

Meanings of the Qur'anic Near-Synonyms: *Al-Ṣirāṭ* and *Al-Sabīl* (the Path) and Their English Translations

Maksud Sinonim Hampir dalam Al-Qur'ān: Al-ṣirāṭ dan Al-sabīl (Jalan) dan Terjemahan dalam Bahasa Inggris

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the meanings of the Qur'anic near-synonyms اصراط al-ṣirāṭ and السبيل al-sabīl (the path) and their English translations. It aims to identify the contextual meanings of these near-synonyms based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, it explains the differences in meaning between these near-synonyms and how such semantic differences are reflected in the English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. The RC-S approach by Murphy (2003) is adopted in this study as a theoretical framework for the analysis of data. The qualitative approach is also employed for collecting and analyzing the data of the study. Moreover, the exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān are consulted to find out the semantic differences between the selected near-synonyms. The results of the study reveal that there are some differences in the denotative and connotative meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms and that the differences in meaning between both near-synonyms are not reflected in the English translations. The study provides recommendations for readers and translators especially the translators of the Holy Qur'ān.

Keywords: contextual meaning; connotative meaning; denotative meaning; near-synonyms; synonym translation

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyalin maksud kata-kata Al-Qur'ān yang sinonim hampir bagi pasangan kata الصراط al-ṣirāṭ dan السبيل al-sabīl (jalan) dan terjemahan ke dalam bahasa Inggris. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti maksud kontekstual bagi pasangan kata sinonim hampir ini berdasarkan tafsir Al-Qur'ān. Kemudian, kajian menjelaskan perbezaan maksud di antara sinonim hampir ini dan bagaimana perbezaan semantic ditunjukkan dalam Al-Qur'ān terjemahan bahasa Inggris. Pendekatan RC-S oleh Murphy (2003) digunakan dalam kajian ini sebagai rangka kerja teori untuk analisis data. Pendekatan kualitatif juga digunakan untuk mengumpul dan menganalisis data kajian. Selain itu, tafsir Al-Qur'ān juga dirujuk untuk mengetahui perbezaan maksud antara kedua kata sinonim hampir yang mempunyai maksud yang hampir sama. Hasil kajian mendedahkan bahawa terdapat beberapa perbezaan maksud denotatif dan konotatif untuk pasangan kata sinonim hampir yang dikaji dalam Al-Qur'ān dan perbezaan maksud antara kedua sinonim hampir tidak disampaikan dalam terjemahan bahasa Inggris. Kajian ini memberi cadangan untuk pembaca dan penterjemah terutamanya penterjemah Al-Qur'ān.

Kata kunci: Maksud kontekstual; maksud konotatif; maksud denotatif; sinonim hampir; sinonim; terjemahan

INTRODUCTION

Synonymy, as a universal linguistic phenomenon in semantics, has been defined by many linguistics and semanticists. It is viewed by Murphy (2003) as a semantic relation between two or more words which maps to the same meaning or concept. Likewise, Cruse (2000) defines synonymy as a semantic relation between words whose semantic similarities are more salient than their semantic differences. While defining synonymy, Matulewska (2016) focuses on denotation and the part of speech

claiming that it is a semantic relation which binds two terms with the same denotative meaning and the same word category but with different word forms. Within such a semantic relation, there exist many types of synonyms.

For example, Murphy (2003) identifies two types of synonyms, namely, logical synonyms and context-dependent synonyms. She further divides the logical synonyms into two types: full and sense synonyms. Murphy maintains that the context-dependent synonyms are all regarded as near-synonyms. Full synonyms are defined as words which are

identical in every sense (Murphy 2003). Literature (e.g. Dolezal 2013; Wang 2016) reveals that full synonyms are uncommon or non-existent. However, sense synonyms are common and are viewed as words which have one or more senses in common but differ in others (Murphy 2003). An example of this type of synonyms is the pair of 'commence' and 'begin'; these lexical items are considered sense synonyms as they have some senses in common but differ in respect of whether the lexical item is formal or informal. Full and sense synonyms will not be further discussed here as the current study is mainly concerned with near-synonyms.

Near-synonyms are defined as words which have some but not all shades of meaning in common (Cruse 2000). Similarly, they are viewed as words which have similar but not identical meanings (Murphy 2003). In this respect, O'Neill (2018) contends that within the domain of lexical semantics, near-synonyms are more common than the other types of synonyms. The pair of 'misty' and 'foggy' is an example of near-synonyms as mistiness is a lower degree of fogginess. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the lexical items 'beautiful' and 'pretty' as well as 'neat' and 'tidy' are also near-synonyms because they do not have the same usage in all contexts (Haily & Jung 2015; Guilani&Hua 2017). In fact, near-synonymy is an interesting and challenging topic in lexical semantics research due to the difficulty in distinguishing near-synonyms or similar words in general even for the native speakers of a certain language (Wang 2016). The current study, thus, aims to investigate the contextual meanings of the selected Qur'anic near-synonyms, the differences in meaning between them and how such differences are reflected in the English translations.

In fact, the Holy Qur'an includes near-synonyms which seem to have exactly the same meaning but convey different meanings upon a deeper semantic analysis of the semantic constituents of these near-synonyms. In this regard, Abdul-Raof (2018: 109) applauds that "each lexical item in the Holy Qur'an has its own inherent semantic componential features which can be slightly distinct from another lexical item that has its own innate semantic componential features claiming that the context and semantic componential features are the major factors in the selection of one word rather than the other". In a similar vein, Al-Sha'rāwī (1993) claims that every near-synonym in the Holy Qur'an has a specific meaning that cannot be replaced by another Qur'anic lexical item even though the two near-

synonyms resemble each other. For instance, the near-synonyms غيث *ghāith* and مطر *maṭar* have one equivalent in English (i.e. rain). However, there exists a slight semantic difference between them in the Holy Qur'an and thus such near-synonyms cannot be employed interchangeably in any Qur'anic context. Although both Qur'anic near-synonyms share the primary meaning "i.e. rain", the lexical item غيث (*ghāith*) is always associated with mercy, compassion, and welfare whereas its near-synonyms مطر (*maṭar*) is always associated with punishment, destruction, and Godly wrath and torment (Al-Sowaidi 2011).

It is noticed that the differences in meaning between such near-synonyms are difficult to understand even for the non-specialist Arabic speakers due to the fact that they are interchangeably used in Modern Standard Arabic (i.e. the standardized variety of Arabic used in writing and formal speech throughout the Arab world to facilitate communication). Such differences in meaning are vital to perceive the Qur'anic texts appropriately. If the differences in meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms are not understood by the reader or translator, the Qur'anic message will not be conveyed appropriately. In this connection, Abdullah (2003), Ishrateh (2006) and Abdul-Ghafour et al. (2017) maintain that the Qur'anic context as well as the exegeses of the Holy Qur'an are highly significant to understand the semantic differences between the Qur'anic near-synonyms. Hence, the current study will investigate the semantic differences between the selected Qur'anic near-synonyms based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'an and the context in which they are used in the Holy Qur'an. Finally, the study will explain how the differences in meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* and السبيل *al-sabīl* (the path) are reflected in the English translations. It provides an insight into the semantic differences between the Qur'anic near-synonyms and how such semantic differences should be taken into consideration when translating the Holy Qur'an.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study investigates two Qur'anic near-synonyms الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* and السبيل *al-sabīl* (the path) and their English translations. These two Qur'anic lexical items are considered near-synonyms because they have similar but not identical meanings in the

Holy Qur'ān. Literature (e.g. Ali 1938, Abdul-Raof 2001, Al-Sowaidi 2011, Hassan 2014, and Abdul-Ghafour et al. 2017) reveals that near-synonymy is one of the challenges facing the translators of the Holy Qur'ān in that the Qur'ānic near-synonyms have special semantic features which make their translation into English highly problematic. In this regard, Ali (1938) maintains that the Qur'ānic vocabulary is so rich that it gives different words for similar ideas and things which have only one English equivalent. Besides, it is claimed that although some Qur'ānic near-synonyms are used interchangeably in Modern Standard Arabic, they are differently used in the Holy Qur'ān (Al-Sowaidi 2011).

An example of such near-synonyms is the Qur'ānic pair of *حلف* *ḥalafa* and *اقسم* *'aqsama* (swore). Abū 'Udah (1985) differentiates between these Qur'ānic near-synonyms claiming that *حلف* *ḥalafa* (swore) means untruthfully swore and is used to implicate a false oath while *اقسم* *'aqsama* (swore) means truthfully swore and implies a true oath in the Holy Qur'ān. In fact, English does not have equivalents for these near-synonyms and has only one general equivalent for both near-synonyms (i.e. swore). In addition, these two near-synonyms are used interchangeably in Modern Standard Arabic and thus the semantic differences between them are difficult to understand even for the native speakers of Arabic. Another example of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms is the pair of *العفو* *al-ʿafwa* and *المغفرة* *al-maghfirah* (forgiveness). Abdul-Ghafour et al. (2017) investigated the semantic differences between them claiming that although both near-synonyms have the primary meaning 'forgiveness' in common, *العفو* *al-ʿafwa* (forgiveness) might be associated with rebuke and blame whereas *المغفرة* *al-maghfirah* (forgiveness) is associated with the encasement, veil, and concealment of the sin. They add that the differences in meaning between these near-synonyms are not reflected in the English translation and both Qur'ānic near-synonyms dealt with as full near-synonyms.

