# Jesus's Ascension based on Critique of Contemporary English Translations of Holy Qur'an Focusing on Polysemy (Case study: Surah Āl-e 'Imrān (3): 55)

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## Abstract

Polysemy is one of the inevitable phenomena in inter-lingual translation. The collocation relation in the polysemous phenomenon is assumed as a key concept here and this image has caused many researchers of Islamic studies to consider it a kind of figure of speech and similar cases in the Qur'an. The Arabic term 'توفّی' (tawaffā) in the Qur'anic phrase ('إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَ رَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ' :I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me') (Surah Āl-e 'Imrān (3):55) may include some concepts, e.g. death, sleep, perfect capture, seizure of soul, etc. Translation of this phrase in inter-lingual translation from Arabic to English has led to some challenges in the estimation of the closest and most precise equivalent for it in contemporary translations of the Holy Qur'an. In addition to the citation from ten translated versions from contemporary translations of the Qur'an in the present paper, and by using a descriptive-analytical methodology and taking an approach toward votes of Qur'anic exegetes, it is inferred that in comparison with other translation versions, Shakir's translation may reflect the context of this verse more clearly; while, other translation versions, e.g. Irving, Pickthall, and Sarvar have presented a free translation of the verse and works such as Saffarzadeh, Qarā'ī, Progressive Muslims and Arberry remained committed to lexicons at this verse, representing a literal translation of this Qur'anic verse. Similarly, translation versions from Muhamed and Samira have inversed the fact of the magical adventure of this verse rather than presenting an image of the death of Jesus Christ (AS).

Keywords: Jesus's Ascension, Jesus Christ (AS), Polysemy, Tawaffā, Contemporary English Translators of the Holy Qur'an

## چکیده

پدیده‌ی چندمعنایی(Polysemy) از پدیده‌های اجتناب ناپذیر در ترجمه بینازبانی است. رابطه همنشینی در پدیده‌ی همنشینی از مفاهیم کلیدی این پدیده است و این تصویر سبب گردیده است بسیاری از پژوهشگران مطالعات اسلامی آن را گونه‌ای از وجوه و نظائر در قرآن تلقی نمایند. کلمه«توفّی» در عبارت«إنِّی مُتَوَفِّیکَ وَ رافِعُکَ إلَیَّ» آیه ۵۵ سوره آل عمران وجوهی از قبیل مرگ، خواب، اخذ کامل، قبض روح و... را دربرمی‌گیرد. ترجمه این فراز از آیه در ترجمه بینازبانی از زبان عربی به زبان انگلیسی باعث چالش هایی در برآورد نزدیکترین و دقیق ترین معادل هم ارز برای آن در ترجمه های معاصر قرآن کریم شده است. در نوشتار پیش‌رو ضمن احصای ده ترجمه از ترجمه‌های معاصر انگلیسی قرآن کریم به روش توصیفی-تحلیلی و با رویکردی به آرای مفسران چنین برمی‌آید که ترجمه شاکر به نسبت دیگر ترجمه‌ها فضای روشن‌تری از آیه را انعکاس می‌دهد؛ دیگر ترجمه‌ها نظیر ایروینگ، پیکتال و سرور به ترجمه‌ای آزاد از آیه روی نموده‌اند و ترجمه‌های مترجمانی همچون صفارزاده، قرائی، مسلمانان‌مترقی و آربری تعهد خود را به الفاظ آیه حفظ نموده و ترجمه‌ای تحت‌الفظی از آیه را بازنمایی نموده‌اند. همچنین ترجمه محمد و سمیرا ضمن تصویری از مرگ حضرت عیسی(ع)، حقیقت ماجرای اعجازبرانگیز آیه را وارونه نموده‌اند.

کلمات کلیدی: عروج عیسوی ،حضرت عیسی(ع)، چندمعنایی، توفّی، مترجمان انگلیسی معاصر قرآن کریم.

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## Introduction

Polysemy is one of the common phenomena in translation from one language to another. Often, there are several equivalent meanings for one word in the target language so that each translator may select one equivalent among the congruent terms based on his perception of the given word to convey the meaning of that term in the target language. Here, the diction of the best and most appropriate equivalent for that word in the target language with the highest tolerance with the source language may signify a more compatible translation to convey the message from the source language. Although such a diction may only denote the special ability and prominence of a translator in the selection of an equivalent, which has the most proximity with the existing word and thus the source text, it is obvious that observance of safekeeping (faithfulness) in conveyance of meaning from source language to target language will be the highest priority thereby to express message of source language.

On the other hand, the Ascension of Jesus Christ is of the precious Qur'anic concepts, which have been noticed both in Islam and Christianity. Each of aforesaid religions and denominations typically believes in his Ascension while some groups e.g. Christians believe in his Crucifixion and in some Christianity tests they believe that he will be revived after his Crucifixion. Also in the Islamic religion in either Shiite or Sunnite groups, they believe in his death (تتنی) either ascension of his soul or body and both of them and thus his life until the stipulated time.

