

# Synonymy in English and Arabic with Reference to the Holy Qur'an: A Contrastive Study

Sana Kamel Al-Omari

Department of English Language and Literature, Irbid University College, Al-Balqa' Applied University, Irbid, Jordan

Abdel-Rahman Husni Abu-Melhim

Department of English Language and Literature, Irbid University College, Al-Balqa' Applied University, Irbid, Jordan

**Abstract**—This is a contrastive linguistic study the primary purpose of which is to shed light on the concept of synonymy as employed semantically in Arabic from one side and English from the other. The study highlights the controversy that surrounds synonymy as debated by classical and modern Arab scholars comparing that to the various opinions held by modern and contemporary English linguists. Since the study is theoretical and qualitative in nature, the researchers relied mainly on different linguistic sources especially those in the field of semantics in the data collection process. Such sources included specialized dictionaries, linguistic encyclopedias, scholarly books in addition to the Arabic and English - translated versions of the Holy Qur'an. The major findings of the study revealed that synonymy is a universal phenomenon that is not limited to Arabic or English, there is no such things as absolute synonymy but rather near synonymy exists at best, there is a clear controversy that exists among classical and modern Arab linguists concerning the existence or absence of synonymy in language. Finally, Absolute synonymy in the Holy Qur'an is simply an illusion and it does not exist at all. What exists is simply near synonymy which appears to be synonymous at first glance but reveals different and distinct semantic meanings upon deeper semantic analysis of the vocabulary items that are generally regarded to be synonymous at the surface.

**Index Terms**—general synonymy, absolute synonymy, near synonymy, Qur'anic synonymy, affirmation of synonymy, denial of synonymy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Synonymy is an important sense relation which refers to the relationship that exists between words such as synonymy, antinomy, hyponymy, polysemy, etc.

### *Definitions*

English linguistic scholars provide various definitions of the term '*synonymy*'. Jackson (1988) for example, points out that two words are Synonymous if they have the same meaning. Therefore, synonymy needs to be defined in terms of contexts or usage. He further states that two words are said to be synonymous if they are interchangeable in all contexts. Jackson also claims that if the two words are interchangeable in all contexts, this means that the words are strictly synonymous (p.65).

Moreover, Lyons (1968) states that two items are considered synonymous if they have the same sense or meaning. He adds that different synonyms present different shades of meaning affirming that there are few 'real' synonyms in natural languages (p.446).

However, Cruse (1986) defines synonyms as "lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of 'central' semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as 'minors' or 'peripheral' traits". He adds that "Synonyms also characteristically occur together in certain types of expressions. For instance, a synonym is often employed as an explanation, or a clarification of the meaning of another word" (p.267).

Furthermore, Ullman (1972) points out that "if more than once word is available for the expression of the same idea, the writer will select the one which is best suited to the context: The one which carry the right amount of emotion and emphasis, which will fit most harmoniously into the phonetic structure of the sentence, and which will be attuned to the general tone of the utterance" (p.151).

Farghal (1998) defines synonyms as those words that sound different but have the same or nearly the same meaning. That is to say, synonymy is the relationship that holds between two words that have the same meaning. He points out that absolute synonymy are hard to find in English and other human languages. He adds that most native speakers of English should consider the pairs of words '*sofa/couch*' synonymous. He gave an example to support his argument. This example is '*He is sitting on the sofa*' and '*He is sitting on the couch*' (p.116).

Palmar (1976) points out that synonymy is used to mean '*sameness of meaning*'. He says that for the dictionary-maker many sets of words that have the same meaning are synonymous. He points out that this makes it possible to define '*gala*' as '*festivity*' or '*mavis*' as '*thrush*'. He adds that synonymy can be defined as symmetric hyponymy. So, if '*mavis*' and thrushes are synonymous, we can say that all '*mavises*' are thrushes and all thrushes are '*mavises*'. Moreover, he states that English is rich in synonyms for the historical reason that its vocabulary has come from two different

sources, from Anglo-Saxon, French, Latin and Greek. However, Palmar argues that there are no real synonyms and that it seems unlikely that two words that have exactly the same meaning would both survive or exist in a language (pp.88-89).

Arab linguistic scholars also provide definitions of the word synonymy.