In fact, the differences in meaning between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms are vital to understand the Qur'ānic texts. If such semantic differences are not reflected in the English translation, the Qur'ānic text will be misinterpreted. This study is an endeavor to identify the contextual meanings of the two Qur'ānic near-synonyms *الصراط* *al-ṣirāṭ* and *السييل* *al-sabīl* (the path) in the Holy Qur'ān making use of various exegeses of the Holy Qur'ān. Then, it highlights the semantic differences between the two Qur'ānic

near-synonyms and how these semantic differences are reflected in the English translation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the contextual meanings of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms *الصراط* *al-ṣirāṭ* and *السييل* *al-sabīl* (the path).
2. To compare the meaning of the Qur'ānic near-synonyms *الصراط* *al-ṣirāṭ* and *السييل* *al-sabīl* (the path).
3. To investigate how the semantic differences between the Qur'ānic near-synonyms *الصراط* *al-ṣirāṭ* and *السييل* *al-sabīl* (the path) are reflected in the English translations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study adopts the Relation by Contrast Approach to Synonyms (RC-S) by Murphy (2003) as a theoretical framework for the data analysis. This approach explains synonymy in respect of the minimal semantic differences that exist between the synonyms. Murphy claims that in any set of different word forms with similar denotations, there could be a slight semantic difference in denotative and/or expressive meaning among synonyms. Consequently, the differences in meaning among synonyms could be explained based on the parameters proposed Murphy (2003) as follows.

DENOTATIVE MEANING

Denotation refers to "the relationship between sense and reference, and the sense of a word is the set of conditions on the word's reference (Murphy 2003: 148). In fact, many translation scholars have contributed to the literature on denotation such as Newmark (1988), Larson (1984) and Hatim and Mason (1997). In fact, Hatim and Mason (1997) distinguish between two kinds of meaning: denotative and connotative meanings. They argue that denotation covers the core referential meanings of a given word while connotation refers to the additional meanings that a word has beyond its referential meaning; they argue that the lexical item 'notorious' means 'famous' but with negative connotations. The connotative meaning is also called expressive meaning by Murphy (2003) and will be discussed in the next section.

EXPRESSIVE ELEMENTS OF MEANING

Expressive meaning includes connotation, affect and social meaning (Murphy 2003). These meanings will be highlighted below:

1. Connotation is viewed as “the additional meanings that a word or phrase has beyond its central meaning” (Richards & Schmidt 2002: 108). It involves associations which do not directly affect the conditions on reference, but which may give some slant to the description (Murphy 2003).
2. Affect is a non-denotative meaning that is concerned with the speaker's attitude toward the subject at hand (Murphy 2003).
3. Social meaning comprises dialect, register, jargon, and other sub-varieties of a language or vocabulary (Murphy 2003).

Although many scholars have contributed to the literature on denotation, such as Newmark (1988) and Hatim and Mason (1997), the RC-S approach is adopted in the present study because it provides a framework for analyzing the data of the study; it provides parameters which facilitate the analysis of the semantic differences between the near-synonyms. Based on the RC-S approach, the meaning of the Qur'anic near-synonyms will be analyzed and the differences in meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms will be also highlighted. Finally, the study will discuss how the differences in meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms are reflected in the English translation.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the meanings of the Qur'anic near-synonyms *الصراط* *al-ṣirāṭ* and *السييل* *al-sabīl* (the path) and their English translations. These Qur'anic near-synonyms are particularly chosen for some reasons. First, these Qur'anic near-synonyms are not common in the Modern Standard Arabic as they are commonly used in the religious contexts and thus the semantic differences between them are subtle and difficult to understand even for the non-specialist native speakers of Arabic. Second, these two Qur'anic near-synonyms occur frequently in the Holy Qur'an; they occur 221 times in the Holy Qur'an based on Abdulbaqi (1364 H.). More precisely, the lexical item *الصراط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (the path) occurs 45 times while the synonym *السييل* *al-sabīl*

(the path) and its plural form *سبل* *subul* (paths) occur 176 times in the Holy Qur'an (ibid).

Moreover, this study adopts two English translations of the Holy Qur'an, namely, Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). Thomas Ballantyne Irving was an American Muslim author, scholar and professor. He wrote *the first American English translation of the Qur'an* which was published in 1985. However, Arthur John Arberry was a non-Muslim American scholar and the writer of *The Koran Interpreted* which was first published in 1955. In fact, the translations of Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003) are adopted for some reasons. First, both translators have different religious backgrounds due to the fact that Irving is a Muslim whereas Arberry is a Christian. Thus, the study investigates how Muslim and non-Muslim translators realize and convey the meanings of the Qur'anic near-synonyms to the reader. Second, the translators use different translation approaches for the Holy Qur'an translation. More precisely, Irving (2002) uses a communicative translation approach (i.e. a translation approach which introduces the Holy Qur'an in a communicative contemporary English) while Arberry adopts a literal translation approach (i.e. an approach to translation that allows the source language to have dominance over the target language) in his translation. Consequently, the current study investigates how two translators adopting two different approaches of translation convey the differences in meaning between the selected Qur'anic near-synonyms to the reader.