The Qur'anic verse (3:55)[1]: '*And when Allah said: O Jesus, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so l will decide between you concerning that in which you differed.*' is one of the verses in which death and ascension of Jesus Christ have been narrated by this phrase: 'إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ. *I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me*'. The various translations of the Holy Qur'an from English translators or in some cases despite the native nature of the translator can be carefully analyzed similarly to other translated versions of the Holy Qur'an in different languages, especially at present when the application of the English language has ever-increasingly become more valuable to develop concepts and teachings of Holy Qur'an in most of the other languages.

In a study implemented by Messrs. Kavus Rouhi Barandagh and Ali Safari in Vol. 80 of Qur'anic Researches Journal in 2016, entitled "Ascension of Jesus Christ (AS), Viewpoints, Challenges and New Approach to the Issue", the opinions of the exegetes about the word full seizure (تَ فِّة) have been discussed; however, there no point about the viewpoints of the translations concealed in the interpretation of the verse. Furthermore, another article by Ms. Ensieh Boroumand and Mr.

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[1]. إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذينَ كَفَرُواْ وَجَاعِلُ الَّذينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذينَ كَفَرُواْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فيمَا كُنتُمْ فيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

Mohammad Hossein Boroumand published in Vol. 16 of the journal of Qur'an & Hadith translation in 2021, titled "Revising criticism of Qur'an's translation based on the structural attitude toward the Surah (a case study of the verses selected from Surah Āl-e 'Imrān)", it analyzed the translations of verses 2, 5, 8, 16, and 109 based on the structural approach arising from the coherent relationships of words through the opinions of exegetes. In the present study, considering the application of the word "تتنى" and its translations in the English translation of the Holy Qur'an using polysemous issues, so many differences have been observed while they generally pointed out of Ascension of Jesus Christ; but they encounter various challenges in narrating the truth of the event which Holy Qur'an intends to offer about his ascension. Thus, the authors of the present paper try to investigate this phenomenon and conduct a comparative analysis of contemporary translation versions of the Holy Qur'an from translators of various religions and beliefs including Shakir, Irving, Saffarzadeh, Qarā'ī, Pickthall, Mohammad Sarvar, Muhamed and Samira Ahmed, Progressive Muslims, Yusuf Ali, and Arberry.

## 2- Polysemy and its effect on translation:

In a different notion from homonymy, polysemy is the same as homonymy which is popular among languages and well-known for them. The homonym often refers to a word with two or more meanings. However, for some reason this meaning is incomplete. In homonym: Firstly, it should have several meanings one of which is used for each of these applications, and secondly, this term should be adapted in the context in

such a way it can give the potential for different meanings, regardless of any possible lexical case (Tayeb Hosseini, 2009:25). It has been referred also typically to semantic relation and multimedia nature of meanings in the literal definition of this concept (Yule, 2005:107; Vicente & Falcum, 2017:2).

According to the expressions used by Qur'anic scholars, polysemy has been mentioned with figures of speech and similar cases (Pakatchi & Afrashi, 2020:64) because it has been stipulated in homonym that each of meanings should be coined for a specific term, but no specific limit has been stipulated for concepts of figurative speech and as a result, it covers a wider range than homonym (Jawāhirī, 2012:70).

It seems that the topic of polysemy has a very close border with hyponymy and the subject of synonymy, while these three categories substantially differ from each other. One lexicon has been coined for different meanings in hyponymy, which is approximately the same as homonymy, including figurative, factual, and or both, and in synonymy or the same meaning, several lexicons have the same meaning (Imami, 2016:74). These conversations and different attitudes have been so far followed with a lot of challenges even among classic scientists. The groups of pros and cons have presented several definitions and types for the presence and or absence of homonymy, absence or presence of different cases, etc. (Nekoonam, 2011: 308-330) It seems polysemy is derived from time change due to time distance from date of descending Holy Qur'an so that if Qur'anic text is presented outside the addressing context, their lexicons may lose their previous semantic transparency and they become ambiguous and concise and as a result,

they may convey different meanings. Now, if this text acquires several concepts with its historical process it typically signifies polysemy (Tayeb Hosseini, Ibid, 26; Pakatchi, 2013:180). It can be found from this process that why some linguists have assumed collocation constraint as necessary for this concept (Safavi, 2001:62). Since the evolution of time, as it is mentioned earlier, creates abstractions and creates semantic possibilities in the process of time; hence, the adverb of cohabitation is included in the phenomenon of polysemy. In any case, what seems clear is that the polysemous characteristic of lexicons is an inevitable property in Arabic and English languages and it makes the translator involved when exposed to a text and the semantic conveyance of it to another language (Mohammad, 2008:1). Some group assumes topics of lexical cases and the like including three categories of lexical homonymy, reality and figurative and semantic homonymy and they believe polysemous phenomenon specifically includes lexical homonym (Nekoonam, Ibid, 308), but no difference has been so far specified too clearly among lexical homonymy and polysemy (Mohammed, Ibid, 9).