Ramadan (1983) defines synonymy as utterances that convey the same meaning and are mutually interchangeable in all contexts. He points out that absolute synonymy is extremely rare. He adds that absolute synonymy represents extra fillers that language cannot provide easily. When this type of synonymy occurs, it does so for a very brief and limited duration. As soon as this happens, very minor semantic differences begin to appear gradually between utterances that are generally considered synonymous. Thus, the use of each utterance becomes suitable and convenient to express a specific meaning out of the multi uses originally possible for each utterance (pp.309-310).

Al-Zayadi (1980) says that the meaning of synonymy has changed throughout history as a result of scholars who pondered over this phenomenon due to clear differences in their approaches and beliefs. The idea of synonymy was initially represented in the differences in the use of vocabulary items that refer to the same meaning or object. This happened prior to reaching consensus and the development in research to finally arrive at an understanding for its concept. He adds that this situation remained the same until the concept of synonymy was studied by modern linguistic scholars who placed a limit on absolute synonymy and imposed more specific constraints concerning its use compared to those imposed by former linguistic scholars. Therefore, it was impossible to expect the concept of synonymy to have been identically used by linguistic scholars throughout the various periods of history (p.48).

## II. PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this study is to shed light on the phenomenon of synonymy in both English and Arabic with special reference to the Holy Qur'an. A review of related literature concerning this issue revealed that there was relatively little attention paid by linguists and language scholars to this phenomenon which fosters the need for further research into this issue. This shows that synonymy deserves greater attention and needs to be studied thoroughly as strongly recommended by Cruse (2004), who directly stated that "Much research remains to be done in the field of synonymy". Moreover, this study will attempt to draw comparison and contrast between the use of synonymy in Arabic as opposed to its usage in English highlighting the various theories and opinions offered by scholars and linguists who specialized in the study of both languages.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

In linguistic research, basically two factors have been used to test for synonymy: Semantic resemblance and replacement or substitutability in syntactic structure. Though there are many several factors in deciding whether words are synonymous, semantic similarity is the most important (Murphy, 2003, p.137).

Murphy (2003) points out that "words can be more or less similar in two ways. They are more similar (than another pair) if they share more attributes in common (having the same denotation, connotation, register, etc.), or they are more similar because they match more closely on anyone of these attributes". He adds that "the most relevant attribute in almost any context would be denotative meaning" (p.137). In other words, how close two words have to be in meaning in order to be synonymous. Consider the following examples:

1. What's a synonym for a prize?--Award.
2. The plaintiff received a hefty award (not a prize) in the lawsuit.
3. Jan won the prize/award for the best drawing.

In the above examples, we can see that award and prize might not be similar enough for the particular sentential context as in (2), but might be perfectly well suited to another sentential context as in (1) and (3). Thus, while award and prize have different senses but for some purposes and certain contexts they are similar enough to be judged as synonyms. He adds that "since similarity judgments involve comparison, the salience of an item's attributes is affected by the item it is being compared with".

Substitutability is the second major factor for synonymy; one word can replace another without changing the sentence meaning.

Palmar suggested two ways of testing synonymy. One way is substitution i.e., replacing one word for another. It has been suggested that if two words are said to be true or total synonyms, they must be interchangeable in all contexts or environments. Indeed, not two words have exactly the same meaning. For example, we can say '*deep*' or '*profound sympathy*' but we can only say '*deep water*' not '*profound water*'.

Another test that is suggested by Palmar is to investigate the opposites or antonyms. For example, '*superficial*' is to be contrasted with both '*deep*' and '*profound*' but '*shallow*' is just in contrast with '*deep*'. Perhaps it seems possible to treat them as synonyms. But they should be interchangeable in all environments in order to consider them as total or true synonyms.

Ullman (1972) mentions three ways to test synonymy. The first test is substitution. He says that this test is one of the fundamental methods of modern linguistics. He adds that even if two words are interchangeable, one will find a certain overlap in meaning and they must be interchanged in some contexts but not in others. For example, one can say

'broadest sense' or 'widest sense', but 'abroad accent' not 'a wide' one. However, he argues that if the difference between synonyms is stylistic, there may be no overlap between them at all. For instance, 'pop off' is hardly substitutable by 'pass away' in any context (pp.143-144).