Besides, Arberry's translation of the Holy Qur'an is regarded as the most reliable translation undertaken by a Christian native speaker of English as his translation was addressed to the English readers living and born in the west (Al-Azzam 2005). Moreover, the Irving's translation of the Holy Qur'an is also written in modern English in which the simplest word is used to convey the meanings of the Holy Qur'an. According to Irving, doing so help seven the Muslim child as well as the interested non-Muslims to understand the Qur'anic message so easily.

It is also worth mentioning here that although the current study adopts two English translations of the Holy Qur'an being highlighted earlier in the methodology, the researchers checked more recent English translations of the Holy Qur'an to trace if there is an improvement in the translations of the selected Qur'anic pairs. In this respect, the researchers identified three translations which have been published more recently than the selected translations by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003);

these English translations of the Holy Qur'an are Maulawi (2004), Ali (2006) and Malik (2007). The renditions of the selected Qur'anic near-synonyms in such translations are discussed in the study and are compared with the selected translations as well.

This study adopts many prominent exegeses of the Holy Qur'an written by early Islamic scholars like Al-Baghawī (1999), Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Qurṭubī (2006) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009). In fact, these scholars died in 516 A.H., 310 A.H., 671 A.H., and 538 A.H., respectively. However, their exegeses have been recently updated by other subsequent scholars such as Abdullah Abdul-Mohsen Al-Turki and Khalīl Ma'mūn Shayḥa; the first scholar edited the exegeses of Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Qurṭubī (2006) while the second edited the exegesis of Al-Zamakhsharī (2009). The present study also adopts other exegeses written by contemporary prominent scholars such as Al-Sha'rāwī (1991) and Ibn'Āshūr (1984). The classical and contemporary exegeses are specifically selected for many reasons. For instance, the classical exegeses of Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Qurṭubī (2006) and Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) are consulted due to the fact that they are regarded prominent as argued by (Abdul-Raof 2001; Yaacob 2019). Other contemporary exegeses like Al-Sha'rāwī (1991) and Ibn'Āshūr (1984) are also adopted because the exegetes worked on explaining the differences in meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms. These classical and contemporary exegeses are dependable and thus they provide the precise meanings of the Qur'anic texts, verses and the context of these verses which are vitally important to understand the semantic differences between the selected Qur'anic near-synonyms.

PROCEDURES

To accomplish the study objectives, the researchers went through many steps. First, the Qur'anic verses where the chosen Qur'anic pair is used were

identified. However, only two Qur'anic verses are selected and analyzed though the near-synonyms occur in 221 verses of the Holy Qur'an as explained in the preceding section. The analyzed verses are selected based on some reasons. The first verse is selected because it occurs in the mightiest surah of the Holy Qur'an, الفاتحة *al-fatīḥah* (Al-Zamakhsharī 2009). The second verse is chosen because both near-synonyms are used and more importantly, the lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (the path) is used twice in the same verse and with different connotative meanings as can be seen in the analysis of the Qur'anic verse. After selecting the two Qur'anic verses, they were presented along with their English translations in tables. Subsequently, the researchers identified the contextual meanings of the Qur'anic pair based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'an and the differences in meaning between such near-synonyms are also explained based on the parameters of the RC-S approach by Murphy (2003). Finally, the study discussed how the differences in meaning between the chosen Qur'anic near-synonyms are reflected into the English translations of the Qur'an.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This section presents the analysis of the Qur'anic pair الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* and السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) and their English translations by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003).

THE CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS OF الصراط *AL-ṢIRĀṬ* AND السبيل *AL-SABĪL* (PATH)

The contextual analysis of the Qur'anic near-synonyms الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* and السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) reveals that there exist some semantic differences between these Qur'anic lexical items in terms of denotative and connotative meaning. This section discusses the contextual meanings of the Qur'anic pair based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'an. Here is the contextual analysis of the Qur'anic verses:

TABLE 1. The meaning of الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (the path)

The Qur'anic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
قال تعالى: "إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (6) صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ" (الفاتحة: ٦- ٧)	"Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray"	"Guide us along the Straight Road, the road of those whom You have favored, with whom You are not angry, nor who are lost!"
	(Al-Fatiḥah: 6-7)	(Al-Fatiḥah: 6-7)

In this verse, it is noticed that the Qur'ānic lexical item *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (path/ road) has a positive meaning. It collocates with certain other lexical items which have also positive meanings such as *إِهْدِنَا* 'ihdina (guide us), *المستقيم* *al-mustaqīm* (straight) and *صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ* (the path/road of those whom You have favored). In fact, the exegetes of the Holy Qur'ān provide different interpretations of the Qur'ānic lexical items *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (the straight road/path) in this Qur'ānic verse. For example, Al-Ṭabarī (2001) explains that “Guide us in the straight path/road” means make us firm in holding fast to the religion of Islam. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Al-Qurtubī (2006) also state that *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (the straight road/path) in this Qur'ānic verse denotes the clear road and the one which is not circuitous. More importantly, Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) acknowledges that *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (the straight road/path) in this verse denotes the religion of Islam.

From a linguistic perspective, the lexical item *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) is originally read as *السرّاط* (*al-sirāṭ*) which is derived from the Arabic verb *سَرَطَ* *saraṭa* (swallow) (IbnManzūr 2012). In Arabic, it is said that ‘the road swallows the travelers or passersby’ to implicate that the road is easy and straight. In addition, Ibn°Ashūr (1984) points out that *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) is used metaphorically to denote “truth” which leads people to the satisfaction of God and this is the mission of Islam. He also claims that *المستقيم* *al-mustaqīm* (straight) is metaphorically used to describe the truth which is not mixed up with falsehood. Such a kind of truth is similar to the straight road which has no twists (ibid). Besides, Ibn°Ashūr (1984) explains that (*إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ*) Guide us in the straight road) means guide us to the truth – guidance which helps us recognize what is lawful and unlawful.

Moreover, Al-Baghawī (1999) provides four interpretations of the Qur'ānic lexical items

الصرّاط *al-ṣirāṭ* (the straight road/path). According to him, *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (the straight road/path) could be interpreted as Islam, the Holy Qur'ān, the road which guides people to the religion of Allah, and the road of the Paradise. However, Al-Baghawī (1999) argues that if *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (the straight road/path) is Islam, what would the request for guidance to the straight road be interpreted when it comes to those who are already Muslims! He then provides the interpretation of the Muslims’ request for guidance to the straight road claiming that the request for guidance implies the firm to holding fast to the straight road (i.e. Islam) and the request for more guidance to it as well.

Al-Sha°rāwī (1991) also contends that *الصرّاط* (*al-ṣirāṭ*) is the shortest and easiest road which leads to the intended destination. Besides, he claims that it is a paved road. According to him, *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (Guide us in the straight road/path) means guide us in the road which has no twists. Al-Sha°rāwī confirms that since the aim of Muslims is to enter the Paradise, the meaning of this verse could be as follows: ‘guide us to the right road which leads us to the Paradise’. More importantly, Al-Samarā°ī (2003) contends that *الصرّاط* (*al-ṣirāṭ*) is used singular (neither dual nor plural) in the Holy Qur'ān to implicate that there is only one *صرّاط* *ṣirāṭ* (road/path) of truth which is Islam. Based on the interpretation of the verse, the lexical item *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) has a positive meaning; it denotes the shortest and easiest road between two points; it is straight, fast and paved and does not have twists. It is used singular in the Holy Qur'ān to implicate that there is only one road of truth which is Islam. In the next verse, both Qur'ānic near-synonyms *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) and *السبيل* *al-sabīl* (path) are used and the lexical item *السبيل* *al-sabīl* (path) is also used in both forms (i.e. singular and plural) in the same verse with slight semantic differences.

TABLE 2. The meaning of *الصرّاط* *al-ṣirāṭ* and *السبيل* *al-sabīl* (the path)

The Qur'ānic verse	Arberry's (2003) translation	Irving's (2002) translation
<p>قال تعالى ”وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ...“ (الأنعام: ١٥٣)</p>	<p>“And that this is My path, straight; so do you follow it, and follow not diverse paths lest they scatter you from His path....”</p>	<p>“This is My Straight Road, so follow it and do not follow [other] paths which will separate you from His path....” (Al-Ancām: 153)</p>
	(Al-Ancām: 153)	

