

**DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v6i5.1249**

**Citation:** Akhmetzyanova, D., & Gilemshina, A. (2017). Synonyms Reflecting Objects and Phenomena of the Metaphysical World in the Translations of Sacred Texts from Arabic into English and Tatar. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 6(5), 292-300. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i5.1249>

## Synonyms Reflecting Objects and Phenomena of the Metaphysical World in the Translations of Sacred Texts from Arabic into English and Tatar

Dilyara R. Akhmetzyanova<sup>1</sup>, Aysilu G. Gilemshina\*<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This paper analyzes the phenomenon of synonymy in translated texts in Russian and Tatar, with various existing and published translations of the Quran used as the main source. The primary goal of the study is to reveal the main regularities of the way synonyms function in the diachronic translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar, as well as to follow the alterations in the vocabulary and stylistic norms of Russian and Tatar. Comparison between various translations allows shedding light on many of the peculiarities of the target language at the time the translation was completed and establishing the chronologic sequence of certain changes in the languages. The primary methods used in the study are the analysis of academic literature on the problem, consolidation of the prior research of synonyms in Russian and Tatar, studying text sources and dictionaries and comparison between the lexical units. The study shows that synonymic units found in the diachronic translations can be of varying degrees of equivalence. The most frequent in the diachronic translations of the Quran are the so-called partial synonyms, and this reflects the translators' attempts to single out one specific lexical-semantic variant or a certain seme.

**Keywords:** Translations of sacred texts, Synonymy, Vocabulary, Objects of metaphysical world, Russian, Tatar, Quran, Contrastive linguistics.

<sup>1</sup> Kazan Federal University, 420000, 18 Kremlyovskaya St., Kazan, Russia. E-mail: [dilyara.akhmetzyanova@yandex.ru](mailto:dilyara.akhmetzyanova@yandex.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Corresponding author. Kazan State Medical University, 420012, 49 Butlerova St., Kazan, Russia. E-mail: [miss.gilemschina@yandex.ru](mailto:miss.gilemschina@yandex.ru)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale

Synonymy in language is a widely researched phenomenon; however, a lot of its aspects are still relevant for linguistics today. Synonymy presents special interest for translation studies, because the choice of a lexical unit from a synonymic row of the target language to render the equivalent meaning of the source language is an important part of a translator's work. In this paper we have studied the phenomenon of synonymy in several translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar, namely translations to Russian by G.S. Sablukov (1993), I.Y. Krachkovsky (1990) and V. Porokhova (1997), as well as translations to Tatar by Nurulla Khazrat (1992) and Rabit Batulla (2001).

The synonymy in the translations of sacred texts is interesting because such texts represent the territory where the translator has to be especially careful and accurate in rendering all the nuances of the original text in order not to violate the cohesiveness of the Holy Scripture and not to show disrespect to any potential readers' religious sensitivities. The vocabulary of the translations of such texts can be divided into two big categories – these are lexical units denoting objects and phenomena of the physical world and lexical units referring to objects and phenomena of the metaphysical, i.e. non-objective, world. The phenomenon of synonymy in translated texts largely correlates with the phenomenon of equivalence, i.e. semantic congruence of lexical units of the translated text to the ones in the source text. These phenomena seriously influence the perception of the translated text – often certain evaluations of a translated text are defined by the usage of language units that contain semantic diversity. Each of the diachronic translations researched in this paper correlates with the original text in its own fashion, either losing its main meaning or retaining and enriching the previous one.

Objects and phenomena of the metaphysical world are a special category of the biggest importance for sacred texts. Such semantic subcategories as rational and emotional features of the surrounding world, as well as various universal concepts, are all a part of this big category.

The main goal of this study is to reveal key regularities of the way synonyms function in the diachronic translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar, as well as to trace the alterations in the vocabulary and stylistic norms of Russian and Tatar.