Finding a common antonym for a pair of synonyms is the second test. For example, the verb 'decline' is synonymous with 'reject' when it means the opposite of 'accept' but no when it is the opposite of 'rise'.

Ullman suggests another way of differentiating between synonyms that is arranging synonyms into a series "where their distinctive meanings and overtones will stand out by contrast". As for example, the different adjectives denoting swiftness: Quick, swift, fast, nimble, fleet, rapid and speedy.

Moreover, he points out that "distinctions between synonyms are a great challenge to the ingenuity of the lexicographer. For many languages there exist special dictionaries of synonyms".

Thus, it is clear that many factors have been used for determining whether two words are classified as synonymous but the most important are replacement and closeness in meaning.

### *Types of Synonymy*

At least three types of synonymic relations have been described in the literature. The first type is full synonymy (Murphy, 2003) or absolute synonymy (Cruse, 1986). These are words that are exactly the same in all aspects and can be interchanged in all contexts. For example, 'hate and loathe/kill' and 'murder'. It has often been pointed out that absolute synonyms are, in fact, partial and extremely rare phenomenon and possibly not existent. It is rare to have two synonymous words that can replace each other in all contexts. For example, one can say 'deep thinking', deep rivers and 'profound thinking' but not 'profound rivers' words tend to differ in some traits or become specialized to specific context.

A second type of synonymy is cognitive synonymy (Cruse, 1986) or sense synonymy (Murphy, 2003). These are pairs of words that have one or more senses but differ in all other senses that they express. An example is 'father' and 'daddy' (Cruse, 1986, p. 274). Both of them refer to 'a biological father'. But 'father' has another sense. 'Father' refers to a religious figure but 'daddy' does not refer to a religious figure. Cruse (1986, p.88) uses a definition where by "x is a cognitive synonym of y if (i) x and y are syntactically identical, and (ii) any grammatical declarative sentence S containing X has equivalent truth-conditions to another sentence S, is identical to S except that x is replaced by Y". The following pair of sentences exemplifies.

1. He plays the violin very well.
2. He plays the fiddle very well.

Assume that sentence (1) is true of the world if we replace 'violin for fiddle', as in (2), the result is a sentence which is also true. The two sentences are said to have the same truth conditions. If we determine that two words have the same truth-conditions in the same sentence, as in (1) and (2), then Cruse considers them synonyms.

A third type of synonymy is near-synonyms or plesionymy (Murphy, 2003 & Cruse, 1986). Near-synonyms have no senses which are exactly the same, but each member of a near-synonym pair has a sense that is similar to a sense of its counterpart. Murphy (2003) gives the examples of *foggy*  $\approx$  *misty* and *mob*  $\approx$  *crowd*. Cruse (1986, p.285) argues that plesionyms yield sentences with different truth-conditions. One can assert one member of a plesionymous pair, while denying the other: It wasn't foggy last Friday-just misty.

The three types of synonymy are not always adopted by linguists. Cruse (1986, p. 268) states that since there are some pairs of words are more synonymous than others, this raises the possibility of a scale of synonymity. Under this view, the higher the degree of synonymity the lexical item has, the closer it is to the end-point i.e., absolute synonymity would be on one end point of the scale and non synonymity would be at the other end; possibly capturing the fact that some words are better synonymous than others. Absolute synonymy can be seen as the zero point in the scale i.e., at the far end of the scale. Near-synonyms lie further down the scale. Cruse adds that "the dividing line between synonymy and non-synonymy is relatively vague in many cases".

Palmar (1976, pp. 89-91) mentions five ways to distinguish between synonyms.

First, some set of synonyms belong to different dialects of the language or to different regions. For example, 'fall' and 'autumn'. Whereas *fall* is used in the USA, 'autumn' is used in Britain. Palmar points out that "the works of dialectologists are full of examples like these. But these groups of words are of no interest at all for semantics. It is simply a matter of people speaking different forms of the language having different vocabulary items".

Second, some synonyms are used in different styles. For instance, *pass away* might be 'die' (posh) or 'pop off' (colloquial). These are difficult to deal with because there is a less clear distinction between the styles than that between dialects.