In this verse, both lexical items *صِرَاط* *ṣirāṭ* (road/path) and *سبيل* *sabīl* (path) are used. It is noticed that the lexical item *صِرَاط* *ṣirāṭ* (road/path) has a positive meaning as it is associated with God as in *صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا* (My Straight Road) and also collocates

with the adjective *مُسْتَقِيمًا* *mustaqīma* (straight) which has a positive meaning as well. However, its near-synonym, *سبيل* *sabīl* (path), has a positive and negative meaning in the same verse. When it is described as the one which scatters people from

the God's road/path, it has a negative meaning as in *بِكُمْفَتَرًا السُّبُلَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا* (follow not diverse paths lest they scatter you). This Qur'anic lexical item *السُّبُلُ al-subul* (paths) collocates with certain other words with a negative meaning such as *وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا* *walātattabi'ū* (do not follow) which implies the prohibition of following such paths. It also collocates with the lexical items *فَقَفَّرَ بِكُمْ fatafarrqabikum* (lest they scatter you) which have negative meanings. In English, the lexical item 'scatter' means "to move quickly in different directions" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007). This lexical item is used in the Qur'anic verse to convey a negative meaning of *السُّبُلُ al-subul* (paths) which mislead people from the right road. On the contrary, this lexical item, *سَبِيلٌ sabīl* (path), has also a positive meaning in the same verse as it is associated with God as in *عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ* *an sabīlih* (from His path). It is shown that the lexical item *صِرَاطٌ širāṭ* (road/path) has a positive meaning only while its near-synonym *سَبِيلٌ sabīl* (path) might have a positive or negative meaning.

This verse is also interpreted by Al-Ṭabarī (2001) as follows: This is my straight road (i.e. Islam), which is well established and I am pleased with; so follow it and do not follow others ways (i.e. other religions like Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism) lest they will make you incline from His path. This is what He has ordained for you (He commanded for you in the Holy Qur'an) that perhaps you will be God-fearing.

In addition, Ibn^oAshūr (1984) and Al-Sha'rāwī (1991) acknowledge that *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path) denotes the wide road and implies Islam. They add that Islam is described in the Holy Qur'an as road because it is intended to help people to be righteousness in this world and the Hereafter and thus it is described as such because it leads people to their destination (i.e. paradise). Ibn^oAshūr (1984) also argues that Islam is described as *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path) due to the fact that it is the clear and straight road and most significantly it is the easiest, safest and shortest one for those who pass on it. According to Ibn^oAshūr, those who pass this straight road will not get astray and those who hold it fast will surely reach their destination (i.e. paradise).

Ibn^oAshūr (1984) also explains that *السبيل al-subul* (paths) as the plural form of *السبيل al-sabīl* (path) is used in the same verse where the Qur'anic lexical items *الصرّاط المستقيم* (the straight road) are used to convey a certain meaning. He illustrates that the use of both lexical items implicate that *السبيل al-*

subul (paths) are different from *الصرّاط المستقيم* (the straight road). He confirms that *السبيل al-subul* (paths) are *بُنْيَات الطَّرِيقِ (bunyāt al-tariq)* which are the small tracks that are split up from the road. In Arabic, these ways are always used by people to reach their houses but do not lead to any other destination and it is also difficult for people to use unless they know well (ibid). Therefore, the verse *عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ* (lest they scatter you from His path) is a warning to follow those specific paths (*السبيل al-subul*) since those who follow such paths will be away from *الصرّاط المستقيم* (the straight road).

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) asserts that Allah commands all humankind to hold the straight road fast (i.e. Islam) and it is described as *مستقيماً mustaqīma* (straight) because it does not deviate from the truth. Consequently, people must follow *الصرّاط المستقيم al-širāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight road) but not others (religions like Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism etc.) since they scatter people from the straight road, the road of the truth (i.e. Islam).

To conclude, it can be said that the lexical item *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path) has a positive meaning; it is clear, wide, fast, safe and straight. It is only used in the Holy Qur'an in its singular form to serve a certain purpose. It conveys a Qur'anic message that there is only one road of truth which is Islam. However, the lexical item *السبيل al-sabīl* (path) might have a positive or negative meaning. As noticed in the second verse (Al-An'am: 153), the lexical item *السبيل al-subul* (paths) in the verse has a negative meaning; it is described as the paths which scatter people from the right road. However, the lexical item *السبيل al-sabīl* (path) might also have a positive meaning as it is associated with God as noticed in the contextual analysis of the same verse *عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ* (from His path).

It is also worth noting that although the exegetes highlighted the positive meaning of *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path) in the Holy Qur'an as has been discussed earlier, the researchers identified very few exceptions in the Holy Qur'an where this Qur'anic lexical item is used with a negative or neutral meaning. More precisely, it is noticed that *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path) is used with a negative meaning in surah Al-Saffaat, verse 23, where it is used to refer to the road to hellfire. Moreover, it is also found that this Qur'anic lexical item, *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path), has a neutral meaning as in surah Al-A'raf, verse 86, where it is used to refer to a normal road. Therefore, it is crucial to indicate that the discussion of the meaning and translation of *الصرّاط al-širāṭ* (road/path) in this study will not cover such exceptions.

THE SEMANTIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN الصراط *AL-ṢIRĀṬ* (ROAD) AND السبيل *AL-SABĪL* (WAY/PATH) BASED ON RC-S APPROACH

The contextual analysis of the meanings of the two Qur'anic near-synonyms shows that there exist some semantic differences between the two near-synonyms الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) and السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) in terms of denotative and connotative meanings. In this regard, Murphy (2003) claims that in any set of different word forms having the same denotation, there exist some differences in denotative and/or expressive meaning. The semantic differences between the two Qur'anic near-synonyms are explained here in the light of the parameters mentioned by Murphy (2003).

As noticed in the contextual analysis, there exist some differences between الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) and السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) in terms of denotative as well as connotative meanings. It is revealed that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road/path) is a straight, wide, easy, safe, fast and paved road and is the shortest road between two points. It is also claimed that it does not have twists. This Qur'anic lexical item is only used singular in the Holy Qur'an to convey a Qur'anic message that there is only one road of truth which is Islam. It is always associated with God's guidance. Therefore, it has a positive meaning.

On the other hand, the Qur'anic lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) is used in both forms (i.e. singular and plural) in the Holy Qur'an. The lexical item السبيل *al-subul* (paths) denotes the small tracks off a road (Ibn^c Ashūr 1984). It might have a positive or negative meaning as seen in the analysis of the second verse (Al-An'ām: 153). The lexical item السبيل *al-subul* (paths) is used to denote the paths which scatter people from the right road as in فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ (lest they scatter you from His path). This lexical item, السبيل *al-subul* (paths), implicates misleading guidance. However, the lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) in the same verse is associated with God's guidance and thus has a positive meaning. Therefore, it can be said that the lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) might have a positive or negative meaning.

Moreover, Arab scholars make a distinction between these Qur'anic near-synonyms. For instance, Al-^cAskarī (1997) claims that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) signifies an easy road and is more specific than السبيل *al-sabīl* (path). Furthermore, Dawūd (2008) agrees with Abū Udah (1985) that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) is derived from the Arabic verb سَرَطَ *saraṭa* (swallow) and denotes a clear and easy road. Dawūd (2008)

and Al-Dūrī (2005) also assert that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) signifies the road of truth where the traveler does not get lost, be bewildered or distracted. They also claim that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) is associated with straightness and remoteness from aberration and going astray. According to Al-Samarā'ī (2003), Al-Dūrī (2005) and Dawūd (2008), الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) is used only in its singular form in the Holy Qur'an due to the fact that there is only one road of truth which is Islam. However, the lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) is used in both forms (i.e. singular and plural) and does not have the same semantic constituents of الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road). Moreover, Al-Samarā'ī (2003) adds that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (the road) is also wider than السبيل *al-sabīl* (path). Consequently, it can be concluded that الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) has a positive meaning and is associated with God's guidance, straightness, remoteness from aberration and going astray. It is an easy, wide, clear, safe, straight, fast and paved road. However, السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) is a small track off the road. It has either a positive or negative meaning.

THE TRANSLATIONS OF الصراط *AL-ṢIRĀṬ* (ROAD) AND السبيل *AL-SABĪL* (PATH)

As noticed in the previous section, the Qur'anic lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road) has a positive meaning; it is a straight, safe, easy, clear, wide and paved road. It is associated with God's guidance. This Qur'anic lexical item, الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road), is used singular in the Holy Qur'an to convey a Qur'anic message that there is only one road of truth which is Islam. While translating this Qur'anic word, it is noticed that both translators rendered this Qur'anic lexical item differently as "path" by Arberry (2003) and "road" by Irving (2002). Therefore, it is of vital significance to provide the distinction between these English lexical items (i.e. path and road) and to identify the lexical item which well reflects the meaning of the Qur'anic lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (road). To do this, the researchers consulted many English books as well as dictionaries (e.g. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007; Falck 2012; Merriam Webster Dictionary Online, Thesaurus Dictionary Online & the Oxford English Dictionary 1989) and came up with the following distinctions:

1. Paths are seen as "less efficient means of transportation than roads. Both paths and roads are long and clear but paths are earthen while roads are wide, straight, fast, and paved" (Falck 2012: 346).

2. Path is “a way formed by or as if by repeated footsteps whereas road is an open way for vehicles, persons, and animals” (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online).
3. Road is “a specially prepared hard surface for cars, buses, bicycles etc to travel on while path is a track that has been made by many people walking over the same ground” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007).
4. Path is “a way beaten, formed, or trodden by the feet of persons or animals or a narrow walk or way. However, road is a long stretch with a smoothed or paved surface between two or more points” (Thesaurus Dictionary Online).
5. Road is an ordinary line of communication used by persons passing between different places, usually one wide enough to admit of the passage of vehicle as well as of horses or travelers on foot. However, path is a way beaten or trodden by the feet of men or beasts, a track formed incidentally by the passage between places, rather than expressly planned and constructed to accommodate traffic or a footway or footpath, as opposed to a road (The Oxford English Dictionary 1989)

It is shown that the “road” is wide, straight, fast, open, and paved while path is narrow and unpaved. Based on the contextual analysis of the two verses where the Qur’ānic lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* “the road” is used, it is shown that the rendering of this lexical item as “the road” by Irving (2002) is more appropriate as it reflects the denotative and connotative meanings of the Qur’ānic lexical item.

Besides, it is shown that the Qur’ānic lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) is a small track off a road and might have a positive or negative meaning as illustrated in the analysis of the second and second verse. The plural form of this lexical item السبل *al-subul* (paths) which is used in the second verse has a negative associative meaning as it is used to denote the paths which scatter people from الصراط المستقيم *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight road). More importantly, it is used in the same verse to denote the path of Allah فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ (lest they scatter you from His path) and that means it might also have a positive meaning. The Qur’ānic lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) is translated as “path” by both translators. However, Arberry (2003) succeeded in reflecting the negative associative meaning of the Qur’ānic word السبل *al-subul* (paths) in the second verse by adding the adjective (diverse) in front of the

lexical item “paths”. This adjective means different in character or quality, not of the same kind (Oxford English Dictionary 1989) or very different from each other (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007) and thus reflects the negative meaning of السبل *al-subul* which scatter and mislead people. Therefore, the rendering of السبل *al-subul* in this verse as (diverse paths) by Arberry (2003) is more appropriate than that of Irving (2002).

So far, this section has discussed the translations of the selected Qur’anic near-synonyms by Irving (2002) and Arberry (2003). However, the other current translations which are examined to see if these Qur’anic near-synonyms are translated properly have not been discussed yet. In fact, the researchers conducted an investigation into more recent translations of the selected Qur’anic near-synonyms and found that the semantic differences between these Qur’anic near-synonyms also posed a challenge to three translators, namely, Maulawi (2004), Ali (2006) and Malik (2007). It is noticed that Malik (2007) dealt with these Qur’anic near-synonyms as absolute synonyms and translated them as “way” and thus the semantic differences between them are not reflected in his translation. It is also seen that Maulawi (2004) made an attempt to make a distinction between these two Qur’anic near-synonyms by translating the lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* as “path”. However, translating the lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* as “path” is not congruent with the original meaning of this lexical item in that the lexical item “path” is considered a less efficient means of transportation than road; path is earthen and is not paved (Falck, 2012). Unlike Maulawi (2004), Ali (2006) provides the opposite translation by rendering the lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* as “way” and السبيل *al-sabīl* as “path”. It is revealed that the semantic differences between the Qur’anic pair السبيل *al-sabīl* (path/way) and الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* (the road) are not reflected in the three translations as well.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study reveal that the selected near-synonyms are purposefully employed in the Holy Qur’ān to convey a certain meaning and more importantly both near-synonyms cannot be interchangeably used in all Qur’anic contexts. The data analysis also shows that there are differences in denotative and connotative meanings between the selected Qur’anic near-synonyms. However, these

differences in meaning are not reflected in some of the English translation such as Arberry (2003), Maulawi (2004), Ali (2006) and Malik (2007). It is also revealed that the lexical item السبيل *al-sabīl* (path) is used with positive and negative connotations. However, such semantic differences are not reflected in Irving's translation. Therefore, the current study highly recommends that the translators of the Holy Qur'an should look for the semantic differences between the Qur'anic near-synonyms whenever they encounter lexical items with similar meanings and make sure that such semantic differences are reflected in their translations. It is also noticed that the Qur'anic context where the Qur'anic near-synonyms are used plays an important role in making the meanings of the Qur'anic near-synonyms clear to the reader as well as to the translator. Consequently, the present study emphasizes the importance of conducting a contextual analysis of the Qur'anic verses that the translators intend to translate in that this analysis could be useful in clarifying the differences in meaning between the Qur'anic near-synonyms. Whenever the readers or translators of the Holy Qur'an encounter near-synonyms with similar meanings, they should consult as many prominent exegeses of the Holy Qur'an as possible because they help in understanding the semantic differences between the Qur'anic near-synonyms. Besides, it is noticed that although the exegetes as well as scholars emphasized the positive meaning of the lexical item الصراط *al-ṣirāṭ* "the road", it is found that there are a few exceptions where this lexical item has a negative or neutral meaning. Therefore, future exegeses should highlight the exceptions of this kind whenever the meanings of the Qur'anic lexical items are explained. Finally, literature reveals that few studies have investigated the Qur'anic near-synonyms and their English translation. Consequently, there is a need to further investigate the Qur'anic near-synonyms and specifically their English translations due to the importance of the Holy Qur'an to all Muslims all over the world.

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