### 1.2. State of Knowledge of Synonymy in Russian and Tatar

The corpus of synonyms of Russian has been researched for over 200 years – the first dictionary of synonyms in Russia came out in 1783, its author being the well-known Russian writer D.I. Fonvizin. Modern linguistics achieved considerable success in studying and describing lexical synonymy. Dictionaries of synonyms and thesauruses are of special value. Many scholars prefer "Dictionary of Synonyms of Russian Language" by Z.E. Aleksandrova (1989). It is interesting because of its wide coverage of vocabulary, including synonyms belonging to different literary styles, obsolete words, as well as folk-poetic, colloquial, substandard vocabulary; in the end of the synonymic row in this dictionary you will also find idioms synonymous to the given words.

Based on the many years of studying Russian synonymy, the Institute of Russian Language has created a functional file system of synonyms. This work resulted in publishing a two-volume academic "Dictionary of Synonyms of Russian Language" edited by A.P. Yevgenyeva (1971). The main value of this dictionary that contains the synonyms and examples of their use in standard literary language lies in the stylistic commentary that is often given more exhaustively than in definition dictionaries. Based on this dictionary, another one was compiled, consisting of one volume, edited by A.P. Yevgenyeva as well and called

“Dictionary of Synonyms. Reference Aid” (1975). Compared to the two-volume dictionary it contains more synonymic rows, has a wider system of usage labels but less supporting information.

Dictionaries that described Russian synonymy contain invaluable material for studying the expressive power of the language, its lexical richness and stylistic diversity. However, achievements in creating dictionaries of Russian synonyms do not exclude difficulties in theoretical development of lexical synonymy issues. The very notion of synonymy gets different interpretations. Scholars have disputes about which words must be considered synonyms and how to classify them, which criteria of synonymy are the defining ones. Varied, often contradictory opinions have been expressed on the matter.

Linguists who try to give a comprehensive definition to the term “synonym” offer various criteria for singling out synonyms. Some of them think that the indispensable criterion for that is that expressing the same notion. Other researchers base their theories on the interchangeability of synonyms. The third point of view is basically that the defining condition for synonymy is the proximity of the words’ lexical meanings (with the proposed criterion for that being: 1) proximity or sameness of lexical meanings; 2) only the sameness of lexical meanings; 3) proximity but not sameness of lexical meanings).

In our opinion, the most important condition of the synonymy of words is their semantic proximity, with sameness being the main condition only in special cases. Depending on the degree of semantic proximity the synonymy can be expressed to a bigger or a smaller degree. The synonymy becomes most pronounced when lexical units are identical in their meaning (e.g.: *здесь – тут* (‘here’), *языкознание – лингвистика* (‘linguistics’)).

There is certain precision in defining the chronological framework of synonymy. When establishing synonymic relations it is necessary to take into consideration the synchrony of the lexical units in question. For instance, the words *странник* (‘wanderer’) and *турист* (‘tourist’) do not form a synonymic row: they belong to different historic periods. Singling out the so-called contextual or functional synonyms is often justly criticized. These include words that only become close in their meanings in a certain context.

It is known that synonymy is a universal phenomenon that unites both local and social linguistic facts over long periods of time. This is why synonymy, particularly lexical synonymy, has given rise to disputes about which lexical units can be considered synonymous and what is the degree of their synonymy, as well as which words are quasi-synonyms (Kobozeva, 1999).

When defining synonyms, researchers usually consider the following features of lexical units: their compatibility within a single syntagma, the similarity of their contextual meanings (functional synonymy), their meanings being identical, the lexical units being interchangeable (Fedorov, 1969). Such an approach to synonymy shows the varying degree of synonymy in words, especially words in different chronological strata.

Synonyms are mostly treated as words belonging to the same part of speech and defining the same notion, differing (or not differing) from each other in slight connotations, or stylistic nuances and usage, or both (Apresyan, 1996). In accordance with that, synonyms can be complete (absolute, accurate) or incomplete (partial); or they can be contextually justified.