Third, some pairs of synonyms differ in their emotive or evaluative meanings and the remainder of their cognitive meaning remains the same. For example, 'politician' and 'state man'. A 'politician' is seen as a liar and a deceiver who never tells the truth. While a 'state man' is seen positively as a person who deals with politics. However, Palmar argues that it is a mistake to separate emotive or evaluative meaning from the cognitive meaning because we do not always judge in terms of 'good' and 'bad' but also we judge size and use the suitable term e.g., giant/dwarf, mountain/hill, etc. and other kind of judgments.

Fourth, some synonyms are collocation ally restricted i.e., their occurrence is limited to certain words. Thus *rancid* occurs with 'bacon' or 'butter', 'addled' with 'eggs' or 'brains'. Palmar says that some argued that these are true synonyms but differing only in that they occur in different contexts or environments. In fact they are not.

Finally, some synonyms overlap because their meanings are very close i.e., there a loose sense of synonymy. This kind of synonymy is exploited by the dictionary maker. For example, for the word '*govern*', the dictionary suggests '*direct, control, determine and require*'. Consequently, each of these words has a further set for each getting further away from the meaning of the original word. He adds that dictionaries, unfortunately, do not give us the precise connections and differences between words and their defining synonyms.

Differences in form do not always signal differences in meaning. Ullman (1972, pp.141-142) argued that it is wrong to deny the possibility of complete synonymy. He says that complete synonymy can be found in technical terminologies and "such synonymy may even persist for an indefinite period". For example, in phonetics, the words '*spirants*' and '*fricatives*' can be used synonymously. Another example is the words '*semantics*' and '*semasiology*'. However, he points out that recent studies concerning the formation of industrial jargons have shown that a lot of synonyms will arise around a new invention until they are finally sorted out. In other words, Ullman wants to say that the industrial vocabulary does allow some synonymy even if it is for a short period of time.

Synonymy as defined in Al-Munjed (1997, pp.29-30) is something that follows something else in the literal sense. The idiomatic meaning of synonymy in linguistics is not as clear since there is no consensus by linguists over what synonymy means. This holds to among modern linguists and scholars just as it did among researchers and linguist scholars throughout history since they had fundamental differences between them regarding the definition of this phenomenon.

Sibawaih (1988) was probably the first linguistic scholar in Arabic who pointed to the phenomenon of synonymy in speech. He divided the semantic relationship between words and their meanings into three parts:

1. Two separate words for two different meaning.
2. Two separate words to convey the same meaning.
3. The same pronunciation for two separate words to convey two different meanings.

This classification figured linguistic scholars to launch investigations and conduct numerous studies into the synonymy of synonymy.

However, some modern linguistic scholars follows the steps of former linguistic scholars in their definition and interpretation of synonymy strictly referring to it as the use of different words to convey the same meaning or using different terms to identify the same object. On the other hand, some other contemporary linguistic scholars have reservations and place certain conditions and restrictions over what they may consider synonymous .Such conditions include:

1. Absolute synonymy where the different words convey exactly the same semantic meaning. Although some modern scholars (Ramadan) for example, claimed that this kind of synonymy rare to a great extent.
2. Belonging to the same linguistic environment i.e., for the two separate words to belong to the same dialect. Thus, we should not expect synonymy to take place through words used in different dialects.
3. Belonging to the same era .Therefore, synonymy is supposed to take place between two different words as long as that happens during the same time period. For example, a certain word that is used during the pre-Islamic era may not be considered synonymous with another word that belongs to the post-Islamic era.
4. One of the two words should not have come to existence as a result of a development in the phonological process.

Accordingly, we can safely define synonymy as that synonymy which refers to the existence of two or more words which truly identify a specific object in a genuine and independent manner conveying one and only one semantic meaning in the same linguistic environment.