It is inferred from aforesaid issues entirely the pivotal point "relation and relations between lexicons" in the definition of polysemy; although this may be typically related to the topic of lexical cases and the like, given in historical texture, these concepts specifically indicate the relationship among bilingual lexicons. Doubtless, the existing relationship is one of the important themes in translation between bilingual terms either it is embodied within the wide range of lexical cases and similar terms or assumed as a special kind of them. The

translation versions of the Holy Qur'an from English translators are discussed in this paper concerning the historical approach toward Verse No 55 of Surah Āl-e 'Imrān and also on the other hand with regard to semantic aspects of the Arabic term 'توفّیٰ'.

## 3- Jesus's death and ascension in evangel:

It has been narrated in four evangels after expressing the old plot made by the Jews to kill Jesus and after public support from this plot and their decision for killing him based on their style that was hanging by the gallows and according to what Cicero implied, it was called as the worst type of torture for the elimination of someone. (Rāzī, 1963: vol. 3: 1393) (Adib Al-Ali, 2006:30). Despite a few differences concerning the quality of the death of Jesus Christ mentioned in Evangels, all of the quotations are typically the same about his killing. Namely, it is felt from all of those narratives a type of consensus about his crucifixion. Those accounts about the quality of killing and the ascension of Jesus Christ have been reported in the Evangels as follows:

Mathews' Evangel (verses 17, 18 and 19): Jesus's prophesy about his death:

- And when Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he recalled his apostles in privacy and told them:
- Now, we are going to Jerusalem, and the son of Adam will be submitted to heads of priests and oracles and they will sentence him to death;
- And he will be delivered to the peoples to mock and whip and crucify him and he will ascend on the third day.

Mathews' Evangel, Chapter XXVI: Plot to kill Jesus:

- And as Jesus finished all of these statements he told his disciples:

- You know that Passover Feast will be two days later and the Son of Adam will be submitted for crucifixion.
- Then, heads of priests and oracles and old men of this people will gather in the abbey of the head of priests that was called Caiaphas;
- They consult with each other to entangle Jesus by trickery to kill him.
- But they said nay, it was not appropriate to wreak havoc upon time of the feast.

Mathews' Evangel, Chapter XXVII, Crucifixion of Jesus (in detail, especially in verses 35 and 50):

- Then, they crucified him and tore his dress and took a lot so that what the prophet had said to come true that they will tear my cloth among them and take the lot on my dress.
- Jesus cried out loudly and gave up his soul.

This story has been expressed with the same quality in Mark's Evangel, Chapter XV, verses (15, 20, 24, 25, and 27); Luke's Evangel, Chapter XXIII, number of verses: 56; and John's Evangel, Chapter XXI, number of verses: 42 similar to the quality narrated in Mathews' Evangel, but it has been referred to the quality of murder of Jesus Christ in the remaining part of this story by some statements e.g. 'his revival after three days' and 'Ascension of his body and soul to the heavens at the same time' narrated in three evangels of Mathews, Mark, and Luke. However, the verses were concerned with the death of Jesus Christ and eventually his burial and typically his death forever in John's Evangel.

Based on the teachings of the Bible in Christian belief, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an absolute subject and there are only some different opinions

about his revival after three days after the story of crucifixion (Mobaleghi Abadani, 1994, vol. 1:276; Noss, 1975:405; Ghadiani, 2002:163) as already mentioned.

## 4- Death[1] and ascension of Jesus in Holy Qur'an

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[1]. **Semiology of Arabic terms 'توفّة' and 'الرّ':** Arabic term 'توفّی' is derived from the root of 'وفی' means *'finished'* that may refer to death e.g. 'تَوَفّاهُ الله' (literally, God seized his soul). (Farāhīdī, 1988:8/410) This word is also used for the death of a deed body, living person, property, and a number of individuals of a group as well and it means respectively as death, seizure of soul, the time including days, months, and ages of a dead person passed in this world, taking of property entirely, and perfect count of members of a group of people (Azharī, 2000:421/15). This term denotes the completion and termination of a period of time, namely the finishing of life e.g. due date of life of a human being (Ibn Manzūr, 1993: 399/15). One of the other meanings of this word is *'sleep'* because wisdom is totally removed during sleep (Turayhī, 1996, 445/1). The completion of action with commitment is assumed as a single rule about the concept of this word and this commitment is the same in any case; either by emerging or by legislation and or with normal assumption because it occurs latently in its root and the cause of such latency is perfection and excellence of something and it denotes many examples such as life, condition, vow, etc. However, death may not be included in the seizure of the soul of someone. (Mostafavi, 2008, 178/13)

The semantic aspects of this term in the Holy Quran generally include the followings:

a) Ascension to the heavens: *'I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me'*[1][1] (Surah Āl-e 'Imrān (3:55)[1][1]

b) Seizure of souls by death: *'Surely (as for) those whom the angels cause to die…'*[1][1] (Nisā', 4:97); *'Those whom the angels cause to die in a good state…'*[1][1] (Nahl, 16:32);

c) Capture of human's senses by sleep: *'And He it is Who takes your souls at night (in sleep)…'*[1][1] (An'ām, 6:60); *'God takes the*

souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep…'[1] (Zumar, 39:42); (Damghani, 1983: 492, 493) (Askari, 2006: 151)

d) Termination and perfection: '…fulfill Allah's covenant; this He has enjoined you with that you may be mindful'[1] (An'ām, 6:152); '…I give full measure and that I am the best of hosts?' (Yousef, 12:59)[1] (Ghorashi, 1992: 7/231)

**Term 'الرفع'**

Arabic term 'رافع' is derived from 'رفع' means to lift versus to take down if it is said that someone lifted me up or took me down (Saheb, 1993:233). Proximity is another meaning for this word (Ibn Fares, 1983: 424/2). Some scholars have assumed this meaning when it is used with Arabic proposition 'الى' (toward) (Turayhī, 1996: 4/238) while some other groups have expressed the meaning as a priority and coming and bringing of something or somebody toward something or somebody else e.g. a governor person. (Morteza Zobeidi, 1993: 11/169)

The most major semantic aspects of this term in the Holy Quran include as follows: Capture: 'And We lifted the mountain (Sainai) over them...'[1] (Nisā' 4:154); voice loudness and coarseness: 'O Believers! do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet…'[1] (Hujurāt 49:2); Sitting on something: 'And he raised his parents upon the throne…'[1] (Yousef, 12:100); ascension and lifting: 'O Jesus, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me…'[1] (Al Imran, 3:55); Ranking preference of something over another: 'Possessor of the highest rank, Lord of power…'[1] (Ghāfir 40:15); and virtue and superiority: '…We have exalted some of them above others in degrees…'[1] (Zukhruf, 43:32). (Damghani; 1985: 391/1)

Superiority and magnificence include comprehensive meaning in this word and each of these concepts is revealed naturally concerning the examples and collocation words.

It has been referred to this issue in Surah Āl-e 'Imrān (3:55)[1] and also in lack of his crucifixion, especially in Surah Nisā' (4:157).·

Similar to different attitudes of the Christians about the death and ascension of Jesus Christ, there are distinct approaches among exegetes of the Holy Qur'an about the aforesaid verse because of semantic aspects of the Arabic term 'توفّی'. The commonalities among their approaches to these two terms (توفّی and رفع) are as follows:

4-1- Capture from the earth and ascension to the heavens without death: (Tūsī, nd: 477/2; Kāshānī: 1989: 159/1; Tabrisī: 1993: 758/2; Ibid: 1991: 177/1Y Abolfotooh Rāzī: 1987: 350/2; Jazā'irī: 2009: 317/1; Modaresi: 1998: 571/1; Tayeb: 1990: 219/3; and Sunnite exegetes: Tabarī: 1991: 204/3; Tha'labī: 2001: 81/3; Baghawī: 1999: 447/1; Fakhr Rāzī: 1999: 238/8; Khazen:

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[1]. And when Allah said: O Jesus, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so l will decide between you concerning that in which you differed.

إِذْ قَالَ اللّهُ يَا عِيسَى إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

[2]. And their saying: Surely we have killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the apostle of God; and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so (like Jesus) and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for sure.

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُواْ فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُم بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلاَّ اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا

1994: 251/1; Samin: 1993: 378/4; Tha'labī, 1997: 53/; Ālūsī: 1994: 176/2)

4-2- Seizure of soul and body without delay (Qomi Mashadi: 1989: 112/3; Kharaz Rāzī: 1980: 99; Majlesī: 1982: 238/45; Ibn Bābiwayh: 2016: 78/1; Ibn Abi Zeinab: 2018: 58; Shah 'Abdul'azīmī: 1984: 116/2)

4-3- Assertion on capture as the meaning of seizure of soul and body at the same time and immediately: (Tabātabā'ī: 2011: 208/3; Makarem Shirazi: 2000: 515/2; Fadlullah: 1998: 48/6; Karami: 1981: 52/2; Davarpanah: 1987: 427/5)

4-4- The Arabic term 'ووت' as meaning of sleep, ascension to the heavens in sleep: According to some evidences from verses of Holy Qur'an such as these verses: '*And He it is Who takes your souls at night (in sleep)…*'[1] (An'ām, 6:60); '*God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep; then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term…*'[2] (Zumar 39:42): Kashānī: 1984: 205/1; Jazā'irī: 2009: 317/1; Shawkānī: 1993: 395/1; Soltan Ali Shah: 1987: 267/1; Āmilī: 1981: 87/2; and see also Exegesis of Makhzan Al-Irfān and Qur'anic interpretations: Tustarī: 2001:123; Zamakhsharī: 1986: 366/1; Baghawī: 1998: 447/1; Ibn Kathīr: 1997: 40/2; Ibn Jawzī, 1995: 154/1; Khazen: 1994: 251/1; Ibn Ashur, 1999: 107/3; Shanqītī: 2006: 219/1; Soyūtī, nd: 189/2; Ibn Ghayem: 1983: 182/1; Ibn Abi Jumhūr, 1984: 73/4; Tabarī: 1991: 204/3; Tabarānī, 2008:

60/2; Tha'labī: 2001: 81/3; Ibn Atīyah: 2001: 445/1; Tha'lab: 1997: 53/; Ālūsī: 1994: 176/2)

4-5- The Arabic term 'ووت' meaning as death (demise): (Eshkevari, 1993: 329/1; Qomi Mashhadi, 1989: 112/3; Jazā'irī, 2009: 317/1; Shubbar, 1986: 327/1; Soltan Ali Shah, 1987: 267/1; Mughnīyah, 2002: 70/2; Āmilī, 1981: 87/2; Mughnīyah, 2003: 71; and Sunnite exegetes: Ibn Abi Hātam, 1998: 661/2; Tabarānī, 2008: 60/2; Tha'labī, 2001: 81/3; Ibn Atīyah, 2001: 445/1; Fakhr Rāzī, 1999: 238/8; Rasānī, 2008: 195/1; Ibn Kathīr, 1998: 40/2; Abu Hayān, 1999: 177/3; Nezam Al-Aaraj, 1995: 171/2; Soyūtī, 1983: 36/2; Ālūsī, 1994: 176/2; Ghasemi, 1997: 324/2; Zuhaylī, 1990: 237/3; Al-Ghazi, 2003: 348/5)

4-6- The Arabic term 'ووت' meaning as the appointed term and ascension to the heavens to protect from damage of enemies to kill him; namely, to get rid of the given plot planned for his murder: (Shubbar, 1986: 327/1; Shawkānī: 1993: 395/1; Ha'iri Tehrani, 1959: 207/2; Feid, 1996: 296/1; Feid Kāshānī, 1994: 341/1; and Sunnite exegetes: Zamakhsharī, 1986: 366/1; Baydāwī: 1997: 19/2; Abu Hayān: 1999: 177/3; Buqā'ī, 2006: 98/2; Sivasi, 2006: 158/1; Abol Saud, 1983: 43/2; Haghi Barsovi, nd: 41/2; Ghonavi, 2001: 166/6; Ālūsī: 1994: 176/2; Marāghī, nd: 168/3; Nawawī, 1996: 128/1)

Despite different exegetic viewpoints, it seems that concerning the lexical root of the Arabic term 'توفّى' and also the coordination of the phrase ' إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ: *I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me*' with God's ultimatum in Verse No 157 of

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١- وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم بِاللَّيْلِ... ((ره ١١١١١ ٦٦٠ ١)

٢- ...اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي هننمهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَى عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَى إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى... ((ره زمر ٣٩٤٢)

Surah Nisā' (4:158) regarding no-crucifixion and also lack of killing of him (بَل رَّفَعَهُ ا َّ ُ إِلَيْهِ): *But! God took him up to Himself*…), it is the best interpretation of living of body and soul of Jesus Christ until now and since the ascension of both of them to the heavens. As a result, God terminates any kind of dispute among the Jews and Christians about this story. It should be noted that the expression of this statement from the Holy Qur'an about the ascension of both soul and body of Jesus Christ at the same time aims to a miraculous stance regarding the story of Jesus Christ's Ascension designated by the Holy Qur'an. (Tabātabā'ī, 2011: 219/5; Javadi Amoli, vol. 14:393).

**5- Jesus's Ascension in semantic translations of translators:**

Primarily and before entering into semantic analysis of translators, the semantic versions of translators are expressed about the translation of phrase: (إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ') as follows:

| Row | Translator | Semantic Translation |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Muhammad Habib Shakir | I am going to terminate the period of your stay(on earth)and cause you to ascend unto Me |
| 2 | Thomas Ballantyne (Ta'lim Ali) Irving | I shall gather you up and lift you towards Me |
| 3 | Tahereh Saffarzadeh | I will take You to Me and will raise you to Myself |
| 4 | Seyed Ali Quli Qarā'ī | I shall take you[ r soul ], and I shall raise you up toward Myself |
| 5 | Muhammad Marmaduke – William Pickthall | I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me |
| 6 | Hafez Gholam Sarvar | I will save you from your enemies, raise you to Myself |
| 7 | Muhamed & Samira Ahmed | I am making you die and raising you to Me |
| 8 | Progressive Muslims | I will take you, and raise you to Me |
| 9 | Abdullah Yusuf Ali | I will take thee and raise thee to Myself |
| 10 | Arthur John Arberry | I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me |