Complete (absolute) synonyms are the few mostly identical lexical units (e.g. pairs of words such as *притеснитель/тиран* (tyrant, oppressor), *празднословие/пустословие* (windy eloquence, empty rhetoric), *ярость/гнев* (fury, wrath), etc.).

However, the bigger part of the synonym field are partial synonyms, which, according to the common notion of lexical-semantic variants (LSV), have such cases when:

1. A monosemantic word coincides in meaning with one of the LSV of a polysemantic word (e.g., the word *обида* ('insult', 'offence') and the second LSV of the word *озорчение* ('sorrow', 'aggravation')).
2. A polysemantic (one or several) LSV's of a word coincides with one (or several) LSV of another. For instance, one of the LSV's of the lexical unit *история* ('history', 'story') is the same as one of the LSV's of the word *небылица* ('tale', 'fable', 'cock-and-bull story'), where the dominant synonym for both is the lexical unit *рассказ* ('short story', 'tale').

The other key notion here is the notion of equivalence. Today this issue is the most debatable in the theory of translation, and is tackled differently by different scholars. Many linguists doubt the existence of equivalents and the viability of using this term. Others confuse equivalence with identity (Komissarov, 2000).

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Goals of the Study

This study had the following goals and tasks: 1) choosing the translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar (such things as social and cultural significance, popularity of this or that translation and their level of adequacy to the original text); 2) comparative/contrastive analysis of the three translations of the Quran into Russian and two translations into Tatar; 3) comparison of synonymic discrepancies of the translations of lexical units that express phenomena of the non-material world (i.e. discrepancies involving the use of synonyms as opposed to using the same word); 4) studying the semantic structure of the synonyms with the help of dictionaries; 5) summation and analysis of the outcome.

### 2.2. Theoretical and Empirical Methods

In this study we used a variety of different methods, each one of them complementing the others:

- Theoretical methods – the analysis of literature on the problem; consolidation of the prior research of synonyms in Russian and Tatar, analysis, synthesis;
- Empirical methods – studying text sources and dictionaries, comparison between the lexical units.

### 2.3 Source Basis of the Study

The source basis for the study is three translations of the Quran into Russian and two translations into Tatar, namely:

- 1) "Translation of meanings" by G.S. Sablukov (prepared circa 1878; published in 1907);
- 2) "Translation of I.Y. Krachkovsky" (done circa 1917; published in 1963);
- 3) "Translation of meanings" by V. Porokhova (published in 1997).
- 4) "Qoran Tafsire" ("Tafsir of the Quran"), completed by Nurulla Khazrat in 1992;
- 5) "Qoran. Qoran ayatlarenen tatarcha magnalare ham anlatmalary" ("The Quran. Meanings and Explanations of Quranic Ayahs in Tatar", completed by Rabit Batulla in 2001.

### 2.4. Analysis Pattern for Synonymous Lexical Units

As an example of how the analytical part of this study was performed let us take a look at the pair of synonyms *убыток/урон* (damage, loss) that appears in the translations in question:

These pair of lexical units builds a syntactic synonyms relationship in the translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar (surah 5, ayah 5):

*“А в будущей жизни он будет в числе несчастных”* (Sablukov, 1993);

*“... и он в последней жизни – в числе потерпевших убыток...”* (Krachkovsky, 1990);

*“.. и будет в жизни будущей среди тех, кто понесет урон (тяжелый)”* (Porokhova, 1997).

*“...and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers”*

The phrase used by V. Porokhova (*понесет урон* ‘will suffer damage’) can be seen as effective and conforming the standards of the “elevated” style. Let us consider the lexical units that are part of the syntactic synonyms *урон* (‘damage’) and *убыток* (‘loss’). In the original text these lexical units are represented by the word *min-al-khāsirīn*, with the preposition *min* meaning “from”, and the word *khāsirīn* being the plural participle in the genitive case with the meaning of ‘those who lose, losers’; ‘unprofitable’; ‘hopeless’ (Baranov, 1985). It is necessary to understand that in Arabic this pair of words is derived from one root. To compare: *khasarah; qarar; khusrān; naqs* – ‘loss’ and *khasārah; qarar* – ‘damage’ (Borisov, 1993). The ‘Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms of Arabic’ by T.A. Shaykhullin and A.Y. Omri lists several Arabic synonyms for the aforementioned words. For instance, *khasārah – faqd* “1) absence, shortage; 2) loss” (Shaykhullin & Omri, 2005).