Skalman (2012) conducted a study focusing on a set of Spanish verbs namely: *arrojar*, *echar*, *lanzar* and *tirar* which all share the meaning "to throw". Data were elicited through a questionnaire consisted of 30 sentences in which a verb was missing from. Respondents were asked to fill in the blank with the verb or verbs that would best complete the sentence. The options were only the four throw-verbs. These verbs exhibit two features; synonymy and polysemy. The researcher investigated the characteristic of the four verbs by exploring data from corpora in two studies (the major source of data is a 400-sentence corpus which is explored using statistical tools) and from an experimental test. The results revealed that each meaning that a verb can express tend to be associated with specific participants roles or arguments (a thrower, an object thrown and a trajectory of motion). Moreover, the results showed that all the meaning extensions are shown to be connected to the central concept '*throwing*' which is shared by all four verbs in addition to other meaning extensions. However, synonymy was only partial since there are many other meanings which the verbs do not share. Speakers also have knowledge of overlap between the verbs uses: where the verbs are used interchangeably and cases where one verb is the only preferred choice.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study is theoretical and qualitative in nature. Therefore, data were collected from several written sources and scholarly reference publications including specialized dictionaries, linguistic encyclopedias and books some of which are available in Arabic only while others are available in English only whereas a few other references were made available in both languages. Since special attention was paid to the use of synonymy in the Holy Qur'an, the researchers conducted a thorough survey and investigation in to the use of synonymy in the Arabic version of the Holy Qur'an as well as the English-translated version of the Holy Qur'an by Yusuf Ali in particular. Selected illustrative examples

regarding the use of synonymy were extracted from several verses from the Holy Qur'an while other examples were chosen from the various references and scholarly books mentioned above.

## V. LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to one type of sense relation that is synonymy involving English and Arabic. This study aims at viewing synonymy in both English and Arabic with specific reference to the Holy Qur'an.

## VI. DISCUSSION

### A. Synonymy in the Sciences of the Holy Qur'an

Al-Munjed (1997, pp. 109-120) points out that the phenomenon of synonymy had the Lion's share throughout history in the studies conducted by various Muslim scholars in their attempts to interpret the meaning of the Holy Qur'an. Similarly, modern Muslim interpreters pay this phenomenon a great deal of attention since the synonymous words have a tremendous impact on clarifying and explicating the Qur'anic meaning. Opinions and stances regarding synonymy vary greatly among those scholars whose primary goal is to interpret the intended meaning of the Holy Qur'anic verse. Such opinions include affirming the existence of synonymy on one hand and refuting its existence on the other. Affirmation of existence or refuting the existence of synonymy varied greatly both in the level and direction.

### B. Affirmation of Synonymy

Affirmation of synonymy was not meant to be studied as an isolated phenomenon but it was dealt with by Muslim scholars as a means to arrive at the intended meaning of the Holy Qur'anic verse in an attempt to show the miraculous nature of the Holy Book. Those who affirmed the existence of synonymy mentioned that it was employed in the Holy Qur'an for different functions including:

1. The use of synonymy for the purpose of emphasis since the use of synonymous words emphasizes a certain meaning. This is achieved through providing the synonymous words such as '*broad highways*', (Al-Anbiya, Verse 31) and '*black intense in hue*', (Fater, Verse 27).

Another way of achieving emphasis is through the use of two successive synonymous words separated by (and) as a connective such as '*Without fear of being overtaken (by Pharaoh) and without (any other) fear*', (Taha, Verse 77) and '*Naught doth it permit to endure, and naught doth it leave alone!*', (Al-Muddaththir, Verse 28).

2. Using substitution or replacement of a certain word in place of another to convey a similar meaning in different verses and different locations for example, they say: '*Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers*', (Al-Baqarah, Verse 170) and they say: '*Nay, we shall follow the ways that we found our fathers (following)*', (Luqman, Verse 21). In addition to, '*qushed forth*', (Al-Baqarah, Verse 60) and '*qushed forth*', (Al-A'raf, Verse 160).

3. The use of synonymy in the interpretation of the Qur'an through providing synonymous words or lexical items that have an approximate meaning for purposes of clarification of Qur'anic meaning and getting rid of any ambiguities surrounding it. An example of this usage is found in Al-Matridi's interpretation of the Holy Qur'an in which he used three different synonymous words to convey the same meaning '*Khalafa, Bara'a and Sawwa*' which all convey the same meaning '*created*'.

It is worth noting that Muslim scholars who affirmed the existence of synonymy in the Holy Qur'an didn't study synonymy for its sake but rather utilized it as a tool to serve the Holy Qur'an and its sciences. This utilization of synonymy was obviously used to achieve several functions including: Emphasis, substitution and interpretation.

Omar (1988) pointed out that numerous linguistic scholars dealt with the phenomenon of synonymy from the point of view of classical linguists. Thus, only a few scholars dealt with the same phenomenon from the point of view of modern linguists.

#### a. The Classical Stance

There was a great controversy among classical Arab scholars regarding the affirmation or denial of synonymy in Arabic:

##### a). Affirmation

One group of Arab scholars proved the existence of synonymy providing evidence that all speakers of the language would use the term '*brain*' to provide an explanation for the term '*mind*'. This proved that both terms are synonymous to them.

Those scholars who were particularly concerned with the study of synonymy provide narrative and anecdotes as evidence to prove their opinion. One of which that anecdotes related to Prophet Mohammad who dropped a knife and asked one of his followers to pick up the knife using the Arabic term '*/sekk ʿ in/*' his follower apparently did not comprehend the intended meaning. Then, he asked the prophet is he meant '*!ʿLmudiyya*' which is a synonymous term for it.

It appears that there were two groups of Arab linguist who were concerned with the affirmation of synonymy. The first group expanded the concept of synonymy without placing any restrictions on its use. However, the other group placed several constraints on synonymy using numerous preconditions for its usage. In accordance with what was

previously mentioned regarding the usage of synonymy, Al-Asfahani (2002) for example, states that real synonymy exists only within synonymous words that convey the same meaning within the same dialect.

b). *Denial*

There was another group of classical Arab linguist who denied the existence of synonymy among whom Al-Askari (1998), who pointed out that two words cannot convey the same meaning which would result in needless redundancy in language. Moreover, he made a distinction between /**madh**/ and /**ṭanā**/ in Arabic stating that the first refers to praising for one time only while the second refers to repeated praise. He also elaborates on the distinction between these two words and the word /**ṭitrā**/ saying that it refers to praising someone in his or her presence while /**madh**/ can be in someone's absence.

C. *The Modern Stance*

Omar (1988) points out that we find the same dispute among modern Arab linguists over the existence of synonymy just like we did among classical scholars with the exception that among modern scholars we find genuine attempts especially among those who affirmed the existence of synonymy to define, classify, and clarify it in a comprehensive manner.

Among the same lines, Omar also states that several modern scholars make the distinction between different types of synonymy and near synonymy. This distinction is made clear as follows:

- **Absolute synonymy:** This occurs when the two words convey exactly the same meaning and the native speakers of the language use these two words in an alternate manner freely without noticing any difference in meaning in all contexts.

- **Near synonymy:** This type of synonymy occurs when the meaning of the two words is almost identical to the point that non-specialists cannot detect the semantic differences between the two words. An example of this type includes the words: '*Sanah*' and '*Aam*', both referring to '*Year*' which are used in the Holy Qur'an. An English example of this type of synonymy includes the words '*sick*' and '*ill*'.

- **Semantic approximation:** This type exists when the conveyed meanings are approximately the same with the exception that one word differs from the other in the sense that it conveys a slightly different form of meaning. Examples of this type of synonymy in English include '*crawl*, *skip*, *hop*, and *run*' and '*walk*' which all convey a similar meaning and have '*movement*' add a common semantic significance. The distinction between the words lies in the fact that the number of legs, the manner of movement and the relationship between the legs and the surface differ from one word to another.

- **The use of periphrastic or synonymous sentences:** This occurs when two sentences convey the same meaning in the same language. Nilsen & Nilsen (1975) classified this type into the following:

1. Transformational: This occurs through changing location of words in the sentence in order to highlight a certain word or words without changing the overall meaning. An example of this type is: *Mohammad entered the room slowly* versus *slowly, Mohammad entered the room*.

2. Substitutional: In this type of synonymy, we substitute a certain word with another resulting in a new sentence that still conveys the same meaning. For example, I bought a typewriter from Mohammad for \$ a hundred dollars versus Mohammad sold me a typewriter for \$ a hundred dollars.

- **Translation:** This type of synonymy occurs when the two words are identical in two languages or within the same language when the discourse style changes. An example of this is the translation of a certain scientific text from the scientific language into a simpler colloquial style or the translation of a certain poem into prose.

