but Allah saved him and promised to honour his followers on the Day of Judgment. Consider the following renditions of verse 54:

1. "And they schemed, and Allah *schemed*, and Allah is The Most Charitable of *schemers*." (Ghali)
2. "They contrived, and God *contrived*; God is the supreme *Contriver*." (Dawood)

Context Two (7:96-99):

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (96) أَفَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ (97) أَوَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يُلْعَبُونَ (98) أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ (99)

Here, a conclusion is made with regard to previously mentioned stories of nations who disbelieved in Allah, oppressed messengers and rejected the message of faith. They thought they would be safe from His fair punishment whether during daytime or night. Had they believed in and heeded Allah, He would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and earth. Consider the following renditions of verse 99:

3. "Did they, therefore, deem themselves secure from the deep *counsel* of God? But none deem themselves secure from the deep *counsel* of God, save those who perish." (Rodwell)
4. "Were they secure from the *craft* of God? None feel secure from the *craft* of God except a people that shall lose." (Palmer)

Context Three (8:30):

وَإِذْ يَمْكُرُ بِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيُبْنِتُوكَ أَوْ يَقْتُلُوكَ أَوْ يُخْرِجُوكَ، وَيَمْكُرُونَ وَيَمْكُرُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ الْمَاكِرِينَ (30).

Here, there is a reference to a meeting held by the senators of Qureish, Prophet Mohammad's tribe, just before his migration from Mecca to Medina. The verse lists the options they discussed to put an end to his growing influence, namely by imprisonment, murder or banishment. They ultimately decided to send 10 people to kill him while he was trying to leave. In reality, however, Allah saved him from all their attempts since the moment he stepped out of his home until he reached his destination. Consider the following renditions:

5. "And when those who disbelieve plot against thee (O Muhammad) to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they plot, but Allah (also) *plotteth*; and Allah is the best of *plotters*." (Pickthall)
6. "Remember how the Unbelievers plotted against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or slay thee, or get thee out (of thy home). They plot and plan, and God too *plans*; but the best of *planners* is God." (Yusuf Ali)

Context Four (10:21):

وَإِذَا أَذَقْنَا النَّاسَ رَحْمَةً مِن بَعْدِ ضَرَاءٍ مَسَّئُهُمْ إِذْ لَهُمْ مَكْرٌ فِي آيَاتِنَا فَلَنُاسِرْغَ مَكْرَهُمْ إِنَّ رُسُلَنَا يَكْتُبُونَ مَا تَمْكُرُونَ (21).

Here, Allah refers to the mercy and bounties He grants to people as well as to His evident signs. Nevertheless, disbelievers deny Allah's graces and try to oppose His teachings. In return, Allah has angels who record their plots, and He is definitely the most powerful and the fastest to act. Consider the following renditions:

7. “When We let the people taste mercy after hardship has visited them, lo, they have a device concerning Our signs. Say: ‘God is swifter at *devising*; surely Our messengers are writing down what you are devising.’” (Arberry)

8. “When we have let men taste of mercy after distress which has touched them, lo! they use a stratagem against our signs! Say, ‘God is quicker at *stratagem*.’ Verily, our messengers write down what stratagem ye use.” (Palmer)

Context Five (13:41-42):

أُولَئِكَ يَرَوْنَ أَنَّا نَأْتِي الْأَرْضَ نَنْفُصُهَا مِنْ أَطْرَافِهَا وَاللَّهُ يَكْفُؤُكُمْ لِمَا كُنْتُمْ لَهَا كَاذِبِينَ (41) وَقَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلِلَّهِ الْمَكْرُ جَمِيعًا يَعْلَمُ مَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ وَسَيَعْلَمُ الْكُفَّارُ لِمَنْ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ (42).

Here, Allah mentions His punishment of those who reject to believe in Him although He is the Supreme Judge and quick in questioning His creation. Previous nations conspired against the prophets who came to guide them. Nevertheless, He truly knows what everyone does and will show the disbelievers that they will not laugh last. Consider the following renditions of verse 42:

9. “And those before them did indeed make plans, but all *planning* is Allah's; He knows what every soul earns, and the unbelievers shall come to know for whom is the (better) issue of the abode.” (Shakir)

10. “Those before them also schemed, but the overall *scheme* belongs to God: He knows what each soul does. In the end, the disbelievers will find out who will have the excellent home.” (Abdel-Haleem)

Context Six (27:45-53):

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَى ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ فَإِذَا هُمْ فَرِيقَانِ يَخْتَصِمُونَ (45) قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لِمَ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ قَبْلَ الْحَسَنَةِ لَوْلَا تَسْتَغْفِرُونَ اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (46) قَالُوا اطَّيَّرْنَا بِكَ وَبِمَنْ مَعَكَ قَالَ طَائِرُكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ تُفْتَنُونَ (47) وَكَانَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ تِسْعَةُ رَهْطٍ يُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا يُصْلِحُونَ (48) قَالُوا تَفَاسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ لَنُبَيِّتَنَّهُ وَأَهْلَهُ ثُمَّ لَنَقُولَنَّ لِوَلِيِّهِ مَا شَهِدْنَا مَهْلِكَ أَهْلِهِ وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ (49) وَمَكَرُوا مَكْرًا وَمَكَرْنَا مَكْرًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ (50) فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْرِهِمْ إِنَّا دَمَرْنَا هُمْ وَقَوْمَهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (51) فَتِلْكَ بُيُوتُهُمْ خَاوِيَةٌ بِمَا ظَلَمُوا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (52) وَأَنْجَيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَنْقُوتُونَ (53).

This is the story of Prophet Saleh (PBUH), who called his people to worship Allah and abandon sins so they could receive Allah's mercy, but they were divided to two parties. The disbelievers said they thought of Saleh and his followers to be a bad omen. Nine of them even conspired to murder Saleh and his family at night and then swear that they never knew about the crime. In return to their plotting, Allah made His own plan while they did not realize. Ultimately, all the disbelievers were punished and their homes became vacant, thus becoming a sign to those with intellect. On the other hand, the believers who enjoyed piety were saved. Consider the following renditions of verse 50:

11. “They plotted away while *We plotted* too, and they did not even notice it.” (Irving)

12. “And they schemed a scheme, and *We schemed* a scheme, and they were not aware.” (Ghali)

Findings

Table 1 below shows the words chosen by the ten translators to render the meaning of Makr in the above six contexts, making sixty options.

Table 1. Chosen English Words to Render Makr in the Six Contexts

Context/Translator	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
1. Pickthall	Scheme	Scheme	Plot	Plot	Plot	Plot
2. Yusuf Ali	Plan	Plan	Plan	Plan	Plan	Plan
3. Shakir	Plan	Plan	Plan	Plan	Plan	Plan
4. Irving	Plot	Design	Plot	Scheme	Plot	Plot
5. Abdel-Haleem	Plan	Plan	Scheme	Scheme	Scheme	Plan
6. Ghali	Scheme	Scheme	Scheme	Scheme	Scheme	Scheme
7. Arberry	Devise	Devise	devise	Devise	Devise	Devise
8. Palmer	Craft	Craft	Craft	Stratagem	Craft	Plot
9. Rodwell	Plot	Counsel	Plot	Plot	Plot	Devise
10. Dawood	Contrive	Cunning	Scheme	Scheme	Scheme	Plot

It is found that the times each choice was used were as follows: plan 15 (25%); *scheme* 15 (25%); *plot* 14 (23.33%); *devise* 7 (11.66%); *craft* 4 (6.66%); *design*, *counsel*, *contrive*, *cunning* and *stratagem* 1 (1.6%).

Discussion

Noticing the differences between the above options, it is worth exploring their major meanings in two prominent British and American dictionaries, respectively: (A) Cambridge Online Dictionary and (B) Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Items with mainly negative connotations are italicized.

Plan (A)

1. a set of decisions about how to do something in the future
2. a type of arrangement for financial investment

Plan (B)

1. a method for achieving an end
2. an often customary method of doing something
3. a detailed formulation of a program of action
4. goal, aim
5. an orderly arrangement of parts of an overall design or objective

Scheme (A)

- a. an organized plan for doing something, especially something *dishonest* or *illegal* that will bring a good result for you
- b. an officially organized plan or system

Scheme (B)

- a. a plan or program of action; especially: a crafty or secret one
- b. a systematic or organized configuration

Plot (A)

a secret plan made by several people to do something that is *wrong*, *harmful*, or *not legal*, especially to do *damage* to a person or a government

Plot (B)

- a. the plan or main story (as of a movie or literary work)
- b. a secret plan for accomplishing a usually *evil* or *unlawful* end

Devise (A)

to invent a plan, system, object, etc., usually using your intelligence or imagination

Devise (B)

- a. to form in the mind by new combinations or applications of ideas or principles: invent
- b. (archaic) conceive, imagine
- c. to plan to obtain or bring about

Design (A)

the way in which something is planned and made

Design(B)

- a. a particular purpose or intention held in view by an individual or group
- b. deliberate purposive planning
- c. a mental project or scheme in which means to an end are laid down
- d. a deliberate undercover project or scheme

Craft (A)

a skill in knowing how to do or make something, or a job or activity needing such a skill

Craft (B)

- a. skill in planning, making, or executing
- b. skill in *deceiving* to gain an end

Stratagem (A)

a carefully planned way of achieving or dealing with something, often involving a *trick*

Stratagem (B)

- a. an artifice or *trick* in war for *deceiving* and outwitting the enemy
- b. a cleverly contrived *trick* or scheme for gaining an end
- c. skill in *ruses* or *trickery*

Contrive (A)

- a. to arrange a situation or event, or arrange for something to happen, using clever planning
- b. to arrange for something to happen or be done by being smart or *deceiving* others

Contrive (B)

- a. devise, plan
- b. to form or create in an artistic or ingenious manner
- c. to bring about by stratagem or with difficulty: manage

Cunning (A)

- a. Cunning people are clever at planning something so that they get what they want, especially by *tricking* other people, or things that are cleverly made for a particular purpose
- b. skillful in planning and ready to *deceive* people in order to get what you want

Cunning (B)

- a. dexterous or crafty in the use of special resources (such as skill or knowledge) or in attaining an end
- b. characterized by wiliness and *trickery*

Counsel (A)

to give advice, esp. on social or personal problems

Counsel (B)

a policy or plan of action or behavior.

Upon looking at the several meanings of the above vocabulary, 'plan' seems to be the most appropriate option, followed by 'design', 'devise' and 'counsel', because of their mainly neutral connotations. On the other hand, 'plot' seems to be the worst option and then 'stratagem', followed by 'scheme', 'craft', 'contrive' and 'cunning', due to their partially negative connotations of deception, trickery, dishonesty or illegal action.

Conclusion

Based on the above examination of the meanings and renditions of Makr in the Noble Quran, the following can be concluded.

First, semantic change is a natural phenomenon in any language. In the present case, the emergence of Islam and the advent of the Noble Quran represent an extraordinary turning point in both the Arabic language and Arab culture, affecting concepts of many aspects. As a result, Makr could have gone through such development over the pre-Islamic age and early Islamic stage until modern times. In other words, had those exceptionally eloquent disbelievers at the Prophet's time known Makr to have the only particular negative sense, they would have seized the opportunity to prove that the Noble Quran itself condemned Allah, but no historical evidence seems to prove that they did.

Second, although the word Makr currently carries a negative sense, it originally has other neutral, and even positive, meanings according to major dictionaries of Arabic. Thus, it is context that needs to be carefully investigated to determine the intended one.

Third, the rhetorical device of Mushakala uses the same word for different parties but with different connotations. It

is employed to enhance the partial similarity in the receiver's mind. Makr is among several examples of this style.

Fourth, Allah is depicted in the Noble Quran as the one Who has got all good qualities but never any negative or evil feature. Therefore, all His acts, including Makr, aim at the good of humanity in any direct or indirect way according to His justice, wisdom and mercy.

Fifth, of the above contexts, five explicitly, and one implicitly, show that Makr is not attributed to Allah in the first place. Rather, disbelievers initiate secret conspiring against the Truth and the righteous people. In return, Allah makes His own secret plans to halt their actions, punish them for their evil deeds and save the good people.

Sixth, it is the translator's responsibility to try their best to carefully comprehend the contextual meaning of Makr in the Noble Quran. Then, they need to keep faithful to the original message, by making choices of appropriate connotations.

Finally, further studies are recommended on similar words in the Noble Quran which could raise ambiguity for non-native speakers of Arabic. Other examples of Mushakala, in particular, can be interesting cases for research.

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ترجمة دلالات (مكر الله) في القرآن الكريم

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ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في الأخطاء المتعلقة بترجمة المعاني الإيحائية للفظة (المكرر) في القرآن الكريم. فهذه اللفظة يغلب عليها المعنى السلبي في اللغة العربية المعاصرة، ولكنها تُنسب إلى الله تعالى في ستة مواضع، فيفهمها بعض الناطقين بغير العربية على معنى التأمّر أو الخداع، فتأتي الدراسة على عدة عوامل تتعلق بهذه القضية، مثل التطور الدلالي، ووصف الله - سبحانه وتعالى - في القرآن الكريم، وسياق الكلام، وأسلوب المشاكلة - وهو أهم هذه العوامل. وبعد ذلك تنظر في المعاني التفصيلية التي يذكرها القاموس لخيارات عشرة من المترجمين بهدف معرفة الأفضل منها من ناحية المعاني الإيحائية.

الكلمات الدالة: ترجمة القرآن الكريم، أخطاء الترجمة، المعنى الإيحائي.

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