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TRANSLATIONS OF NEAR-SYNONYMS IN THE QUR’AN,
A CONTEXT-BASED ANALYSIS

MA Dissertation
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Word count: 11806 words excluding diagrams and endnotes.
And recite (and teach) what has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord: None can change His Words, and none wilt thou find as a refuge other than Him. (18.27)
Declaration

I undertake that all material presented by me for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person(s). I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Antar Solhy Abdellah
Abstract

In this study, the concept of synonymity is discussed and ‘near-synonyms’ is proposed to be the term that is more appropriate for linguistic analysis in natural languages. Differences in meaning or usage among pairs of near-synonyms are claimed to be context-dependent, hence an analysis of the concept of ‘context’ is carried out, and a model of translation analysis based on the context is proposed. In this model, context of the original, linguistic- cultural- emotional, should be thoroughly analysed and carefully regarded in the process of translating whereby there should be a parallel linguistic context, a suitable cultural background, and an equivalent emotional context. This model is then applied on 5 translations of the near-synonyms ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ in the Qur’an.
Acknowledgements

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Heavens and the Earths, for enabling me to shed some light on the message of the Qur’an and its translation. I pray to Him to accept this work and benefit me with it in this life and in the Hereafter.

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Finally I thank the MBI trust at SOAS, for funding me throughout my MA course.
To the Memory of my mother.
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INTRODUCTION

Synonymy is a linguistic term that refers to lexical expressions that share the same or similar meanings. It falls into the domain of Semantic study. Linguists do not agree on a certain identification of the degree of similarity that should exist between two lexical items to be considered synonymous of each other. Linguists who believe in the existence of synonymy state that one word can sometimes be freely substituted for another which has the same meaning. (Schneidemesser 1980, Thrane 1986, Brodda and Karlgren 1969, and Suarez 1971). A pair of words in this view can also be exchanged for each other in certain contexts and with some limitations. However, the advocates of the existence of synonymy believe that the existence of absolute synonymy is very rare and can take place, in most cases, in two different dialects referring to the same object (Suarez 1971 and Schneidemesser 1980). On the other hand other linguists deny the very existence of this resemblance and claim that no two words are identical in all types of meaning: propositional, elocutionary, or evocative (Bolinger and Clark 1977, Bloomfield 1933, Quine 1953, among others).

In the Arabic language in particular and for long ages there has been- and still is- a big controversy concerning whether Arabic has got words that have identical meanings. Arab linguists fall in two opposing stands regarding synonymy : those who defend the existence of synonymy and justifies its existence with the richness of the bases in the language, the different dialects used to refer to the same object, or to historical developments where obsolete words were replaced by new words that have the same meaning . The other group of linguists represents those who defend the non-existence of synonymy, and rather claim the existence of differences ‘Fouraq’. The term differences in this respect refers to the different uses of seemingly similar words. In this view words can not be identical, and the context is the only criterion for selecting words according to different mode, tenor or tone of discourse.

In the Qur’an the case becomes even more complicated; since the Qur’an represents for Arabs the source book of sound standard Arabic. Claiming the existence of synonymy among different lexical items would mean that different people understand the text differently according to the senses and the connotations aroused in the mind based on the
free substitution of similar other words (synonyms). This is one of the main reasons that made the differences advocates defend fiercely their stand in order to protect the holy book from misinterpretations based on such substitutions. Nevertheless, recently Omar 2001 proposed the existence of perfect synonymy in the Qu’ran, and explained that the similarities emerge from the fact that each pair of lexical items is either derived from the same stem, or that each word was used by different tribes in the Arab peninsula though they refer exactly to the same object. One way of solving the problem of approaching the holy book as a linguistic text, is what Bint Al-shati’ 1987 and Omar 2001 claim to be near-synonyms; words that seem to share some, but not all, the shades of meaning implied by two different lexical items. ‘Near Synonyms’ seems to be the term favoured by most Arab and non-Arab linguists. Taylor (2003) explains that perfect synonymy is “vanishingly rare…a logical impossibility, what we frequently do encounter are pairs of words that are ‘near’ synonyms.” (2003:5).

The question of whether or not the Qur’an uses synonymy is not the domain of this research, though it is a very important part of the arguments that led to both different interpretations and different translations of the holy text. The problem of this study is mainly how different translators dealt with Qur’anic words that seem to represent a case of synonymy. The present study investigates the strategies used by different Qur’an translators in translating these words, and whether they regard the context where different words occur or just adopt one translation of a word, as well as its synonymous, wherever one occurs regardless of the context.

**THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY:**
The main problem of the research can be stated in the following question:

- How far do translators regard the context in their translation of selected near-synonyms in the Qur’an?

From this main question, the following questions branch:

1- What is synonymy, and what is near-synonymy?
2- Is there synonymy in the Qur’an?
3- What is context?
4- What are Models of Context?
5- What is the most appropriate model for analyzing Qur’an translations?
6- What are the most appropriate translations of the selected near-synonyms in the Qur’an according to this model?

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:
The present study is limited to the following aspects:
Aim: determining the appropriacy of some translations of near synonyms in the Qur’an based on a proposed context-analysis model.

Lexical items: The near-synonymous words selected for analysis in the present study are: ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṯar’

Qur’an translations: the study will refer to the following authorized Qur’an translation for analysis:
1- The Koran Interpreted, by Arberry. A. J (1964)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:
In this study, I examine a number of English translations to selected near synonyms in the Qur’an. I believe this can provide insights into the message of the Qur’an as a text, which is the most important aspect in any linguistic or non-linguistic text. It is hoped that this study will also provide an illustration to translators that different aspects of contextual study require careful consideration.

PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY:
- Reviewing related literature
- Evaluating different models of contextual analysis, and developing a context-based model for translating near-synonyms.
- Applying the model on the translations of near-synonyms in the Qur’an.
- Discussing results and suggesting further research.

METHODOLOGY
In analysing the Qur’an verses I will follow the following procedures:

1- Presenting the verse where one of the near-synonyms occurs (ghayth or maṭar) in Arabic, with these words underline.

2- Transliterating the verse into English using the transliteration scheme presented in the appendix page 53.

3- Translating the verse into English except for the words (ghayth or maṭar) which will be kept untranslated.

4- Analysing the linguistic, cultural and emotional contexts of this pair of near-synonyms in Arabic,

5- Presenting different translations of the same verses focussing on how the words (ghayth or maṭar) are translated

6- Evaluating the appropriacy of these translations according to the model of contextual analysis.

**STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY:**
- Introduction, and aim of work

Chapter one: *Synonymy in Linguistics.*
This chapter examines the definitions of synonyms and near-synonyms in linguistics, the different stands towards this linguistic phenomenon, the importance and uses of synonyms, and reviews studies that either reject or advocate the existence of near synonyms in natural languages. The chapter also reviews ancient as well as modern Arab linguists’ views concerning the existence of (near) synonymy in the Qur’an. This chapter will provide answers to questions one and two of the questions of the study.

Chapter Two: *Context and Translation*
This chapter investigates the concept of ‘context’ and reviews different models for explaining the nature of discourse in context. It also studies the relevance of context models to translation theory and translation strategies. An assessment of these models is also presented and a context-based model is proposed for Qur’an translation analysis. This chapter provides answers to questions three, four and five.

Chapter three: ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’, *Context and translations*.
This chapter examines the contexts where the words ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ have been mentioned in the Qur’an, and applies the proposed model of Context-analysis on the different translations of these two words. Finally, results are reported showing which is the most suitable translation of these near-synonyms.
CHAPTER ONE

SYNONYMS IN LINGUISTICS
CHAPTER ONE
SYNONYMS IN LINGUISTICS

In the beginnings of the twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure published his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) and indicated that the study of meaning was formulated in the shape of a *signe* which is a combination of a *signifiant* (form, sound or pattern) and a *signifié* (meaning or concept) with the relation between signifiant and signifié as arbitrary and based on conventions. In an ideal semantic system, a finite number of signifiers will be paired off, one to one, with an equal number of signified. The ideal is captured by the slogan ‘one form- one meaning’ (Taylor 2003:2). Natural languages, however, do not conform to this ideal. Two main linguistic phenomena deviate from this model; namely polysemy and synonymy. In polysemy, a single phonological form is associated with two or more distinct semantic values. In synonymy, a single meaning is symbolized by two or more distinct phonological forms.