D. *Denial of Synonymy*

Al-Munjed (1997, pp. 120-224) pointed out that the attitudes of those scholars who deny the existence of synonymy especially those dealing with synonymy in the Holy Qur'an and its sciences varied as well as their opinions regarding this phenomenon. He adds that before starting to study these synonymous utterances in the Holy Qur'an, it is necessary for us to remember the definition of synonymy in the light of which we should decide whether two words are synonymous or not. Accordingly, synonymy may be defined as the true and independent reference of two or more utterances to the same meaning as long as the utterances exist in the same linguistic environment. Furthermore, scholars who study synonymy are not concerned with the factor of language development because the semantic significance of utterances used in the Holy Qur'an has a sacred nature that protects it from the factor of linguistic development and change overtime. The following are examples of synonymous terms extracted from the Holy Qur'an:

/ʔb, wālīd/ (Father)

The first tern /ʔb/ is a general utterance that refers to the person who provides another person with food and shelter and is concerned with the education of that person both physically and mentally. Moreover, he also provides guidance and counseling. For examples, '*And when they entered in the manner their father had enjoined*', (Chapter Yusuf), (Joseph)-Verse no. 68, and '*Therefore will I not leave this land until my father permits me*', (Chapter Yusuf), (Joseph)-Verse no. 68. The term /ʔb/ can also be used to refer to our grandparents and great grandparents. For example, '*it is the cult of your father Abraham. It is He Who has named you Muslims*', (Chapter Al-Hajj), (The Pilgrimage)-Verse no. 78 and '*Allah, your Lord and Cherisher and the Lord and Cherisher of your fathers of old?*', (Chapter As-Saaffat), (Those

Ranges in Ranks)-Verse no. 126. This term is also used figuratively to refer to scholars and leaders who are viewed as mentors and role models who are usually followed and imitated. For example, *'We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps'*, (Chapter Az-Zukhruf), (The Gold Adornment)-Verse no. 23.

In contrast, the term /wālid/ is used only to refer to a biological parent who is the immediate father or mother excluding the grandparents or great grandparents. This is clarified in the Holy Qur'an since it is mentioned only in either the singular form or the dual form as illustrated in the following example: *'treat with kindness your parents'*, (Chapter Al-Baqarah), (The Cow)-Verse no. 83.

The final important difference between the term /ʔb/ and /wālid/ is that the second /wālid/ is always associated with emotions and compassion unlike the first term /ʔb/ which is associated with logic and reason. This is also illustrated in the fact that all verses in the Holy Qur'an that specifically refer to emotions and passion preferred the reference to /wālid/ instead of /ʔb/ as illustrated in the following examples: *'Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal'*, (Chapter Luqman, Verse no. 14) and *'treat with kindness your parents'*, (Chapter Al-Baqarah), (The Cow)-Verse no. 83. Therefore, the two utterances /ʔb/ and /wālid/ cannot be considered synonymous and should not be used interchangeably.

A final example which does not support the existence of synonymy is the use of the two utterances /ʔtā/ and /jāʔ/ to mean 'came'. These terms are used in numerous verses in the Holy Qur'an but they all within they all fall within the same semantic reference framework which shows that the use of the term /ʔtā/ is almost always surrounded with ambiguity, doubts, ignorance and lying. While the use of the term /jāʔ/ is almost always surrounded with clarity, belief, awareness and certainty. For example, *"'Inevitable' cometh 'to pass' the Command of Allah: seek ye not then to hasten it"*, (Chapter An-Nahl), (The Bees)-Verse no. 1.

Another difference in the use of the two terms is that /jāʔ/ implies an action that comes as a result of a clear will and intention while the term /ʔtā/ usually refers to an action that happens accidentally and unintentionally as clarified in the following examples: *'Then there came a caravan of travellers: They sent their water-carrier (for water)'*, (Chapter Yusuf), (Joseph)-Verse no. 19 and *'At length, when they came to a (lowly) valley of ants'*, (Chapter An-Naml), (The Ants)-Verse no. 18. Therefore, the two terms cannot by any means be considered synonymous and nor can be used interchangeably since they do not convey exactly the same meaning or have the exact semantic reference in the Holy Qur'an.