As seen in the following diagram, most the translations of the term 'توفّی' are concerned with four translated phrases, and also term 'رافع' includes three translated phrases.
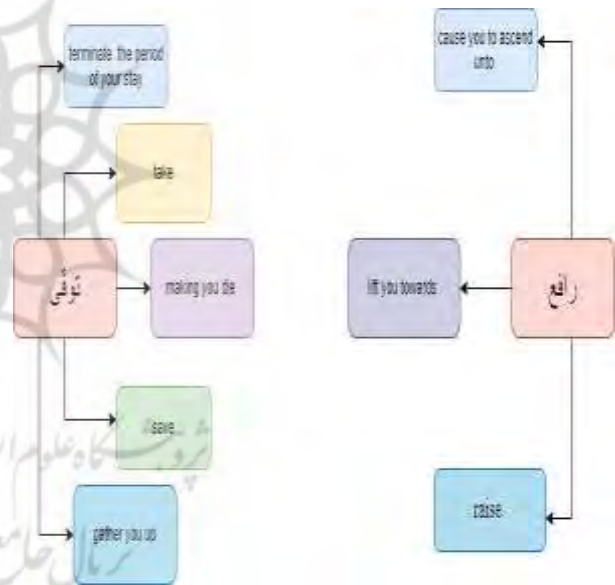


What needs to be expressed before the analysis of translated versions is to pay attention to the order of verse structure by translators regardless of order preference for this verse according to the attitude of some Qur'anic exegetes (Moghatel Ibn Soleiman, 2002: 279/1; Tabrisī, 1993: 758/2; Soltan Ali Shah, 1987: 267/1; Ha'iri Tehrani, 1959: 207/2; Balāghī, 2007: 106/7; Sabzevari, 1998: 62; Tabarī, 1991: 204/3; Tabarānī, 2008: 60/2; Diniwarī, 2003:

109/1; Tha'labī, 2001: 81/3; Māwirdī, nd: 397/1; Ghazi Abdul Jabbār, 2005: 67; Ibn Atīyah, 2001: 445/1; Ibn Jawzī, 2001: 288/1; Ibn Anbārī, 1983: 205/1; Fakhr Rāzī, 1999: 238/8; Nasafī, 1995: 241/1; Ibn Kathīr, 1999: 40/2; Qurtubī, 1985: 101/4; Rasānī, 2008: 195/1; Ibn Kathīr, 1998: 40/2; and see also: Exegesis of Gharā'ib Al-Qur'an wa Raghā'ib Al-Furqān, 173/2; Qur'anic Interpretations: Lubb al-Ta'wīl fī Ma'ānī Al-Tanzīl, 251/1; Tha'labī's Exegesis, 53/2; Al-Durr Al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr bil-Ma'thūr, 36/2; Bayān Al-Ma'ānī, 348/5; Sābūnī, 187/1). Most of the translators of this phrase are trying to convey it semantically based on the order of the phrase 'إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ' per se; thus, it is dealt with inquisition and analysis on semantic translations of translators concerning this structure:

**5-1-1- Translation by Muhammad Habib Shakir**:

The term 'مُتَنِّي' has been translated into this phrase (*terminate the period of your stay (on earth)*) in Shakir's translation so that it typically signifies the due date for death and finishing of residence of someone or something within a place and time interval. Using of free phrase (*on earth*), the translator emphasizes typically this concept that denotes Jesus's residence on earth has terminated and this termination has led to his ascension (*cause you to ascend*). It seems that this translator has used this type of translation that means death and this has been observed in Qur'anic interpretations from some of the exegetes (Zamakhsharī, 1987: 366/1; Baydāwī, 1999: 19/2; Abu Hayān: 2001: 177/3; Buqā'ī, 2008: 98/2; Soyūtī, 2008: 158/1; Abul Saud, 1983: 43/2; Haghi Basovi, nd: 41/2; Ghonavi,

2001: 166/6; Ālūsī, 1993: 176/2; Marāghī, nd: 168/3; Nawawī, 1998: 128/1; Shubbar, 1988: 327/1; Shawkānī, 1985: 395/1; Ha'iri Tehrani, 1959: 207/2; Feid, 1998: 296/1; Feid Kāshānī, 1995: 341/1), or it refers to one of the lexical meaning of this word (Ibn Manzūr, 1993: 399/15; Azharī, 2000: 421/15).

Although, one could not find explicitly the quality of physical and spiritual ascension of Jesus Christ in this translation, concerning the term '*terminate*' adjacent to '*ascend*' one may notice a kind of physical and spiritual ascension of Jesus Christ at least. The term '*ascend*' is a lexicon that may be used when a kind of motion to the upper point or type of ascending flight is inferred from this term which is prominently observed in Shakir's translation. It is necessary to imply this point that by addition (exegetic adding) and implication of this translated expression within parentheses it has caused a type of transparency in his translation; particularly where the timely addition of an image for more clarity of concept is considered an advantage of translator's work. (Gholizadeh, 2001:26)

*5-1-2- Translation from 'Thomas Ballantyne Irving' and 'Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall'*:
The term 'مُتَنِّي' has been translated in translations done by Irving and Pickthall. Although the term '*gather[1]*'

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[1]. Concerning Updating an online feature of English thesauruses on the website 'https://dictionary.cambridge.org', it was tried

stands for collection and accumulation, if it is used in this phrase (gather+someone+up) in English, it may signify the concept of 'to embrace someone and support from someone inclusively'. However, such support may typically relate rescue of Jesus Christ concerning Muslim belief among the given translator, any transparent expression is not inferred from it about the Ascension of Jesus Christ unless because of the collocation of this term with *'ascend'* and due to its inclusion of the type of ascension in Pickthall's translation one could implicitly infer this issue. This support was for the sake of the Ascension of Jesus Christ and the expression of this statement in Irving's translation with the phrase (lift+ toward) may denote taking him up toward God and this can typically signify his ascension. Although, despite semantic synonymy among them in the distinction between the terms 'ascend' and 'lift', it seems that in the former, an individual personally ascends without any tool or by compulsion, in the latter term, it is a kind of taking up by tools. It is also likely impossible to infer his physical lifting along the physical ascension of Jesus Christ in translation diction by Pickthall, but his physical ascension may be also inferred in the selection of translation term by Irving concerning the aforesaid distinction.

This may not be irrelevant if the reason for such diction is typical because of the impact of belief of some of Sunnite exegetes in the interpretation of this phrase into 'Spiritual Ascension' and in some of them as 'Ascension of soul along with body' for this group of translators, particularly Irving and Pickthall (Zamakhsharī, 1986: 366/1;

Baydāwī, 1997: 19/2; Abu Hayān, 1999: 177/3; Buqā'ī, 2006: 98/2; Soyūtī, 2006: 158/1; Abu Saud: 1983: 43/2; Haghi Borsovi, nd, 41/2; Ghonavi, 2001: 166/6; Ālūsī, 1994: 176/2; Marāghī, nd: 168/3; Nawawī, 1996: 128/1).

### 5-1-3- Translations from Saffarzadeh[1], Qarā'i[2], Progressive Muslims, Yusuf Ali[3], and Arberry[4]

The word *'take'* has been considered equivalent to the Arabic term 'توفّیٰ' in translation versions of these translators and it means absolutely as grasping and capture. This term is almost the most literal proximate to the word 'توفّیٰ'. Although this term of capture has been absolutely mentioned in translations of these translators and implied ambiguously it can report both only spiritual ascension and physical and spiritual ascension together so that it does not display transparently the concept of this verse in the story of Ascension of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, based on the collocation of the terms 'take' and 'raise' in the translation of the Arabic term 'رافع' and concerning their semantic use, especially where something may cause ascension and take up, it can be concluded that translators have focused their efforts on a commitment to the lexicon of this verse and thus its literal translation and this also assumed as another emphasis in lack of semantic conveyance in representational translation by these translators. The absolute term 'capture' has been noticed in the attitude of some of Holy Qur'an exegetes either Shiite

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to select all of the English linguistic analyses based on the given site.

[1]. Tahereh Saffarzadeh
[2]. Ali Quli Qara'i
[3]. Abdullah Yusuf Ali
[4]. Arthur John Arberry

or Sunnite (Tabarī, 1991: 204/3; Tha'labī, 2001: 81/3; Baghawī, 1999: 447/1; Fakhr Rāzī, 1999: 238/8; Khazen, 1994: 251/1; Samin, 1993: 378/4; Tha'labī, 1997: 53/; Ālūsī, 1994: 176/2; Kharaz Rāzī, 1981: 99; Majlesī, 1982: 238/45; Ibn Bābiwayh, 2016: 78/1; Ibn Abi Zeinab, 2018: 58; Shah Abdul 'Azīmī, 1984: 116/2; Makarem Shirazi, 2000: 515/2; Fadlullah, 1998: 48/6; Karami, 1981: 52/2; Ansarian, nd: 371/7; Davarpanah, 1987: 427/5) and reader of this text may not consider exegete's bias and thus related translator in diction of such translation in this regard.

## 5-1-4- Translation by Hafez Gholam Sarvar[1]

Translation of the term 'save' as equivalent for the word 'توفّیٰ' by Sarvar signifies the rescue of Jesus Christ from those who plotted his killing. Despite the aforesaid report, such a translation may make the real image of the adventure of the Ascension of Jesus Christ ambiguous and it is followed by a kind of free semantic notion without proximity to the lexicon in the source language in which the audience sees oneself involved in a maze of Ascension Story. Although the translation of the term 'رافع' to 'save' denotes the Ascension of Jesus Christ, due to the ambiguity of the word 'save' some comprehensible points will be remained unresolved for this subject so far: Does this rescue relate to his death or posthumous soul ascension? And or both physical and spiritual ascensions at the same time?!