It is worthy of note that the nouns *урон* (‘damage’) and *убыток* (‘loss’) become syntactic synonyms when they come with a participle (*потерпевших убыток* ‘the ones who suffered a loss’), verb (*понесет урон* ‘shall suffer damage’) and adjective (*в числе несчастных* ‘among the unhappy ones’).

We have compared the definitions of the lexical unit *убыток* (‘damage’) as it is presented in the Big Definition Dictionary (Ushakov, 2000). The word *урон* is defined similarly and used in the similar meanings.

The semantics of these words has not changed since earlier times, which is evident from the analysis of their definitions in the Dictionary of the Russian Academy (Slovar Akademii Rossiyskoy, 1789-1794).

The dictionary of synonyms by A.P. Yevgenyeva (1975) shows that these words are polysemantic and there is a vast variety of forms and methods of their co-occurrence with other words.

The Tatar equivalent of this Arabic lexical unit is represented in the following examples: *хәсрәтләнүче булыр* (‘will be grieving’), *газапта булыр/зыян күрәчәк* (‘will experience torment/see damage’). In the translations in question it comes as follows:

*“...вә ул ахирәттә хәсрәтләнүчеләрдән булыр, ягъни газәптә булыр”* (Nurulla Khazrat, 1992);

*“андыйлар Ахирәттә дә зыян күрәчәк”* (Batulla, 2001).

The word *хәсрәтләнүче* (‘grieving’) is a passive plural participle in the meaning of “they who grieve or who suffer grief or sorrow” (Ganiyev, 1984). The lexical unit *хәсрәтләнүче(ләрдән)* is derived from the word *хәсрәт* (‘grief’), which is defined by the Definition Dictionary of Tatar as “1) grief, grievance, worry; 2) unhappiness; 3) a person of too many worries” (Ganiyev, 2005).

The word *газап* (‘torment’) is loaned from Arabic, and has the meanings of: “1) physical suffering, punishment; 2) heavy emotional turmoil; spiritual unrest; 3) burden, torment, suffering” (Ganiyev, 1984 and 2005).

The lexical unit *зыян* is more often used in the meanings of “1) damage; 2) loss; 3) harm” (Ganiyev, 2005).

Then we analyzed the aforementioned pairs of words to find equivalent LSV's. For instance, the pair of semantically similar words *хәсрәт/газап* are used in the language to denote the same phenomenon and are therefore synonymous. However, these units do not coincide in meaning with the Russian equivalent pair *убыток/урон*, because the Tatar variant comes closer to the meaning of "torment, suffering, emotional stress; punishment, etc.". Therefore, the pair *хәсрәтләнүчеләрдән (булыр)/газапта (булыр)* is not synonymous to the Russian pair.

The words *убыток* and *урон* have completely identical meanings, so their synonymy is undoubted, these are absolute synonyms.

The Tatar word *зарар* has the meaning that coincides with the LSV of the pair of words *убыток/урон* and the Arabic participle *khāsirīn*. It is this fact that allows us to conclude that their meanings are synonymous and that these words are equivalent.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Analysis of Synonymic Lexical Units in the Translations of the Quran to Russian and Tatar

In our study we have discovered a large number of lexical units that are related to the phenomena of the non-material world. We will hereby mention only the ones frequently used in the translations of the Quran. Namely, we have examined such synonymic rows as: *убыток/урон* ('damage'), *празднословие/пустословие* ('idle talk'), *изволение/дозволение/воля* ('permission', 'will'), *история/повесть/небылица* ('story', 'tale', 'fable'), *мука/наказание/расплата* ('torment', 'punishment', 'retribution'), *народ/община/люд* ('people'), *жизнь/жилье/приют* ('life', 'housing', 'refuge', etc.), as well as their Tatar equivalents.