In conclusion, we can safely claim through the detailed and careful analysis of a considerable number of terms that are often regarded as synonymous in the Holy Qur'an that the proposed existence of synonymous terms in the Holy Qur'an is simply an illusion and that practically do not exist in any form or fashion. Furthermore, careful analysis of such terms in the Holy Qur'an reveal that each term is used for a specific reason and significance which leads us to the solid belief that exact and absolute synonymy does not at all exist in the Holy Qur'an as was generally perceived previously by Arab linguistic scholars.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Upon thorough analysis of the illustrative examples extracted from different sources dealing with particularly with semantic and functional usage of synonymy, the following conclusions maybe reached:

- Synonymy is a universal semantic phenomenon and may be considered as one of the most important sense relations.
- Modern Arab linguistic scholars placed specific constraints on the use of synonymy compared to those restrictions imposed by former linguistic scholars.
- There was a great controversy among classical Arab scholars as well as modern Arab linguistic scholars regarding the affirmation or denial of the existence of synonymy in Arabic with each group of scholars giving illustrative examples to support their argument and substantiate their claim.
- There was a clear consensus among Arab and English linguists that absolute synonymy hardly ever exists since neither language accepts that two words are absolutely and completely synonymous even if they are used interchangeably.
- What exists in language in reality is what may be termed as "near synonymy" which reflects two relatively similar meanings at first glance but convey two distinct semantic meanings upon close examination of their functions.
- The existence of absolute synonymy specifically in the Holy Qur'an is nothing more than an illusion and does not exist at all. This finding is substantiated by clear evidence drawn from numerous explications of the Holy Qur'an conducted by professional Arab linguists and properly trained Muslim scholars.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Asfahani, A. (2002). Al-Aghani. Beirut, Lebanon: Scientific Books Publishing House.
- [2] Al-Askari, A. (1998). Al-Furooq al-lughawia "Linguistic differences". Cairo, Egypt: Culture and Science Publishing and Distributing House.

- [3] Al-Munjed, M. N. (1997). *Altraduf fi Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem "Synonymy in the Holy Qur'an between theory and practice"*. Damascus, Syria: Dar Al-Fiker Publishing.
- [4] Al-Zayadi, H. (1980). *Altraduf fi allugha "Synonymy in language"*. Baghdad, Iraq: Ministry of Culture and Information Publications.
- [5] Cruse, D. A. (2004). *Meaning in language*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Cruse, D. A. (1986). *Lexical semantics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02990-9.
- [7] Farghal, M. (1998). *Vocabulary development and lexical relations*. Irbid, Jordan: Dar Al-Hilal for Translation.
- [8] Jackson, H. (1988). *Words and their meanings*. London, UK: Longman. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139165570.
- [9] Lyons, J. (1968). *Introduction to theoretical linguistics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [10] Murphy, M. L. (2003). *Semantic relations and the lexicon*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511486494.
- [11] Nilsen, D. L. & Nilsen A. P. (1975). *Semantics theory*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers. DOI: 10.2307/357256.
- [12] Omar, A. (1988). *Elm al-dalala "semantics"*. Cairo, Egypt: Al-Kutub Publishing.
- [13] Palmar, F. R. (1976). *Semantics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [14] Ramadan, A. (1983). *Fusuul fi fikeh al Arabiyya "Readings in Arabic"*. Cairo, Egypt: Al- Khanji Library.
- [15] Sibawaih, A. (1988). *Al-Kitab*. Cairo, Egypt: Al-Khanji Library.
- [16] Skalman, E. (2012). *The interplay of synonymy and polysemy: The case of Arrojar, Echar, Lanzar and Tirrar* (Master's thesis, University of Tromsø). Tromsø, Norway.
- [17] Ullman, S. (1972). *Semantics: An introduction to the science of meaning*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

**Sana Kamel Al-Omari** is an instructor of English at Al-Balqa' Applied University, Irbid University Collage in Jordan. She holds an M.A. degree in English linguistics from Yarmouk University 2008. Her research interests include: General linguistics, pragmatics, major language skills and first and second language acquisition.



**Abdel-Rahman Husni Abu-Melhim** was born on February 14, 1958 in Jerash, Jordan. He is a Jordanian-American, currently teaching as an Associate Professor of English language and literature at Al-Balqa'a Applied University in Jordan. He graduated from Texas A&M University, College Station in 1992. His Ph.D. degree was in English with emphasis on socio-linguistics. His research interests include: Socio-linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Psycho-Linguistics, and Cross-Cultural communication.