An Analysis of Grammatical Tense in Persian and English Translations of Surah Yusuf

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ABSTRACT

One of the interesting aspects of language studies is grammatical tense. In Iran, traditional grammarians have often classified tense into past, present, and future. Today, linguists have challenged such classifications by suggesting new ideas. In this regard, the present study, by using a descriptive-analytic method, and based on traditional models of tense, compares tense in the English and Persian translations of Surah Yusuf (from Holy Quran). Having identified the verbs in the text of Surah Yusuf (Joseph), the study analyzes their tense, and then compares the four Persian and English translations. The study reveals significant findings including the ideology of the translator, number of each subcategory of tense and their relationships with the text of Quran.

Keywords: Tense, Surah Yusuf, Persian translation, English translation, Ideology

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INTRODUCTION

One of the interesting aspects of language studies is grammatical tense. In Iran, traditional grammarians have often classified tense into past, present, and future. Today, linguists have challenged such classifications by suggesting new ideas.

Tense is a temporal deictic category. Tense is one of the main categories of studying language. Along with lexical elements and other forms of temporal deictic, it enables the listener (addressee) to draw a relationship between the context of speech and the context of speech production. Furthermore, tense enables the listener to recognize the relative order of temporal situations which are described by the speaker. Traditional grammarians of Persian language have categorizes tense into past, present, and future, where each of these has its own subcategories.

DISCUSSION

Different theories have been presented with regard to grammatical tense. The main thrust of the present study includes grammatical tense, translation of *Quran*, and translator's ideology. These are analyzed in the following sections:

In discussing tense, Bateni (2010) considers three layers of analysis for verbs. In the first layer of analysis, to understand the properties of a verb, its class is divided into dependent and independent. Each of these can occupy a slot in a sentence. They have some subcategories explanation of which goes beyond the scope of this study. Ahmadi

Givi and Anvari (2006) consider tense as one of the properties of verbs, and divide it into past, present, and future; each have subcategories including simple, perfect, continuous, subjunctive, etc. However, Rahimian (2009) divides tense into past and non-past. Given the function of tense, the present study uses Ahmadi Givi and Anvari's (2006) model.

With regard to translating *Quran*, Karimnia (1997) has studied the differences in equivalents and has noted that, "the aim of translating *Quran* into Persian is to provide us with a text which has the most similarities – as much as it is possible – to the original text." Nevertheless, these definitions may be problematic is some ways. For example, such a text may not be able to solve the reading problems of the readers. To solve this problem, the author of the essay does not think that the purpose of translating *Quran* is interpretation; rather, it is presenting a Persian text. The author believes that one of the missing aspects of translating *Quran* into Persian has been the lack of finding appropriate and similar equivalents: "The translator of *Quran* should not translate the words, expressions, sentences, lines, and syntactic structures in a dissimilar way unless there is a firm reason for doing so."

Ghaeminia (2007) has studied *Quran* from a cognitive linguistic perspective and has noted that interpreting *Quran* from this perspective can lead us to a more truthful understanding of it. He has investigated the principles of the cognitive linguistic framework such as perspective, dynamism, and function as they are applied to the interpretation of *Quran*. He has concluded that cognitive linguistics is the climax of semantic thought and should be used in interpreting *Quran*.

With regard to ideology, Mosaffa Jahromi, Meimaneh, and Ketabi (2008) believer that translation, no matter what level it is, is influenced by metalanguage. Therefore, they have studied the translator's ideology in translating *Quran*. They content that metalingual elements such as ideology control linguistic choices and this in fact leads to the production of different translations; "In translation, in addition to language, metalingual deductions are influenced and determined by ideology." They also note that ideological stances in translation help produce metaphorical transformation and new concepts in contrast to the source language. The role of translator's ideology is consideredto play an important role in interpreting polysomic words too. They also point to the role of translator's ideology in other aspects. It is finally concluded that the choice or thereof rejection of a word may be influenced by ideology.

1. Research questions and methodology:
The main questions of the research are:
- How frequent is the use of grammatical tense in the text (Surah Yusuf) and in its Persian and English translations?
- What is the function of tense in the Persian and English translations of the text?
- In the Arabic text, what tenses are used? How frequent? How are they different in translation?

This study is based on library research and uses a descriptive-analytic methodology. First, the verbs in *Quran* were identified, and their grammatical tense were recorded. Then, their Persian and English translations were identified by using the comprehensive software of Quranic sciences. Finally, the data was analyzed by SPSS 21.

1.1. Analysis of tense in Persian translations
In Surah Yusuf, there are 400 verbs. