

Translation Procedures Used in the Rendition of Quranic Cognate Object Constructions into Persian

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Abstract

Cognate objects are verbal nouns that are morphologically related to their preceding verb by being derived from it. For all their widespread use in Arabic, such constructions are almost non-existent in Persian, and their use in the language is considered a deviation from the normal syntax of Persian. Given this, translating them into a language with no exact equivalents is likely to pose challenges for translators. This language-related problem has been probed in this investigation through a descriptive-analytical research methodology. To see how translators of the Quran set about rendering them into Persian and what compensational syntactic devices they might resort to, a content analytic approach was applied to an aggregate of 53 instances of Cognate Object Constructions (COCs) with their translations by five Persian translators of the holy book freely available on the website *ParsQuran*. It was found that the translators had mostly resorted to the deletion procedure rather than literal rendition, probably to help render them more naturally in the target language. The deleted cases of COC had been supplemented by a range of minor procedures, including transposition through using prepositional phrases and adverbs, the use of metaphors, amplification via absolute adverbs/adjectives and synonymy, and explication.

Keywords: cognate object constructions (COCs), the Quran, translation procedures, Persian translation

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1. Introduction

Translation Studies (TS) as a field, which has already come of age, deals inter alia with language-related problems. This is mainly due to the fact that languages vary, not the least on typological grounds, making the rendition of certain constructions, particularly those absent in a target language, a demanding task for translators to tackle. As a case in point, Cognate Object Constructions (COCs), that is, verbal nouns/noun phrases normally derived from their preceding verb root (e.g., the English example of *The army fought a hard fight*), are one such absent category in modern-day Persian (Khani Kalgay & Halalkhor, 2015). The linguistic phenomenon is normally not used by the speakers and writers following the natural flow of the Persian language.

In the wake of the Arab conquest of Persia in the 5th century A.D. and the subsequent multi-stage mass conversion of Iranians into Islam, the culture, religion, and the language of the dominant ruling party have had a profound bearing on the way next generations of Iranians have lived afterwards (Lashina & Chikrizova, 2023). Iranians, the majority of whom are Muslims and honor the Arabic Quran, have paradoxically paid insufficient attention to learning Arabic. This runs counter to the fact that there are commonalities between Persian and Arabic as a result of language contact, and that they rely for their religious services, to a considerable extent, on Persian translations of the religious texts. The bookstore shelves are no short of renditions of a wide variety of religious books in Arabic, including the Quran and prayer books.

Translation, among other things, has invariably been considered as a source of exerting influence on a target language (Chou et al., 2025). Along similar lines, numerous words and expressions have made their way into both written and spoken Persian through contact with the Arabic language. Such lexical borrowing (Perry, 2005) has helped enrich more languages, including Persian. However, languages seem to have been more resistant to syntactic borrowing, that is, taking in syntactic constructions from another language.

This study was inspired by the researcher taking stock of how rendition of COCs might prove problematic for Persian translators of the Quran. An effort to render such structures verbatim into Persian would detract from the naturalness of a translated text – religious or otherwise – thereby creating syntactic oddity in the language at a literal translation level. The

research undertaken, therefore, set out to uncover the translation procedures deployed by the translators of the Quran in rendering cognate objects from Arabic into Persian – a structure which, as already alluded to, is exotic to the target language. The investigation accordingly addressed this language-related issue, which seems to be unexplored from the point of view of the technicalities of translation procedures deployed by five renowned Persian translators of the holy book.

2. Literature Review

COCs occur in numerous typologically unrelated languages yet with varying frequencies. While Arabic, with its various dialects, is one such language in which the construction is frequently used (Yasin, 2014), English contains far fewer cases of it. COCs consist of a verb and an object which is morphologically and/or semantically related to the preceding verb (Allerton, 2002). The following two English COCs contain objects (a verbal noun) that are derived from the root of the verb, or that share semantic features with it, respectively:

(1) Mary had to fight a hard fight to earn the custody of her daughter.

(2) The peasants fought the battle empty-handed.

There are slight distinctions between COCs in Arabic and English. Whereas the verb in such constructions can be both transitive and intransitive in Arabic, they are exclusively intransitive in English. Also, the former allows for passivation of sentences containing the construction. The following example taken from the Quran illustrates a sentence with a transitive verb:

(3) اَنَا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُبِينًا. (Al-Fath Surah, Verse 1)

Indeed, We made you win (the fight) a clear win.

The most exhaustive account of how COCs work in Arabic has ever been offered by Sibawayh, the 7th-century Persian grammarian of the Arabic language (Iriarte Díez, 2021). Functionwise, the scholar divides COCs into three different types (Iriarte Díez, 2021): (a) emphatic, (b) number-identifying, and (c) manner-identifying cognate objects. The following sample verses or parts thereof are intended to help illustrate types 1 and 2 of COCs (Type 3 has

been represented by example 3 above, where the kind of win or victory has been clearly spelled out in the NP فتحاً مبيناً meaning a clear victory):

(4) وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا. (Al-Tariq Surah, Verse 16)

And (surely) I will deceive them a deceit.

(5) قرأت الكتاب قراءتين. (invented example)

I read the book two readings (= twice).

In Persian, one could identify instances of use of COCs in great works of literature, yet its occurrence in modern-day Persian sounds unnatural and semantically redundant. Some scholars have attributed the existence of a few cases of the construction to the external linguistic influence of the Arabic language in the wake of Arab conquest of Iran and the concomitant syntactic borrowing of it (Khani Kalgay & Halalkhor, 2015). Still, there are researchers who maintain that COCs were used by speakers of Old Persian (Molayi, 2002), and that instances of their use are to be found in the extant religious texts belonging to an era when most people had Zoroastrianism as their religion. The issue of COCs is clearly an unexplored area since very few researchers have dealt with it.

As far as the field of TS is concerned, very few investigations have been conducted to tackle the issue of the rendition of Quranic COCs into Persian. As an example, Sadeghi (2024) explicated upon the different types and functions of cognate objects in the Quran and analyzed only five Quranic verses rendered by a number of translators. The analysis was ad hoc and not grounded on any concepts or theories taken from the field of TS. In yet another research study, Amraei and Marof (2019) did a comparative analysis of the rendition of COCs in two Persian translations (i.e., Fooladvand and Haddad Adel) and found that the two had almost overlooked a semantic-based rendition of the structure. However, they further pointed out that Fooladvand had yielded a better translation in that his translation was more meaning-oriented. This observation was also confirmed by the research carried out by Khani Kalgay and Halalkhor (2015). The researchers carried out an investigation into the way COCs in Al-Nisa Surah in the Quran had been translated into Persian by Fooladvand. The findings showed that the translator had somewhat successfully rendered the nuances of meaning in the constructions, particularly

its emphatic kind. Again, this study was not grounded on the concepts and theories of TS. In addition, it just looked at the work of one translator, namely Fooladvand. Along similar lines, Shokrani (2008) examined the Persian equivalence of a particular type of Arabic cognate object, or absolute object as he called it, that is, a cognate object construction in which the verb has been ellipted.

All in all, the few studies cited, as already stated, do not seem to be grounded in scholarly discussions of the field of TS. The present study has analyzed the translation of 53 Quranic COCs in the work of five Persian translators and sought to arrive at the translation procedures employed to oil the wheels of rendition of the Quranic verses containing those constructions.

3. Method

A product-oriented descriptive approach (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013) has been adopted in this research. In product-oriented approaches to TS research, as the name suggests, the emphasis is on an aspect or given aspects of a finished product (i.e., a translated text) rather than the mental processes the translator goes through to achieve it (Hatim, 2013). The data of this study consists of 53 Quranic verses or parts thereof containing COCs. The instances of COCs were identified following a close perusal of the relevant literature on the issue (Amraei & Marof, 2019; Khani Kalgay & Halalkhore, 2015; Sadeghi, 2024; Shokrani, 2008; Vaezi et al., 2017). The literature just cited, wholly or partially dealing with the issue of Quranic COCs and recording instances of such usage, was (re)read, and manifestations of this linguistic phenomenon in them were spotted and tabulated. Subsequently, their types were identified and recorded in tabular form. As such, the sampling procedure might be said to be one of availability or convenience type, as the already available data (i.e., that gleaned by other researchers) was exposed to scrutiny. Following that, the website of ParsQuran (<http://www.parsquran.com>), a website supplying free translations of the holy book into the two languages of Persian and English, was searched for the translation of cognate objects by five well-known Iranian translators (i.e., Fooladvand, Khorramshahi, Ansarian, Ghomshei, and Makarem Shirazi).

A strict definitional approach to COCs was adopted in the phase of data collection in that only verbal nouns deriving from the root of the preceding verb were selected and set apart

for analysis. Other variants of COCs, such as verbal nouns preceded by word parts other than the verb (see the following example), were left out:

(6) قَالَ اذْهَبْ فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَاؤُكُمْ جَزَاءً مَوْفُورًا (إسراء، آیه ٦٣)

(He) said: Whoever follows you from among them, then their punishment will be Inferno, a severe punishment. (Al-Isra Surah, verse 110) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

In (6) above, as a case-in-point of COCs excluded for examination in this study, the COC جزاء موفوراً has been preceded not by a verb but by a derivative noun, that is, جزاء in the noun phrase construction جزاؤکم.

The verses and their five translations were subsequently tabulated and underwent a qualitative content analysis to help the researcher arrive at the range of translation procedures the translators had employed. The researcher (re)read the renditions and took notes of the way they had been translated into Persian. The notes were then developed into codes representing translation procedures. Wherever there were already established terms for particular procedures in the literature, they were adopted for use by the researcher. Translation procedures, which should not be confused with translation strategies, are “a specific technique or method used by the translator at a certain point in a text” (Munday, 2016, p. 88), for instance, lexical or syntactic borrowing of a word or structure from the source language. A frequency count was then conducted to help find patterns of use of those procedures.

4. Results

In presenting the findings of this investigation, initially, some descriptive statistics of the type and number of COCs identified from the Quranic verses will be given. Each type will be exemplified by a case-in-point from the data. Subsequently, the type and frequency of the translational procedures arrived at in the data analytic phase will be offered so that the reader could have a feel for the kind of data exposed to analysis in the study. By translation procedures, it is meant the techniques a translator uses at a given time to tackle a language-related problem in a source text rendered into a target one.

Table 1 below yields the type of COCs identified in the Quranic data. As the table shows, whereas the number-identifying kind accounts for the least number of constructions with less than 10% of the total number of occurrences of the structure, the manner-identifying subcategory comprises more than half of the occurrences (58.5%):

Table 1

Frequency of Types of COCs in the Quranic Data

COC type	Number (percentage)
Manner-identifying	31 (58.5%)
Emphatic	18 (34%)
Number-identifying	4 (7.5%)

The following Quranic COCs are intended to help illustrate the three types of the construction, in order of frequency. In sample Quranic verse (7), the cognate object عمل (meaning *deed* or *action*) deriving from the previous verb يعمل, has been postmodified by the adjective صالح meaning *pious*; therefore, it signifies the kind or manner of the deed or action to be taken. Hence, the attribute is described as *manner-identifying*. In (8), the cognate object دَعَا meaning *a call*, derived from the preceding verb يَدْعُونَ, has been given without any postmodifying word or expression. It is thus a case of *emphatic* COC. Example Quranic verse (9) signifies the number of lashes the intended sinner is to receive, that is, eighty (ثمانين). Hence, the term *number-identifying* COC:

(7) فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا (كهف، آية ١١٠)

Thus, whoever craves to meet his God must do deeds, pious deeds. (Al-Kahf Surah, verse 110) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

(8) يَوْمَ يُدْعُونَ إِلَى نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ دَعَاً (طور، آية ١٣)

It is the day when they are called upon to (be inflicted by) the fire of Hell, a call. (Al-Tur Surah, verse 13) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

(9) فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً (نور، آية ٢٣)

Then lash them, eighty lashes. (Al-Noor Surah, verse 23) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

Table 2 shows the number of major translation procedures used by the Iranian translators in rendering COCs of manner-identifying types, by far the most frequently used type of the construction. As the table illustrates, in the majority of cases, the cognate objects and their accompanying characteristic components have been deleted to help ‘domesticate’ (Munday, 2016) the translated text, that is, an effort has been made by the translators to seek to render the target text in ways aligning with the nature of Persian language, a language which appears to be almost lacking in COCs:

Table 2

Main Translation Procedures in the Rendition of the Quranic Manner-identifying COCs and Their Frequency

Translation procedures	Number (percentage)
Deletion	137 (88%)
Literal rendition	18 (12%)
	Total 155 (100%)

The following COC of a manner-identifying توبه نصوحا (meaning *a pure repentance* and deriving from the preceding verb توبوا) helps typify the deletion and literal rendition procedures applied to it by two Iranian translators (i.e., Khorramshahi and Makarem Shirazi), respectively:

(10) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا (التَّحْرِيمُ، آيَة ٨)

You believers (in God)! Repent to God (for what you have wrongly done), a pure repentance. (Al-Tahrim Surah, verse 8) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

(Khorramshahi’s translation) ای مؤمنان به درگاه خداوند توبه‌ای خالصانه کنید،

You believers (in God)! Make a pure repentance to God. (researcher-produced translation of Khorramshahi’s rendition)

(Makarem Shirazi’s translation) ای کسانی که ایمان آورده اید! توبه کنید توبه خالصی،

You who have believed (in God)! Repent to God, a pure repentance. (researcher-produced translation of Makarem Shirazi's rendition)

As is evident from Khorramshahi's translation of the Quranic COC above, the construction has been left out in the Persian translation to try to render it in as natural and redundancy-free a style as possible. Since Persian is a language rich in compound verbs (i.e., verbs comprised of a noun + a verb), the verb توبه کردن (meaning *make a repentance*) with no one-word verb equivalent in the language has been used to render the Arabic verb توبوا into Persian, and the cognate object توبه has been deleted. However, in the translation of the same COC by Makarem Shirazi into Persian, the structure توبه نصوحا has been rendered almost verbatim as توبه خالصی, a structure which sounds to be an oddity in the target language. The first rendition is, therefore, more likely to buy into the Persian language as it fits in well with its internal patterning.

Table 3 likewise displays the main translation procedures deployed by the Persian translators in their rendition of the Quranic verses containing emphatic-type COCs, the second largest group of COCs in the current data. Once again, deletion comprises the majority of cases whereby an attempt has been made to render the target texts in line with the inherent features of Persian language (Needless to say, due to the limited number of number-identifying COCs in the data, a similar tabular representation of the subtype has not been provided at this space):

Table 3

Main Translation Procedures in the Rendition of the Quranic Emphatic COCs and Their Frequency

Translation procedures	Number (percentage)
Deletion	88 (97.5%)
Literal rendition	2 (2.5%)
	Total 90 (100%)

The sample emphatic COC (11) below similarly has been translated in two different ways: once by deleting the unnatural-sounding construction in the target text (i.e., Persian) and on a second occasion by giving a literal translation of it:

(11) وَيُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْرَاجًا (نوح، آیه ۱۸)

And He brings them out, a bringing out (Nooh Surah, verse 8) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

و [پس از آن] شما را [دوباره] بیرون می‌آورد (Khorramshahi's translation)

And (then) He brings you out (again). (researcher-produced translation of Khorramshahi's rendition)

و بیرون می‌آورد بیرون آوردنی [عجیب] (Fooladvand's translation)

And He brings (you) out, a [strange] bringing out. (researcher-produced translation of Fooladvand's rendition)

As far as the deletion procedures are concerned, there were very few purely deleted COCs in the data set. The deleted cases of COCs had been further supplemented by some minor types of translation procedures apparently to help render them in a more natural-sounding and redundancy-free way suiting the characteristic features of the target language, that is, Persian. Such procedures included transposition through using prepositional phrases and adverbs (normally occurring in the emphatic type), the use of simile and metaphor, amplification via absolutes and synonymy, and explicitation. The following instances of deleted COCs in the data (12–16) are intended to be illustrative of supplementary translation procedures:

(12) يَصُدُّونَ عَنْكَ صُدُودًا (نساء، آیه ۶۱)

They turn you down, a turning down. (Al-Nisa Surah, verse 61) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

از تو به شدت روی می‌گردانند! (Ansarian's translation)

They turn away from you with (all) their power. (researcher-produced translation of Ansarian's rendition)

از تو سخت روی برمی‌تابند (Fooladvand's translation)

They turn away from you severely. (researcher-produced translation of Fooladvand's rendition)

In sample Quranic verse number 13, two translations have been given: one by the translator Ansarian and the other by Fooladvand. In both cases, we witness that the COC has been deleted in translation; that is, the said translators had refrained from repeating them in their given renditions. However, whereas the latter has added an adverb سخت meaning ‘severely’ to the translated text, the former has added a prepositional phrase (PP), به شدت, which could be rendered into English as ‘with all their power.’ Example 13 illustrates a metaphorical rendition of the Quranic COCs. Here, the original verse contains a literal sense:

(13) أَنْ تَمِيلُوا مِيلًا عَظِيمًا (نساء، آیه ۲۷)

They wish you would long for it, an extreme longing. (Al-Nisa Surah, verse 27) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

می‌خواهند که شما (از راه حق و رحمت) دور و منحرف گردید. (Qomshei’s translation)

They want you to go astray (from the path of truth and blessing). (researcher-produced translation of Qomshei’s rendition)

In the above example, the source text, that is Arabic, lacking in any metaphorical sense, has been otherwise rendered metaphorically. In the Arabic text, the verb تمیلوا, meaning *to desire (sexually)*, has been freely translated into Persian using the metaphor of *going astray* from the path of truth and blessing. This might have been done by the translator to seek to yield a more euphemistic turn of phrase.

With regard to the translation of emphatic-type COCs in the data, it was found that the translator had deleted the COC in the target text yet had amplified (Vinay & Darbelent, 1995) (i.e., had expanded it at the clausal level) the translation by using absolute adjectives and adverbs (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). The following shows the addition of one such absolute adverb, that is کاملاً (meaning *completely*), to the translated text:

(14) وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا (نساء، آیه ۶۵)

And they surrender, a surrender. (Al-Nisa Surah, verse 65) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

و کاملاً تسلیم باشند. (Makarem Shirazi’s translation)

And they surrender completely. (researcher-produced translation of Makarem Shirazi's rendition)

Amplification had also occurred in the Quranic data through the use of pairs of synonymous words of the same syntactic type – a linguistic phenomenon that is frequently used in Persian and is not considered a marker of redundancy. This was especially found to be the case with Qomshei's rendition of the Quranic verses:

(15) وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا (فجر، آیه ۲۰)

And they love wealth, a great love. (Al-Fajr Surah, verse 20) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

و سخت فریفته و مایل به مال دنیا می‌باشید (و به ثواب آخرت هیچ نمی‌پردازید). (Qomshei's translation)

And you are mesmerized and attracted by wealth (and do not heed the gain of the other world). (researcher-produced translation of Qomshei's rendition)

As we see in the sample verse (15), the Arabic verb *تُحِبُّونَ*, meaning *love*, has been rendered into Persian using a pair of synonymous lexical items *فریفته و مایل به*, which could be translated into the target language roughly as 'be mesmerized and attracted by.' The example also typifies the use of another translation procedure, namely explicitation or rendering explicit in the target language information which is implicit in the source language (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). This procedure, which is by no means infrequent in the translation of all the selected translators, is likely to help the reader to better grasp the meaning contained in the verses and lead them through. Example 16 illustrates another instance of the use of explicitation through the addition of parenthetical information as well as the use of synonyms *مکر و حيله* meaning *deceit and trick*:

(16) وَمَكْرُؤًا مَكَرًا وَمَكْرُؤًا مَكَرًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ (نمل، آیه ۵۰)

And they tricked, a trick, and We tricked, a trick, where they were unaware of. (Al-Naml Surah, verse 50) (researcher-produced translation of the Quranic verse)

و آن کافران (در قتل صالح) مکر و حيله به کار بردند و ما هم آنها را از جایی که هیچ نمی‌فهمیدند به کیفر مکرشان رسانیدیم. (Qomshei's translation)

And those disbelievers used deceit and trick (in the killing of Prophet Salih), and We punished them for their deceit where it did not occur to them. (researcher-produced translation of Qomshei's rendition)

From a linguistic point of view (as well as a religious one), it goes without saying that if the quality of the rendition of the Quran in any language is high and, in particular, it caters for the linguistic and cultural taste of the target language community, it is more likely to capture the attention of potential readers as well as make the highest impact on the existing readership. The analysis of the way the Quranic cognate objects had been translated into Persian by five Iranian translators showed that, via the translation procedure of *deletion*, they had tried to render natural-sounding translations into Persian – a language typographically different from Arabic. If typographical variations are not taken into account by translators, it makes the “degree of translation loss ... maximal” (Alhaj, 2015, p. 55). It stands to reason that construction, at least in a strict sense of the word, is almost absent in Persian, and literally translating them into the language is apt to detract from the quality of a translated text, as it sounds semantically redundant.

To help oil the wheels of a given text, translators might further avail themselves of the resources of the source language. This was actually the case with how the Iranian translators of the Quran went about rendering the holy book into Persian in this study. In effect, they benefited from transposition, that is, “a change of one part of speech for another” (Munday, 2013, p. 90), amplification, or using “more words, often because of syntactic expansion” (Munday, 2016, p. 92) as well as explicitation or simply rendering the less obvious information in the source text as explicit.

5. Conclusion

This study looked into the translation procedures employed by five renowned Iranian translators in rendering the Quranic verses containing COCs, which are almost non-existent in Persian. It was found that the scholars had deployed two major procedures, namely omission and literal translation, and that they, in the case of deleted COCs (accounting for three-fourth of all the procedures), had further supplemented the translated texts by minor translation

procedures such as transpositions involving mostly adverbs and PPs, amplification via the use of absolute adjectives/adverbs and synonymous pairs of words, and explicitation.

One particular limitation of the present study was its limited sample size, which renders generalizability of the findings far from practical. Future researchers could avail themselves of a more sizeable body of data to help provide a bigger picture of the issue at hand. Still, one notable area of study might be a comparison of machine-generated versus human expert-produced renditions of the same linguistic phenomena. On condition it happens, one could expect scholars in TS to become more sensitized to the problematic language-related issue of COCs.

It appears those who want to become professionally involved in translating the Quran and, by extension, other sacred religious texts need training with the principles and theories of TS. Problematic areas such as COCs for translators could be a point of departure in some translator training courses, particularly those targeting Arabic as a source language and Persian as a target one.

Conflict of interest

The author certifies that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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