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[1]- Chaudry Mohammad Sarvar

## 5-1-5- Translation from Muhamed and Samira Ahmed:

Similar to the translation from Sarvar, the equivalence of the term 'توفّیٰ' to 'die' in translated versions by these translators may display a kind of translation that could signify the type of rescue from the plot made by killers of Jesus Christ, but did this story occur in this way and was his death an external fact? Although according to the attitude of some linguists (Farāhīdī, 1988: 410/8) and exegetes (Ibn Abi Hātam, 2008: 661/2; Tabarānī, 2008: 60/2; Tha'labī, 2011: 81/3; Ibn Atīyah, 2011: 445/1; Fakhr Rāzī, 2009: 238/8; Raasani, 2008: 195/1; Ibn Kathīr, 1998: 40/2; Abu Hayān, 2009: 177/3; Nezam Al-Aaraj, 2005: 171/2; Soyūtī, 1984: 36/2; Ālūsī, 1994: 176/2; Ghasemi, 1999: 324/2; Zuhaylī, 1992: 237/3; Al-Ghazi, 2003: 348/5) one of the semantic cases for term 'توفّیٰ' stands for death and perhaps such kind of translation typically signifies this semantic probability, it should be seen if this meaning could be tolerated and coordinated with other verses of Holy Qur'an about Ascension of Jesus Christ, especially Verse No 157 of Surah Nisā' (4:157) or whether they confirm it or not. This concept adjacent to the word '*raise*' may also not solve this problem and it only signifies proportional lexical diction by these translators, particularly this type of translation can be assumed as the ascension of his soul after death similar to any other natural death. This notion conflicts typically with the semantic context of verses of Ascension of Jesus in the Holy Qur'an, especially in verse 157 of Surah Nisā' (4:157), of course.

## 7- Conclusion:

Polysemy is one of inevitable phenomena in inter-lingual translation from one language to another,

particularly regarding those verses which are typically placed in a historical process e.g. in verse No 55 of Surah Āl-e 'Imrān (3:55) in Holy Qur'an. Term 'توفّى' is one of the words stand for capture with respect to its root and such capture may convey some concepts e.g. death, sleep, seizure of soul, seizure of both soul and body at the same time. God refers to story of seizure and Ascension of Jesus Christ in aforesaid verse. This story is substantially different in terms of belief between Muslims and Christians, although it refers to his revival after death in some of Evangels. However, by implication of verse No 157 of Surah Nisā' (4:157), Holy Qur'an disproves his death. This Qur'anic verse has been turned into a challenge for Holy Qur'an exegetes and Christians based on its historical texture and inevitably by inspiration from these exegeses, this verse has affected translation versions done by translators of Holy Qur'an. The result of this paper is followed with these findings:

7-1- All translators have been committed to structure of verse and lack of order preference in this verse respectively and they have translated it based on structural order of this verse in their translated works.

7-2- Polysemy mainly referred to term 'توفّى' in translated works of translators.

7-3- The quality of 'seizure of soul' and 'ascension' has been considered clearly in these translations, given that similar to exegesis, translation lacks wide range for perfect expression of meaning and translator has to be committed to frameworks of structure and lexicons of the verse and also to observe faithfulness in translation of meaning, but it seems that some translated works e.g. of Mr. Shakir has dealt with this subject more clearly and

in order to express this point he has referred to this subject by adding element in parentheses instead of non-addition of this point, especially where it has caused more clarity which assumed as punctual and duly task in translation.

7-4- Despite considering original meaning of root of work 'توفّى' in translations by Saffarzadeh, Qarā'ī, Progressive Muslims, Yusuf Ali and Arberry, whereas this may display an image of literal translation, it could not convey message of this verse, especially by translation from one language to another and miraculous story of Jesus Christ's Ascension.

7-5- In addition to their free notion in their translations, Irving and Pickthall have referred exegetically to this story by God's inclusive support from Jesus Christ, but such translations do not express magic story in Holy Qur'an about quality of this miracle and they do not transparently express this support.

7-6- Despite referring to rescue of Jesus Christ in Sarvar's translation, He has taken the same step in to the path of translations by Irving and Pickthall.

7-7- The maximum translation error is observed in translated works by Muhamed and Samira Ahmed in which they display death of Jesus Christ, while it is in conflict with verse No 157 of Surah Nisā' (4:157) and at the same time it may negate objective of Holy Qur'an in expression of story of Jesus Christ; namely, potential for physical and spiritual ascension and his life simultaneously.

7-8- Commitment to lexical aspect of this verse in translated works of some translators e.g. Saffarzadeh (Shiite), Progressive Muslim, Yusuf Ali (Sunnite) and Arberry (Christian)

makes more evident their silence about the impact of their religious belief on translation that was already mentioned.

7-9- And finally, necessity for inquisition into translation of Qur'anic verses, which are focused on religious differences and convey some topics e.g. polysemous phenomenon, is assumed as a highly crucial topic in propagation of teachings of Holy Qur'an into other languages and also their diagnostics for new Muslims who have been already accustomed to their former religious beliefs.

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