**Definition of synonymy and dispute over ‘sameness’:**

Taylor (2003) finds synonymy a ‘very puzzling phenomenon’ and no less problematic than polysemy, although synonymy has received relatively little attention from linguists. Harris (1973) defines synonymy as ‘sameness of meaning of different expressions’. A broader understanding of synonymy manifests the sameness involved into sameness of use in addition to the sameness of meaning. Lyons (1986:427) beholds the context in his definition of synonymy; “two elements cannot be absolutely synonymous in one context unless they are synonymous in all contexts”.

It is commonly asserted that ‘perfect’ or ‘full’ synonyms, i.e. words that share exactly the same meaning do not exist, or if they do, they are exceedingly rare. Lyons confesses that “it is undoubtedly true that there are very few (absolute) synonyms in language” (1986:448). For some linguists, the absence of perfect synonyms is a methodological assumption rather than a matter of empirical fact. Bolinger (1977:1) asserts that “if two ways of saying the same thing differ in their words or their arrangement they will also differ in meaning”. In a similar vein, Clark proposes the ‘Principle of contrast’ according to which “every two forms contrast in meaning” (1992:7). Bloomfield earlier rejected the
notion of sameness in meaning in his fundamental assumption that “each linguistic form has a constant and specific meaning. If the forms are different, that their meanings are also different, hence, there are no actual synonyms” (1933:144). Quine (1990) has even argued that perfect synonymy is a logical impossibility. According to Quine, to be able to say that two words ‘have the same meaning’ presupposes that we are able to contemplate meanings independently of the words used to represent those meanings. Since meanings do not come isolated from the means of their linguistic expression, to identify synonymy in terms of sameness of meaning is “irredeemably circular”. He excludes even the sameness in use as a possibility; “two words cannot have exactly the same use, for when we use one we are not using the other.” (1990: 131).

Differences in meaning and use:

Nida (1949) points out that close investigation of the use of expressions in a natural language will always reveal some reason for denying their synonymity. Examples are: ‘peace and tranquillity, childish and puerile, truth and reality’. Harris (1973:10) points out that a more interesting denial of synonymy would be one based on “the thesis that a natural language, unlike a constructed language, is such that the conditions for synonymity of two expressions are never fulfilled”. He summarises the ways by which we may differentiate between meanings of any two expressions by listing Collinson’s nine possible differentiae:

1) One term is more general and inclusive in its applicability; another is more specific and exclusive, e.g. refuse/reject, seaman/sailor, ending/inflexion.
2) One term is more intense than another, e.g. repudiate/refuse.
3) One term is more highly charged with emotion than another, e.g. looming/emerging, louring/threatening.
4) One term may imply moral approbation or censure where another is neutral, e.g. thrifty/economical, eavesdrop/listen.
5) One term is more professional than another, e.g. decease/death, domicile/house.
6) One term may belong more to the written language; it is more literary than another, e.g. passing/death.
7) One term is more colloquial than another, e.g. turn down/refuse.
8) One term is more local or dialectal than another, e.g. flesher/butcher.
9) One term belongs to child-talk, is used by children or in talking to children, e.g. 
\textit{daddy, dad, papa/father}.

\textbf{Why people use synonymy:}

If there are such differences between any two seemingly similar expressions, why is it the case that written, especially literary, texts and people in everyday life communication use different words to mean the same thing? Ullmann (1962:153) points out some of the reasons behind the uses of synonymy;

1) People like to hear good words in succession and it causes a flow of synonyms.
2) Poets use synonyms motivated by the exigencies of metre.
3) A collocation of synonyms could produce a contrast effect either serious or humorous.
4) Synonymy is used to correct one’s use of words when one wishes to replace a word by a more appropriate one.
5) When a poet tries to formulate his thoughts and ideas he may put in his text all the various synonyms that come to his mind.

From this list, we can conclude that the use of synonymy is generally for stylistic purposes rather than for a real need for the use of different words to refer to the same object. Only number four in Ullmann’s list can represent a level of real need for the use of synonymy other than a stylistic one.

\textbf{Studies FOR synonymy:}

Sturtevant (1954) discusses a case of synonymy in Old Norse and concludes that synonyms are found in Old Norse because of the historical developments that happened to the language. He shows how one word ‘\textit{tungl}’ acquired a specific sense of ‘moon’ at a comparatively late period, while another ‘\textit{ambott}’ was a loan word.

Brodda and Kargren (1969) emphasise the existence and the ultimate need for synonymy in natural languages as well as in computer languages. They explain that people tend to use synonyms in their search for information; if the encyclopaedia says nothing about ‘Sweden’ one tries with ‘Scandinavia’, if nothing about ‘syntax’, one tries ‘grammar’. A
synonymy-based retrieval system is thus a vital need for reacting to people’s needs. In their arguments, they provide a new definition for synonymy as follows: “two expressions may be considered to have the same meaning in a given context if a reader is likely to react to both in the same way”. Hence, the concept of sameness is broader than just sameness of meaning or use.

Suarez (1971) presents a case of absolute synonymy in the Tehuelche language, spoken in the Province of Santa Cruz, Argentina. He presents the following evidences for his claim: a) the informants insisted that the words meant the same thing, b) there was complete agreement between informants as to the words that have the same meaning, c) the words refer to very concrete things, not emotions or adjectives, d) the same informant telling a traditional story in different occasions, uses one or another of a pair of synonyms. He concludes that empirically or theoretically, there can be no evidence against the existence of absolute synonymy.

Schneidemesser (1980) discusses the various words used for carrying money in American English; *Purse, billfold, wallet, pocketbook, handbag*’ and shows that these words are synonymous because of the different dialects and the different regions where each word is commonly used.

Thrane (1986) investigates synonymy in Old English and states three semantic conditions of synonymity as follows: two expressions are variations of one another iff: a) they have the same referent, b) the heads in the expressions are members of the same lexical category, c) they contract the same syntactic relation with the same verb phrase in the same context. He then applies these conditions on the adjectives of moral sufficiency in the Old English *Andreas*.

**Studies FOR synonymy in Arabic:**

Of the ancient Arab linguists, the following are advocates of the occurrence of synonymy in the Arabic language:


Al-shayya{i (1993) lists the points they share in common. He explains that according to them, the occurrence of synonymy is due to

1- the richness of the bases in Arabic, and the various patterns used to derive different linguistic categories from the same stem,
2- the fact that some adjectives became so wide-spread that they are treated as nouns and synonymous of original other nouns, e.g. sayf and hussam (sword).
3- The differences among the dialects of the Arabs, e.g. sekkin and Mudya (knife)
4- Loan words that entered the Arabic language, e.g. An-narjes and Al-ahbar (daffodils)
5- Majaz ; or the metaphorical uses of words, e.g lugh and lisan (language and tongue)
6- Differences in the pronunciation according to different dialects, e.g. zara{a and raza{a (to plant or drop)

Saleh (1968) explains that in modern standard Arabic the differences between pairs of words should not be traced back to their original use as they are now part and parcel of the modern language. Anis (1965) points out that each dialect of Arabic does not have absolute synonymy, but the standard level of the language that refers to all these dialects should have synonymy, and as the Qur’an is a unique and supreme literary text, synonymy is apt to occur frequently. This is aided also by Omar’s recent study (2001) in which he gives examples of absolute synonymy in the language of the Qur’an e.g. ‘âthara and Fa<ala (to favour).

Studies AGAINST Synonymy:
Ziff (1966) on the other hand discusses the nonsynonymy of Active and Passive sentences, and explains that it is a common misconception to think of Active and Passive sentences as synonymous. He presents some examples like the following:
- His wife likes no one.
- No one is liked by his wife.

and explains that the difference arises from identifying the lady in the sentence and whether it is a certain lady or each one’s own wife. He concludes that there is no such thing called synonymy between Active and Passive. Katz and Martin (1967), however, show that the arguments laid out by Ziff (1966) are grounded on syntactic interpretation of the sentences, and explain that rejecting synonymy based on syntactic interpretations is wrong. So the sentences under discussion may not be pairs of synonymy simply because there is no semantic relation between them.

Bushke (1969) conducted a psycholinguistic study on 17 college students for encoding homophones and synonyms for verbal discrimination and recognition, and found out that information about words semantic or phonetic attributes may be encoded selectively. He concludes that these findings are consistent with the view that words may be treated as complexes of differential features.

De Jonge (1993) discusses the existence of synonyms in language and whether they represent two forms and two meanings or two forms and one meaning. He points out that “in theory synonymy is undesirable” and attempts to show that functional differences in meaning can distinguish two apparently synonymous verbs in Modern Italian. In his study, De Jonge refers to Breal’s principle of economy, which is explained as follows;

“People can produce infinite set of sentences with a finite set of elements. This shows that they abstract from reality in order to reduce it to a finite set. Otherwise, each thing and every situation would need a new expression, and language would then require an infinite number of units. From this point of view, it is illogical and even undesirable to suppose that synonymy could exist, since this existence would imply an unnecessary and uneconomical expansion of the set of units.”(1993:523). De Jonge builds on this result his call for the search for Differences among seemingly similar expressions. He states “from this point of view, we have to suppose that if the speaker of a language provides us with two forms that are alike in meaning, both forms are the result of independent human strategies and we have no other alternative than to take seriously these two linguistic
forms, however similar they may appear to be, and to try to find the ‘raison d’etre’ for both- namely, their difference in meaning.” (p. 523).

Atkins and Levin (1995) have a lexicographical look at some near-synonyms, and explain that “even slight shades of meaning may affect syntactic behaviour” (1995: 96). They discuss the case of the *Shake* verbs in English, and conclude that these verbs show real differences in syntactic behaviour. They believe that tracing the differences between near synonyms is very important to the work of lexicographers in their corpus analysis and to a database that needs to make that kind of distinctions to account for apparently random variations in usage.

Vasudevan (1996) discusses the stylistic value of synonyms, but shows that there is no absolute synonymy in language; he rather supports the view of differences in the meaning or use of pairs of expressions. He also explains that poets’ choice of synonyms depends on the context.

From a syntactic point of view, Hudson et al (1996) show that synonymy is an impossible conception. They present various examples as evidences for this claim, like the following:

- He is able/*capable to work hard.
- He is capable /*able of hard work / working hard.

They conclude that we are capable of learning purely syntactic facts unaided by semantics. Taylor (2003) differentiates between synonyms and Near-synonyms and explains that absolute synonyms are very rare, and applies Vantage’s Theory of co-existence to account for the near-synonymy of the English adjectives ‘tall’ and ‘high’.

**Studies AGAINST Synonymy in Arabic:**


Al-shayan (1993) explains that their evidences are the following:
1) If two words refer exactly to the same object, then logically one of them would die out.

2) Language communication opts for economy in sending and perceiving messages, and the occurrence of synonymy will violate this aspect of language.

3) The memory storage of one word for one object is less in space and easier in processing than two.

4) Most of the well-known synonyms are in fact adjectives rather than real original words that refer to an object.

5) The use of the connective and (wa in Arabic) means that two different things are connected rather than one.

Al-{awwa (1998) traces the study of synonyms and differences in the Qur’an and explains that even if there is synonymy in the Arabic language, the language of the Qur’an in particular should be treated differently. She discusses three terms in the Qur’an that seem to be synonyms and explains the difference in meaning and use according to the context of the verses in which the words were mentioned: ath-thann, ar-rajaa’, and al-khawf (Doubt, hope with fear, and Fear).

Bint Al-Shati’ (1987) explains plainly that the Qur’an as a text is quite different. It is different in that it is not written by any one of the Arabs, but rather by God in the Arabic language. This means that each word, and even each letter, has a special role to play in the different levels of meaning or usage in a particular context. This is one reason why interpretations of the Qur’an are not treated as Qur’ans in their own, and that’s why the translators of the Qur’an state that their work is a translation of the meanings perceived by a certain translator or scholar rather than an equivalent to the holy text. Bint Al-Shati’ points out that this stand is not taken out of the feeling of protection towards the holy book, but after long exhaustive objective studies according to a very strict scientific methodology whereby she used to handle a certain topic in the Qur’an and analyses the words used in it whenever this topic is mentioned in the book. She concluded that the context is the guideline and the criterion for determining the choice of words in the Qur’an, and that replacing a word in place of another does not fulfil all the different aspects of meaning and uses as the original words do.
Near Synonyms, Half way between Synonyms and Non-synonyms:

From surveying the studies that reject synonymy and the studies that defend its existence we can make the following points:

1. Linguists who reject synonymy only reject absolute synonymy, and most of them agree to partial-synonymy (expressions that share some but not all of the shades of meaning), some of them even finds in synonymy a rich stylistic value.

2. Linguists who defend synonymy tend to have a contemporary functional look rather than a historical analytical view of the differences between synonyms.

3. The criterion for synonymity is the interchangeability in certain contexts and not in all contexts, in other words no free substitution. Another criterion is readers’ and hearers’ reaction to the use of the linguistic expression in certain contexts.

We can thus conclude that perfect or absolute synonymy is a matter of philosophical study rather than functional or linguistic, and that the phenomenon we are interested in is in fact Near-synonyms that seems to exist in natural languages and over which there is no such controversy.

Near Synonyms, in Taylor’s words, are “words which are similar in meaning, which tend not to be contrastive, but which are distributed differently” (2003:1). A characteristic of near-synonyms as opposed to words which are merely similar in meaning, is that near-synonyms exhibit “a low degree of implicit contractiveness” (Cruse 1986: 266). Taylor gives the example of warm and hot which, though similar in meaning, are not synonyms or even near-synonyms, since by asserting that something is warm one may be implicitly denying that it is hot, and vice versa. Big and large do not contrast in this way, since it would be incoherent to assert of one and the same entity that it is big but not large (or vice versa). But if the two words are not contrastive, they are far from being interchangeable in all contexts. On the contrary, there is often a clear preference for one of the terms, even to the exclusion of the other. We should say, for example, that we have prepared a ‘big surprise’ for someone, not a ‘large surprise’. On the other hand, we talk about a ‘large amount’ of money, rather than a ‘big amount’6. The different contextual preferences point to substantial differences in the meanings of the two adjectives.
The challenge now is “how to describe the meanings of near synonyms in a way that does justice to the semantic value of each of the items, and which goes some way towards explaining their different distributions, while still recognizing the low degree of contractiveness between them” (Taylor 2003: 5). Taylor reviews some semantic theories and assesses their validity in explaining near-synonyms. Saussurean structuralism does not seem to work in this respect as the value of an item is determined by the items with which it is in paradigmatic contrast. The theory of Semantic fields, in which the semantic value of a term is delimited by the semantic value of its neighbours, does not have a place for non-contrastive, or even overlapping items. Katz’s theory of Features does not have the apparatus for representing the meanings of near-synonyms. What Taylor proposes instead is an application of a non-linguistic theory that was originally introduced to account for aspects of colour categorization - the Vantage theory of Co-existence whereby two terms can co-exist and each one refers to the same thing from a different perspective.

**Conclusion:**

This chapter presents answers to question one and two of the Questions of the study that are posed in the introduction. Definitions of synonymy tend to emphasize the aspect of *sameness* in meaning, in use, in the interchangeability or even in the receivers’ reaction to the message. While linguists, including Arab linguists, do not agree on whether or not a language has absolute synonymy, there seems to be no such big dispute regarding Near Synonyms which are items that share some, but not all shades of meaning. The Qur’an as a linguistic text is thought to have examples of near-synonyms where there are preferences for using a certain item in a certain position. The context remains the most suitable criterion for determining the interchangeability and the contractiveness of any pairs of near-synonyms. In the following chapter, we investigate theories of context and contextual models of discourse analysis in order to develop an understanding into the nature of near-synonyms and the role of context in the Qur’anic choice of words.
CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT AND TRANSLATION
CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT AND TRANSLATION

While formal Semantics focuses on the study of meaning in its relation to some possible world, or rather to a model or structure, the study of Pragmatics focuses on meaning in its relation to the situation where it takes place and to the participants in the speech act. Malinowsky (1964:63) explains that the most fundamental function of speech is pragmatic- “to direct, to control, and to correlate human activities”. He points out that “no study of speech except within the ‘context of situation’ is legitimate”.

Nature and Definition of Context:

Gaining Knowledge about the world means rebuilding the world cognitively. Goodman (1979) points out that the assumption that the world does not exist in an objective sense, but is created, or brought to existence, in the process of knowing, finds direct reflection in language. For instance, whether time ‘flows like a river’ (as it does in English) or ‘grows like a tree’, ‘falls like a waterfall (as it does in Mandarin Chinese- Lee Chin in Tabakowska 1999) or ‘runs like a rocket’ (as it does in Egyptian Arabic), depends on how the ‘individual human observer’ responsible for first creating an expression- that with time became the linguistic convention- happened to see the things around him.

The meaning of a linguistic expression thus depends on how people perceive of this expression depending on a certain situation, a certain time, and certain persons who take part in the communication. Van Dijk (1977:191) views the context as “a highly idealized abstraction from a situation and contains ...those facts which systematically determine the appropriateness of conventional utterance”. From the point of view of Relevance theory, Gutt (1998:42) considers the notion of context as “a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumption about the world… it is the set of premises used in interpreting [an] utterance” Under this definition, ‘context’ is a very wide notion that can include virtually any phenomenon entertainable by the human mind. Serber and Wilson (1986:15) explain: “A context, in this sense, is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances; expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs. Anecdotal memories, general cultural
assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation”.

**Role of Context in Determining Meaning:**
In chapter one, we discussed how two words can not be identical in all aspects of meaning: for if they were, they would be one and the same object. Two objects may well be indistinguishable under particular circumstances (near synonyms), which does not justify the conclusion that they are identical. Another context may provide the means for distinguishing them. Bosch (1984: 4) gives the example of a triangle which differs in meaning (perception) according to different contexts¹. In the following diagram, the leftmost object differs depending on what other objects there are and thus on what objects the target object must be distinguished from. Each set of contrasting objects makes us focus on particular aspects or properties of the object.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Natural description for the leftmost object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>‘the triangle’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>‘the small one’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>‘the large one’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>‘the equilateral one’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>‘the white one’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>‘the black one’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is quite strange that one and the same object is perceived differently according to the surrounding items that constitute the context in which it appears. Even stranger is to describe the same thing with two opposite words as ‘white’ and ‘black’; the triangle in situation E is the same one as in situation F, only because they are in different situations that the identity of the same triangle is perceived differently.

Gutt (1998: 41) gives another example that involves human interaction in the following exchange:

- Joe: ‘Will Sarah be long?’
- Pam: ‘She is with Frank now’.

Pam does not answer Joe’s question directly, rather she informs her that Sarah is with Frank. There are two possibilities; in a case A, Frank is known to be very quick with people; he usually deals with a matter in a few minutes, in which case Sarah will not be long. In a case B, Frank is known to keep people for a long time, hence Sarah will be long. Gutt presents these cases in the following diagram:

*The colour of the right triangle is red*
Types and Properties of ‘Context’:

Van Dijk (1977:192) discusses the following points as basic characteristics of ‘context’;

1- A context has a ‘dynamic character’. It is not just one possible world-state, but at least a sequence of world states. These states (situations) do not remain identical in time, but change. Hence a context is a ‘course of events’.

2- This course of events has an initial state, intermediary states, and a final state.

3- In an infinite set of possible contexts, one will have a specific status, viz. the ‘actual context’. The actual context is defined by the period of time and the place where the common activities of speaker and hearer are realised, and which satisfy the properties of ‘here’ and ‘now’ logically, physically, and cognitively.

4- An actual context has a set of alternatives. Some of these are normal, and satisfy the basic postulates of communicative courses of events. Others are possible, imaginable, but not normal.

5- The context changes from moment to moment, this change affects objects in the successive states of context. This change also affects the relations between the possible agents and the possible patients.

Another basic characteristic of context is raised by Sperber and Wilson (1995) when discussing the role of context in Relevance theory. A context is assumed to be organised and this organisation affects the accessibility of a particular piece of contextual information on a particular occasion.

On the other hand, Langacker (1987) indicates three types of context; Syntagmatic, systemic and situational contexts. ‘syntagmatic context’ refers to the process of linear combination of linguistic units to form complex linguistic expressions. This level of context does not require that composite structures be definable or computable from their components. An example is that the form ‘ing’ in English refers to a notion of action; as in going, but this is less prominent in wedding or building. Systemic context, in contrast, establishes the position of a linguistic unit within the network of interrelations which together constitute the grammar of a language. In this respect, a linguistic unit derives its value from its relation to relevant aspects of this network. The full meaning of an expression can only arise by including relevant situational elements of the particular situation which is being described, i.e. pragmatic circumstances (physical and social
context) that condition a particular usage event. It is this ‘situational context’ that finally establishes the overall contextual meaning of an expression.

Tabakowska (1999) comments on Langacker’s theory and points out that his main interest is in the process of conceptualisation, which results in his focussing on the perspective of the speaker. Conversely, Speber and Wilson (1986) construe their theory from the perspective of the hearer; they focus on the comprehension of the verbal message, which means viewing language mainly as being grounded in social interaction.

Models of Context in Pragmatics:
Since the context of speech, or the co-text of a text, constitutes the variable meaning of a message- whether verbal or non verbal, it seems that the study of Pragmatics is the core of the study of ‘context’. Pragmatics studies ‘speech in context’ from the perspective of ‘the where, the when and the who’ that constitute the basic elements in a communication. Modelling Pragmatics then will focus on speech Acts as the process that embodies human linguistic exchange. We believe that Speech Acts in this sense is inter-dependable on the context in which it occurs. In the following, we review various models of context, and comment briefly on them.

1. Bloomfield’s Behavioural Model:
Bloomfield was concerned with the description of overt observable linguistic form. He was aware at the same time of the need to place linguistic form in the broader context of practical human events. Bloomfield’s model is based on a stimulus- Response formula where “one person makes a reaction (R) when another person has the stimulus (S).” (Bloomfield: 1933:24).

```
S   -----------------------------------------> R
```

2- Firth’s Situational Model:
Firth’s model (in Gregerson1980) focuses on the situation which works as the sphere that encompasses the speech, and the participants.
3- *Austin’s Speech Act Model*:

Austin’s (1962) Model focuses on the acts accomplished by a speaker when uttering words simultaneously. He analyses a speech act into three main components: *locutionary*, which refers to the propositional meaning, *illocutionary*, which refers to the intended meaning, and *perlocutionary*, which refers to the side effects of the utterance whether intended or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locutionary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression, propositional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4- *Hymes’ Mnemonic Model*:

Hymes focuses on the components of Speech Acts and lists them as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Scene</em> Time and place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological setting (formal/informal; festive/ serious)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td><em>Participants</em> Speaker/ sender; addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>addressor; hearer /receiver/audience;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td><em>Ends (purposes)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes and Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><em>Act sequence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Message form and content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td><em>Key</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>’Tone, manner, or spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td><em>Instrumentalities</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Channels (oral, written, etc) and forms (language, dialect,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>register, etc) as the means of speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td><em>Norms of interaction</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rule-governed properties of speaking (no interrupting,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Genres

Poems, myths, lectures, riddle, etc.

5- Verschueren Model of Relations:

Verschueren (1977) isolates the basic factors in context and claims that the speech act enters into four relations;

1. The relation with language (L): that is; the speech act (SA) imposes certain requirements on the linguistic structures which manifest it.

2. the relation with the world (W): SA’s reflect their cultural setting. This includes Grice’s speech maxims: ‘Be as informative as required’; ‘say only what you believe true’; ‘be relevant’; ‘don’t be obscure, but do be succinct’.

3. the relation with the speaker (S): SA’s reflect their attitude or psychological state of the speaker.

4. the relation with the hearer (H); this relation involves the effect upon the hearer as intended by the speaker (represented by the arrow).

6- Ross’s Model of Deep Structures:

Ross (1970) suggested that all declarative sentences could be derived from a syntactic deep structure representation of the following type:
Speech acts are viewed from a syntactic perspective with speakers and addresses modeled in terms of NP’s and V’s modified by some sort of abstract diacritic features.

7- Fleming’s communicational Model:
Fleming (in Gregerson1980) presents a stratification network scheme for the communication process, as follows:

8- Gregerson’s Model of Communication Acts:
Gregerson’s (1980:9) model is represented in the shape of a tree where as he explains “it is intended to express the fundamental idea that communication involves a communicative source (CS) which determines (DET) in some sense the internal state of a communicative
goal (CG). However, each of these, (CS) and (CG), is internally complex. First with reference to the (CS) the tree exhibits a three way conjunction of a volitional (VOL) function, a presuppositional (PRESP) function, and an attitudinal (ATT) one. This cluster as a group determines (DET) a predicational (PRED) function and a referential (REF) one, which in turn determines (DET) or affects overt forms via an expressional (EXPR) component. The (CS) determines the internal processes in the (CG), which is itself also complex. The (CG) too possesses the same three conjoined functions (VOL), (PRESP) and (ATT), which determine (DET) two further components.”

Concluding Remarks on Context Models:
Through surveying these models of context, we notice that some of them focus on the nature of the message and the psychological processes involved in communication (Fleming, Gregerson) while others focus on the interrelationships between the speech act and the participants in the communication model (Firth, Verschueren), others emphasize the different aspects of meaning a message may have, including its underlying meaning (Austin, Ross) and finally some consider the type of response expected in a certain situation (Bloomfield, Hymes). While Bloomfield’s Model focuses on the exchange between participants, it is clear that he does not take into account other factors like the time, place or setting of the exchange. Firth’s model does not show the type of interaction
between the participants, the time, the place, nor the purpose of interaction, which are all important factors in understanding the message. One merit of Austin’s model is explaining the different modes of meaning a linguistic expression might have in one and the same context. However, the model does not represent the hearer’s response or the channels used in conveying the message. Ross’s model fails to represent the interrelationships between speaker and hearer and the nature of the message convey. However it can represent, as Ross calls it, the deep structure underlying all communication, before any course of derivations.

From a pragmatic point of view, we believe that Hymes’s model is the most comprehensive one, as it deals with various aspects of the situation where a speech act or a message may be conveyed. Hymes’ model pays equal attention to the type of message delivered as well as the norms that govern the expected response or even the manner of producing the message. However, Hymes’s model focuses mainly on the nature of the speech act in one language, and does not address problems that arise when transferring this speech act, or text, into another language through translation. In the remainder of this chapter, we investigate the role of ‘Context’ in translation, and review some context-based models of translation.

**Role of context in translation:**

We have already seen examples where meaning can change depending on the context in the same language. By translating a text for a target audience with cultural background different from that envisioned by the original writer, the translator is, in effect “quoting the original writer out of context” (Gutt, 1998: 49). Gutt considers all instances where a text is presented to an audience with a context different from the one originally envisaged, as “secondary communication situations”.

Referring to the importance of cultural context in translation, Ali (1991:33) works out a new definition for translation; “the process of translating is better defined as a reproduction in the TL of a message contained in a SL.” He views the process of translating as a mental process where a translator “analyses the structures of the SL into kernel elements or features before he can dissect the intended meaning of the linguistic
expression”. It may be helpful for the translator to realize that not all the problems he encounters in translating a text are problems peculiar to translation. Gutt (1998:50) explains that “any text transferred from its original context to a different one is likely to be affected in its meaning by that change, even when there is no change of language.”

Darwish (1999) illustrates a view of the translator’s mind as follows:

![Diagram of Source Language and Target Language](image)

He emphasizes that “The travel path is not always in one direction. It is in fact bidirectional even when translation occurs in one direction. The action-reflex mechanism works like a pendulum shifting back and forth from one language set to the other, with the translator constantly referring back to the source text.” Another important factor in this view of mind is the role played by culture which represents the framework for the context of communication.

When dealing with a problem caused by contextual differences, the translator should ask himself whether he could, or even should, address this problem by amending the translated text, or whether other means need to be sought (like using a footnote, or writing an introduction to the text, etc). This is especially true when the ‘differences in context are extensive and would require major reworking of the text’ (Gutt 1999). That’s why Nida and Taber (1969) find it important for the translator to recognize the three main
functions of language; “informative, expressive, and imperative”. Consequently an adequate translation- like all adequate communication- “must not only provide information which people can understand but must present the message in such a way that people can feel its relevance (the expressive element in communication) and can then respond to it in action (the imperative function).” (1969: 27) They perceive the translation process as an interaction model encompassing the interaction of the original sender and receiver as well as the new sender (the translator) and the new audience, as represented in the following diagram:

Nida and Taber view the translation process as a model where an original speaker, source (S) conveys a message (M1) to his original audience, receptors (R1). A translator to perform his function must first become a displaced receptor (R) and then in turn a source (S), producing, often in a totally distinct historical-cultural context, a message (M2) to be conveyed to new receptors (R2). Their model does not only show the place of original writers, and original audience in addition to the translator and the new audience, it also shows the place of the translator-critic (R’, S’). This critic has traditionally concentrated in his judgments only on the adequacy of the match between M1 and M2 with regard to form and meaning (the dotted arrow). What Nida and Taber advocate is that the reaction of the receptor R1 and R2 be the focus of critical attention in seeking dynamic equivalence in translation (dashed arrows).

One advantage of this model is that it takes into consideration the original context of the text and compares it with the context of the target language. The appropriacy of the translation hence would be determined based on the effect the target text has on the new audience. Gutt (2000: 391) quotes Mounin who presents this notion in a rigid way when commenting on translating a successful play: “prior to faithfulness to the wording, to grammar, to syntax, and even to the style of each individual sentence in the text, must be
faithfulness to that which made this piece a success in its original country. One has to translate its effectiveness on stage first before giving consideration to the reproduction of its literary or poetic qualities.” When translating religious texts, the Qur’an or the Bible for example, this principle of relevance will have to be modified; since the relevance here will not be only in the effects aroused in the target audience, but more over in the exact meaning of the original and how it developed. It all depends on the needs of the audience, and with a religious audience in mind, a translator has to work out the different aspects of the original context and try to translate the context and amend the target text accordingly. Nida (1986: 38) states “there are certain important religious symbols which though often obscure in their meaning, are necessarily important for the preservation of the integrity and unity of the biblical message”. Beekman and Callow (1974) support this stand by referring to the ‘principle of historical fidelity’ where the preservation of historical details is seen so highly relevant that it “overweighs the additional processing effort required” (Gutt, 2000: 388).

A proposed Model for Qur’an translation:

Although Nida’s model of the translation process is an interactive one that encompasses both the context of the original message and the message after translation, we believe it is still inadequate for religious translation where the ‘historical as well as cultural fidelity’ comes before the effect of the message on different audiences. Translating the word of God, The Qur’an, needs more attention to the linguistic, historical and cultural contexts more than any piece of literature. For this reason we propose the following model which we believe well represents the process of adequate and appropriate translation of Near-Synonyms in the Qur’an:
What we propose in this model is that the original message should be understood with respect to three types of context:

1- Linguistic: the vocabulary, the structure and the morphology of Near synonyms
2- Cultural: the situation, the metaphorical devices used and the overall meaning of the verse in which the Near Synonym occurs, and
3- Emotional: the evocative meanings aroused in the mind and soul of the audience, and the communication end of the verse.

These three levels of context are not isolated; they are interrelated and sometimes overlapping. They are also in circular interaction where they lead naturally to each other and together form the message.

In the other hand, the translated form should also have three types of context:

1- Parallel Linguistic: the choice of lexes and structure in the target language,
2- Cultural background: by giving footnotes, or introduction to a group of verse that have a certain topic, or by the choice of cohesive and coherent devices that keep the effect of the original,
3- Equivalent emotional: as reflected in the choice of words, and the order of presentation.
Conclusion:
In this chapter, we reviewed the nature of context in language interaction and the models of communication in context. This chapter answers questions three, four and five of the questions of the study. A definition of context can thus refer to ‘the setting of the interaction, the participants involved, the type of relations between them, the culture background, the message conveyed, the means of conveying it, and the instruments of receiving it’. Translation as a communication act is affected by the context, and any change in context will consequently cause a change in the original message, that’s why all translations, and reported messages are considered ‘secondary communication acts’. Finally we proposed a model for translating Near Synonyms in the Qur’an bearing in mind, the three types of context- linguistic, cultural and emotional. In the next chapter, we will apply this model on the words ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ in the Qur’an and their translations.
CHAPTER THREE

GHAYTH AND MAṬAR, CONTEXT AND TRANSLATIONS
CHAPTER THREE
GHAYTH AND MAṬAR, CONTEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

In this chapter, we apply the proposed context-translation model on the distribution and translation of the Near-Synonyms ‘ghayth and Maṭar’ (الغيث و المطر). The main purpose of this analysis is to decide on which translation, and which translation strategy, is the most appropriate in conveying the meanings of this pair of Near-Synonyms.

3.1 Context of the Original:
3.1.1 ghayth:
The word غيث is derived from the stem ΙϮϏ. The stem has the meanings of help at times of distress, saving, rescue, and sending mercy on people. The word غيث was mentioned in the Qur’an five times; three of them as a noun غيث and two as a verb ϨΙŶϏ and ϥϮΜϴϕΘδΗ. The following are the verse where the expression is used beginning with the verbs;

Idh tatḥagithSnā rabakum fas-staj-ba8 (الإنفال: 9:8) lakum. (Remember when you asked for ‘ghawth’ from your Lord, and He responded to you)
thumma ya’ti min (12: 49) ba{di dhaliqa {~mun fiyhi yugh-thu an-n-su wa fiyhi ya{#r$nā. (After that there will come a year when people will be ‘yughahthun’ and when they will press wine).

‘inna Allaha (indahu {ilmu9 (القصور: 34:31) ass~{ati wa yunazilu al-ghayth. (Truly Allah has the knowledge of the Hour and it is he who sends ‘al-ghayth’.)
wa huwa al-ladhi yunazilu10 (الشورى: 28:42) al-ghayth min ba{di m~ qanat$. (It is He who sends ‘al-ghayth’ after they have despaired).
kamathali ghaythin ‘a{jaba al-kuff-ra11 (التحديث: 20:57) nab~tuhu. (Like a ‘ghayth’ whose vegetation pleases the unfaithful).
3.1.1.1. Linguistic context of ‘ghayth’:

Ibn Manẓūr (1956) explains that ghayth غياث in Arabic means “rain and pasture or grass”. In this sense maṭār مطر has the same meaning as غياث. However, Ibn Manẓūr finds it important to state “the water coming from the sky is originally called ‘maṭār’ while the grass and pasture that grow as a result of this water are referred to as ‘ghayth’”. He moreover mentions the meanings of the stem and the verbs derived from غياث which all in general mean “to ask for help”\(^\text{12}\). He also gives an account about Al-‘A*ma{ ‘i who praises a maiden who used the two words quite differently\(^\text{13}\). {Abd al-W~h{ ibn {Ali al-Lughawī (1957:189) on the other hand points out that “If the Earth is full of water that comes from the sky, this is called ‘ghayth’. Firuzabadi (1817) explains that ‘ghayth’ is the cold rain that grows grass”.

Al-Doqr (in Al-Muḥaddith 2003) mentions the account of a nomad who was rudely requesting God to send water from the sky to rescue them from drought, and that he used the word ‘ghayth’ to explain this meaning\(^\text{14}\). While Tha{alibi (1998) mentions more than 36 words for different types of water that comes from the sky, and explains the difference in meaning and usage between them. ‘ghayth’ is this taxonomy is “water that comes after a drought and when people need it\(^\text{15}\)”. On the other hand, Razi (in Al-Muḥaddith 2003) finds no difference between ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭār’, and states that “ghayth is the maṭār that Allah sends to the Earth”.

While ‘ghayth’ in classical Arabic is always connected with the meanings of help or rescue, we find that ‘maṭār’ does not have such direct relation with these meanings. In the verses mentioned above, each time the word ‘ghayth’ is mentioned, it suggests the meaning of saving or rescue.

3.1.1.2. Cultural Context:

In the cultural context of the word ‘ghayth غياث’ we explore the interpretations given to this lexical item in the verses in some Qur’an Exegeses. Al-Qurṭubī (in Al-Muḥaddith 2003) explains that “sending saving water from the sky is something that Allah only knows and that no other one, including the prophet, has knowledge of. Al-ghayth is the name given to the water that is profitable at the time of its falling, while al-maṭār may be harmful or useful”. Suyūṭī (1957) explains that a man came to the prophet (SAW\(^\text{16}\) and
asked when his wife will give birth to his baby, when he will die, and when will water come from the sky to save them. Then this verse (31:34) was revealed. He also mentions that a man came to the second Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab and complained that people are having drought and they have reached the point of despair, here Omar said: Only now you will have rain and recited the verse 17 (42:28)”. Ibn Kathir (1978), mentions an account about the prophet (SAW) when he spoke about himself saying: the instructions and guidance that I have been sent with are like and abundant ‘ghayth’ that came on a ground, some of it absorbed the water and grew heavy grass, and some didn’t catch it so they stayed bare18”. It is quite important to note that the example given by the prophet uses the word ‘ghayth’ rather than ‘maṭar’ especially in a context where he would like to show the mercy and guidance with which he was sent. Tābarī (1980) explains that in the battle of ‘Badr’ the prophet of Allah kept pleading with God and kept praying for Him, that the prophet’s cloak has dropped from above his shoulders, then Abu Bakr, the first Caliph in Islam, asked the prophet to take it easy as for sure Allah will make him victorious. At that time the verse (8:9) was revealed using the verb which is derived from ‘ghayth’ to mean pleading and sincere prayer for help19. Finally, Al-Qurṭubi (in Al-Muhaddith 2003) gives an account about the story of the prophet Joseph and his interpretation of the Egyptian King’s dream. The King asked Joseph to explain what is meant by seven fat cows and seven dry ones; Joseph tells him that there will come seven good years where they have to plant a lot, after those seven hard years will come where people may benefit from what they saved in the former seven years. Joseph however goes on to tell the king about another year that was not in the dream where people will have mercy from the sky and where they will be saved and celebrate by making wine20. The word used for that mercy coming from the sky is ‘ghayth’ غيث.

3.1.1.3 Emotional Context:
Abdel Haleem (2001:36) points out that the language the Qur’ān employs in speaking about water is lively and full of movement. He refers to the verse (42:28) mentioned above and comments on the emotional effects of the word ‘ghayth’ in its context saying “He sends down water and the earth ‘becomes green on the morrow’. This is intensified by personification: the earth is ‘barren and lifeless’ and ‘lowly’, but when God sends down water on it ‘it thrills and swells’, the effects of the rain are the ‘marks/pints of God’s
mercy”. ‘ghayth عيث’ is always used in The Qur’an to remind people of the blessing of God and of his mercy upon them21.

3.1.2 maṭar;

The word ‘maṭar مطر’ is mentioned in the Qur’an fifteen times in the form of verbs مطرت and nouns مطر as shown below;

(النساء): 27

wa la junaha (alykum ‘in kana bikum ‘adhan min maṭarin ‘aw kuntu maṭara ‘an22(4:102)

(القرآن : 40 : 25) (القرآن : 27)

al-qaryati al-latî ‘umṭirat maṭara as-saw’i. (and they came across the city that was ‘umṭirat’ a fatal ‘maṭar’.)

wa ‘amṭarnâ (alyhim maṭaran 24(النمل : 58:27)

fasâa’a maṭaru al-mundḥarînâ. ( and we ‘’amṭarnâ’ on them a ‘maṭar’ and truly the ‘maṭar’ of those who were warned is the worst.)

wa ‘amṭarnâ (alyhim 25(الشعراء : 137:26)

maṭaran fasâa’a maṭaru al-mundḥarînâ. ( and we ‘’amṭarnâ’ on them a ‘maṭar’ and truly the ‘maṭar’ of those who were warned is the worst.)

wa ‘amṭarnâ (الاعراف : 84:7)

(الاعراف : 84:7) (الاعراف : 84:7)

{alayhim maṭaran fa-nzur kayfa kana {aqibatu al-mujrimûn. (And we ‘amṭarna’ on them a ‘maṭar’, see then what was the end of the sinners.

27(الهود : 82:11)

fa lamma jâ’a ‘amruna ja‘alnâ {alyahâ safilahâ wa ‘amṭarnâ {alyha hijâratan min sijjîlin man<udin. (And when our command came, we made it up side down, and ‘amṭarna’ on it rocks of fire).

28(الحجر : 74:15)

saﬁlahâ wa ‘amṭarnâ {alyhim hijâratan min sijjîlin (then we made it up side down and ‘amṭarna’ on it rocks of fire)
they saw a cloud traversing the sky, coming to meet their valleys, they said, "This cloud is mumtiruna!" "Nay, it is what you were asking to be hastened!" A wind wherein is a Grievous Penalty!

Remember how. (îminbin 'alâdh  a biâ'i 'awi 'tinâ sam-tan min asâijar fa 'amîr alayn hitaratan min as-samâ'i 'awi 'tinâ bî adhâbin 'alîmin. (Remember how they said: "O Allah if this is indeed the Truth from Thee, then 'amîr' down on us a stones form the sky, or send us a grievous penalty."

It is worth noting that 13 instances of these 15 are telling the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to whom was sent the prophet Lot.

3.1.2.1 Linguistic Context:

We have seen before how Tha‘alibi (1998) classifies different types of rain. He seems to use the word ‘ma‘ar’ as a general umbrella for all of these terms since he gives a title for this taxonomy as “explaining the names of ma‘ar’”. The same stand seems to be taken by most classical Arabic lexicographers (Firuzabadi, Ibn Manžur, Ibn Al-Athîr, Al-Razi and Al-Asfahânî) as they mention the word ‘ma‘ar’ in their explanation of different types of water that comes from the sky. This is not strange as it is the only common item still in use in Modern dialects of Arabic. Modern Arabs speak about ‘ma‘ar’ with the general meaning of rain rather than specifying a certain type of rain, unless the speaker is highly educated or wants to convey a specific meaning.
3.1.2.2. Cultural Context:

Whereas Arabs, whether old or Modern, use the word ‘maṭar’ as a general term to mean ‘water that comes from the sky’, the Qur’an however seems to specify and explain that water that comes with mercy is ‘ghayth’ while water that comes with punishment is ‘maṭar’. Khidr (1991: 32) points out that the instances where ‘maṭar’ is connected with punishment are unmistakenable in the Holy book; “even in the verse that does not explicitly mention punishment (4:102) there is a hint on the inconvenience, or the annoyance caused by ‘maṭar’. Al-Shafi‘i (in Al-Muhaddith 2003) points out that whenever there seemed to be ‘maṭar’ in the sky, the prophet (SAW) used to pray to God that it would carry mercy, not punishment, and that it would not harm the Muslims. It is also reported that whenever the sky thundered and enlightened, the prophet (SAW) used to be sad until refreshing water comes from the sky. When asked about this, Al-Qurṭubi tells us, the prophet (SAW) used to say “there were people before you -the people of Sodom- who once saw ‘maṭar’ like this and thought that it carried mercy for them but it carried punishment”.

As most of the verses that have the word ‘maṭar’ refer to the story of the people of Sodom, it is important to give the context of this story. Lot was a nephew of Prophet Abraham, and was sent as a Prophet and Warner to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were committing the sin of homosexuality. Two angels in the shape of handsome young men came to Lot in the evening and became his guests by night. The inhabitants of Sodom in their lust for unnatural crime invaded Lot's house but were repulsed. In the morning, the angels warned Lot to escape with his family. Tabari (1980) points out that Lot’s wife was not faithful to him and she deserved to be punished like the sinners of these cities. Then God rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the heaven; and overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. Lot’s wife looked back from behind him, and became like them.
3.1.2.3. Emotional Context:
The whole atmosphere accompanies with the word ‘maṭar’ in the Qur’ān is one of punishment, destruction, retribution, or in the least sense inconvenience and annoyance. Abdel Haleem (2001:37) comments on this nature of rain in the Qur’ān by pointing out that “in contrast with the benign nature of water manifested in such adjectives as ‘purifying’, ‘blessing’, ‘fresh’, ‘saving’, ‘mercy’, man is sometimes reminded of the destructive side of water, when, instead of being sent down in due measure it is ‘loosed’, made to ‘rise high’, and ‘billows surge from every direction’, when nothing could provide protection from the flood”.

In a similar manner, Yusuf Ali (in Al-Muhaddith 2003) explains that the shower of stones was accompanied with a mighty Blast ‘Sa‘īha’ صيحة. Here it was the violent wind and noise accompanying the rain of brimstones, possibly with some volcanic action that destroyed the city of Sodom 35.

From surveying the different contexts of ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ in the Qur’ān, we can safely say that they cannot be total synonyms, and the fact the Modern spoken Arabic, as well as classical non-Qur’anic Arabic, use ‘maṭar’ to refer to the general meaning of ‘rain’ is not a justification for considering ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ to be the same in the Qur’ān context. Hence a translation of these near-synonyms by using the word ‘Rain’ tends to be really vague. In the remainder of this chapter we analyse some translations of ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ and assess their appropriacy in keeping faithfulness to the context of the original.

3.2 Context of the Translation:

3.2.1 Arberry (1964)
Arberry gives the following translation for the word ‘ghayth’ in verse (24:28 الشورى 28);

“And it is He who sends down the rain, after they have despaired, and He unfolds His mercy”. (1964: 501).

For the word ‘maṭar’ mentioned in (27 :58 النمل: 58) he offers;
“And We *rained* on them a *rain*; and evil indeed is the *rain* of them that are warned”. (1964: 387)

As we have seen in the arguments above, the word ‘rain’ is quite vague in determining the properties of the water that comes down from the sky. Although the contexts of the two verses refer to different states, in fact opposite states, the wording used in the original is suitable to each atmosphere while the word ‘rain’ in both contexts in Arberry’s translation is not accepted at least according to our proposed model of translation analysis.

3.2.2 Ahmad Ali (1984)

Ahmad Ali gives the following translation for (25:40);

“They must have surely passed by the town on which We had *rained* the terrible *rain* of ruin”. (1984: 309)

For (24:28);

“It is He who sends down *rain* when they had despaired of it, and showers His benevolence”. (1984: 415)

and for (31:34) he offers;

“Only God has the knowledge of the Hour. He sends *rain* from the heavens, and knows what is in the mothers’ womb”. (1984: 315)

and finally for the verb *yughath* in (12:49) he writes;

“This will be followed by a year of *rain*, and people shall press (the grapes).” (1984: 204)

It seems that Ahmad Ali could in some instances realize the difference in effect that the words ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ have in the structure of the meaning. Thus he translates ‘maṭar’ as “a terrible rain of ruin”, but he does not mention any thing about the quality of ‘ghayth’ in the following two verses, finding it enough to depend on the context of the verse to show that this is a different ‘rain’, and the context can sometimes be ambiguous as in (31:34) where the verse can refer to the power of God in destroying the disbelievers or to the mercy of God bestowed on His servants.

3.2.3 Shakir (1983 on-line version):
Shakir gives the following for the word ‘ghayth’ in (24:28):  
“And He it is Who sends down the rain after they have despaired, and He unfolds His mercy; and He is the Guardian, the Praised One.”

For the same word in (57:20) he offers;  
“Know that this world's life is only sport and play and gaiety and boasting among yourselves, and a vying in the multiplication of wealth and children, like the rain, whose causing the vegetation to grow, pleases the husbandmen…”

while for ‘maṭar’ in (27:58) he writes;  
“And We rained on them a rain, and evil was the rain of those who had been warned.”

and for the same word in (7:84) he gives;  
“And We rained upon them a rain; consider then what was the end of the guilty.”

Like Arberry, Shakir does not seem to differentiate between the uses of the words ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ and uses ‘rain’ as a sufficient equivalent item depending on the context of other words in the same verse for clarification. We have discussed that the occurrence of ‘rain’ close to ‘despair’ as in (24:28), or close to ‘guilt’ as in (7:84), is not enough for reproducing the message in another contextually different language.

3.2.4 Yusuf Ali (1954)

Yusuf Ali seems to have realized the difference in meaning and emotional effect of ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’; he translates ‘maṭar’ in (7:84) as;  
“And we rained down on them a shower (of brimstone): Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime!” (1954: 364)

and adds to the meaning expressed in the words ‘shower of brimstone’ a footnote that says “the shower is expressly stated in Q. xi. 82 to have been of stones. In xv. 73-74, we are told that there was a terrible blast or noise (saihat) in addition to the shower of stones”
(1954: 364). He picks the word ‘shower’ for ‘maṭar’ in almost every instance the latter in mentioned; (الشعراء: 137: 26, النمل: 58: 27, القرآن: 40: 25). For the word ‘ghayth’, Yusuf Ali uses ‘rain’; so in translating (24:28), he says;

“He is the One that sends down rain (even) after (men) have given up all hope, and scatters His Mercy (far and wide). And He is the Protector, Worthy of all Praise.” (1954: 1313)

and finds it enough to add in brackets ‘even’ in order to show the contrast between a state of despair and a state of mercy being sent. When translating the verb yughathu which is derived from ‘ghayth’, however, he does not pick ‘rain’ which he seems to keep peculiar to the noun ‘ghayth’. Rather he uses ‘abundant water’ (12: 49);

“Then will come after that (period) a year in which the people will have abundant water, and in which they will press (wine and oil)” (1954: 568).

3.2.5 Pickthall (1999)

Like Yusuf Ali, Pickthall seems to use different items for translating ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’, but unlike Yusuf Ali, he does not make ‘rain’ peculiar for ‘ghayth’ nor for ‘maṭar’, but rather uses a clarifying adjectives that state the nature of the water concerned. Thus, in translating ‘ghayth’ in (24:28), he uses ‘saving rain’;

“And He it is Who sendeth down the saving rain after they have despaired, and spreadeth out His mercy. He is the Protecting Friend, the Praiseworthy” (1999: 666).

While in translating ‘maṭar’ in (25: 40), he uses ‘fatal rain’;

“And indeed they have passed by the township whereon was rained the fatal rain. Can it be that they have not seen it? Nay, but they hope for no resurrection” (1999: 497).

In another position (27: 58), he uses ‘dreadful rain’;

“And We rained a rain upon them. Dreadful is the rain of those who have been warned” (1999: 526),
and for the verb *yughathu* which is derived from ‘ghayth’, he does not mention anything related to water coming from the sky, and instead refers to the effects of this water in people’s life (12:49: 

“Then, after that, will come a year when the *people will have plenteous crops* and when they will press (wine and oil)” (1999:331).

3.3 Results and Conclusion:
In this study, the concept of synonymity was discussed and near-synonyms were proved to be a more appropriate term for linguistic analysis in natural languages. Differences in meaning, or usage among pairs of near-synonyms are claimed to be context-dependent, hence an analysis of the concept of context was carried out, and a model of translation analysis based on the context was proposed. In this model, context of the original, linguistic-cultural-emotional, should be analysed and carefully regarded in the process of translating whereby there should be a parallel linguistic context, a cultural background, and an equivalent emotional context. When applying this context on five different translations of a sample of near-synonyms in the Qur’an, we noticed that some translators do not differentiate the meaning or effect of each of the words ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ and opt for the word ‘rain’ as an equivalent (Arberry, Ahmad Ali, Shakir). These translations are not considered adequate in conveying the message of the original according to the proposed model. On the other hand two translators seem to have realized the difference in meaning, usage, and emotional effect these words have, and thus adopted different strategies for rendering the message in English; Yusuf Ali used ‘rain’ to mean ‘ghayth’, in the noun form, all the time and ‘shower of...’ to mean ‘maṭar’, while Pickthall used ‘rain’ for both of them, and added clarifying adjectives to explain different types of water that comes from the sky. According to the proposed model these latter two translations are more appropriate in conveying the message expressed in the near-Synonym ‘ghayth’ and ‘maṭar’ as they are mentioned in the Qur’an.
3.4. Recommendations:

In the light of the results reached in the present study, we recommend the following studies to further investigate and enrich the field of translation theory and translation studies:

1- A detailed study of near-synonyms in the Qur’an that takes the following pairs of near-synonyms into consideration:

- Al-qalb wa al-fu’âd  
- Al-zawaj wa al-nikah  
- Al-sana wa al-{am  
- Al-jû{ wa al-makhma*a  
- Al-half wa al-qasam  
- Al-hijr, al-{aql, al-nuhâ wa al-hilm  
- Al-jasad wa al-jism  
- Al-*abb wa al-sakb  
- Al-khatm wa al-ṭâb{  
- Al-kitab wa al-sifr  
- Al-tadabbur wa al-tafakkur  
- Al-‘istima{ , al-‘in*ât wa al-‘i*ghâ’a

2- A further study that applies the context-based model proposed in the present study, on the translation of other linguistic expressions in the Qur’an, or in literary texts.

3- A detailed study that analyses strategies used by translators in translating the Qur’an.

4- A detailed study that analyses the concept of polysemy in linguistics and addresses the problems raised by it in the process of translating.

5- Integrating the present study, and similar studies, into the courses of translator education in Arabic as well as English courses of translation, translation theory, lexical Semantics, and Pragmatics.
## APPENDIX

### Transliteration key

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1 From a logical point of view, De Jonge (1993: 523) explains that if a speaker uses two linguistic signs that seem to mean exactly the same, the question is why he would do so: if he uses his mental capacities efficiently, he will surely not ‘store’ more words than the minimum necessary for efficient communication. In other words, [De Jonge] assumes that speakers are too lazy to use more words than they actually need.”

2 In a similar manner, Harris (1973) suggests the following points for differentiating meanings of words;
   a) the meaning of A is known to a person X, when the meaning of B is not,
   b) the meaning of A may be rendered in some language by an expression which is not an exact translation of B,
   c) A differs in the organization of meaningful elements from B,
   d) the meaning of A differs in some respect ..from the meaning of B,
   e) A has for a person X associations not shared by B.

3 Vasudevan (1996: 69) lists other stylistic values for the use synonymy when discussing Sanskrit poetry;
   A synonym may: 1) approximate most to the meaning,
   2) add to the beauty of meaning or object considerably
   3) carry figurative beauty along with it,
   4) contribute to a new lease of excellence,
   5) hint at a meaning almost not plausible to be imagined about the object under description,
   6) contain figurative elements contusive to beauty.

4 Ezorsky (1959) considers the interchangeability test in determining synonymy and the truth value of sentences as the criterion of validity. She explains: “two expressions are synonymous in a language L if and only if they may be interchanged in each sentence in L without altering the truth value of that sentence.”
Even philosophically, Taylor (1954) dismisses the concept of synonymy as dogmatic, mythical and untenable. He makes three statements through which he denies the existence of synonymy: “1) it would be impossible to explain to anyone what synonymy is, because any attempt at clarifying it would presuppose his capacity to recognize it, 2) It is impossible ever to explicate the notion of the sameness of anything whatever or to supply a criterion for it which is not empty in its appeal to the sameness of something else, itself in need of a criterion, and c) It is impossible, owing to the peculiar nature of understating, to give any criterion either for sameness or for difference of meaning”.

Another example is: my house is big / large, but my sister is big / NOT large.


First number from the left refers to the number of the sura and the second refers to the number of the verse, followed by the name of the sura in Arabic.

The complete verses are as follows:

5:30: And the earth itself in need of a criterion, and c) It is impossible, owing to the peculiar nature of understating, to give any criterion either for sameness or for difference of meaning.

Another example is: my house is big / large, but my sister is big / NOT large.

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5:30: And the earth itself in need of a criterion, and c) It is impossible, owing to the peculiar nature of understating, to give any criterion either for sameness or for difference of meaning.
16 SAW: *alla Allahu {alayhi Wasalam; this Arabic sentence is the tradition whenever the name of Muhammad is mentioned or referred to. It means 'Peace Be Upon Him'.

Commenting on the same verse Yusuf ‘Ali (in Al-Muhaddith 2003), in his commentary on his translation, says: “that men should get such a blessing as rain when they expect it according to ordinary calculations or probabilities does not impress them, as it is a daily occurrence. But Allah’s mercy is more than this. It comes to our aid even when all hope is lost, and gives us new chances and new openings where we least expect them. His quality of cherishing and protecting His creatures is always active, and what higher praise can we give? ”

21 Commenting on the same verse Yusuf ‘Ali (in Al-Muhaddith 2003), in his commentary on his translation, says: “that men should get such a blessing as rain when they expect it according to ordinary calculations or probabilities does not impress them, as it is a daily occurrence. But Allah’s mercy is more than this. It comes to our aid even when all hope is lost, and gives us new chances and new openings where we least expect them. His quality of cherishing and protecting His creatures is always active, and what higher praise can we give? ”

22 the complete verses are the following:
أخيرنا: إبراهيم بن محمد حسن: خالد بن زياد عن المطلب بن حنظب:
أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يقول عند المطر: "اللهُمَّ سِقْنِي رَحْمَةً لاَّ سَقْيًا عَذَابٍ وَلَا بَلَاءٍ، هَلْ أُنْتَ بَيْنَ شَجَرَةَ النَّكْرُ وَبَيْنَكَ، وَلَا بِأَمْرِيَةَ".

أخيرنا من لا الله أخربى خالد بن زياد عن المطلب بن حنظب:
أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان إذا برق السماء أو رعدت غرف ذلك في وجهه إذا أمشَرَر مَرَّى عنه (سُورَةِ النَّفْس).
Yusuf Ali, in his commentary on his translation, points out that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed, and even their precise position cannot be identified. But the brimstone plain of the tract still exists, right on the highway between Arabia and Syria. To the traveller in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea the whole locality presents a scene of dismal desolation which truly suggests the awful punishment for unspeakable crimes. (al-Muhaddith 2003, keyword : Sodom)
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