The following regularities can be named among the key results of this study:

1) The comparison of the different translations of the Quran allows us to trace some separate stages of formation of synonyms in the standard literary Russian language, reveal the lexical features of the language of the period when this or that translation was completed or establish a sequence of semantic changes in Russian and Tatar.

2) For adequate rendering of the classic Quranic text the translators use various stylistic and lexical means of the target language, thus making the translated text closer to the original one. The semantic structure of the synonyms here is an important criterion in defining interlinguistic semantic variability.

3) The synonymic units found in the diachronic translations can be of varying degrees of equivalence. Here we can single out two groups of synonyms based on their semantic structure:

a) Completely identical semantic structures (semantic absolutes or complete synonyms);

b) Partially identical semantic structures (partial synonyms).

The latter category is the most frequent in the diachronic translations of the Quran, and it reflects the translators' attempts to single out a specific lexical-semantic variant or a certain seme.

4) Often, to retain the elevated style and adequacy of the perception of the text, translators use equivalent units that have grown obsolete in modern Russian (*празднословие, дозволение, небылица*, etc.). In some cases using obsolete synonyms is related to the time period when the translation was completed, the correlation of the functioning lexical units, literary standards and the translators' preferences.

5) In the contemporary translations of the Quran to Tatar there is a tendency to a word-for-word translation, which is why the use of Turkic-Tatar synonyms is minimal; at the same time the active use of

previously loaned arabisms compensates for the lack of synonymic means (*ахирәт хәяте-ахирәт йорты* 'housing', 'refuge', *мәкерлек* 'trick', 'cunning', *гаһед-вагъдә* 'obligation', 'agreement', etc.).

6) Obviously enough, the Quran and its translations contain many synonyms and lexical units denoting religious notions. Particularly synonyms of such widely used words as *мука – наказание – расплата* ('torment' – 'punishment' – 'retribution'), *братство (Бога) – партия (Аллаха)* ('brotherhood (of God)' – 'party (of Allah)'), etc.

7) Among the factors that contributed to the development of synonymy in Russian and Tatar were the translations made by various authors in different periods of time. Using theological terms, set expressions, clichés, archaic words, symbols, introducing literalisms because of the fear of misrepresenting the sacred text, etc. – all these factors can lead to the emergence of differences in the original and translated texts and the relative equivalence of the text in the target language.

#### **4. Discussions**

This study has shown that the structure of synonyms in the semantic field of "objects and phenomena of the metaphysical world" in the translated texts in Russian and Tatar is an important theme of research and a criterion of establishing interlinguistic equivalence.

The problems of synonymy in Russian and Tatar were researched by such scholars as D.G. Tumasheva (1982), R.A. Yusupov (1980), E.N. Denmukhametova (2008), V.G. Fatkhutdinova and A.A. Aminova (2006). However, this paper is the first attempt to analyze synonymy in translated texts, on the example of sacred literature. Detailed structural-semantic analysis of synonyms attempted in this study is the first attempt to follow the main regularities of the correlation of synonyms in different translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This study has proved that synonymic equivalents in the translations of the Quran into Russian and Tatar completed at different periods of time allow establishing basic tendencies of development of the lexical structure of the language within this semantic field (objects and phenomena of the metaphysical world). Studying diachronic translated equivalents helps to reconstruct universal features of common word semantics, as well as the translators' interpretation of some universal meanings that occur when using synonymic means of the target languages. Thus, Russian translators use these means to attempt to focalize the lexical-semantic variants and emphasize connotations of the synonyms. Modern Tatar translations show the tendency for literal translation, which is why the use of synonymic means of Tatar language is minimal and this is enhanced by the use of previously loaned arabisms.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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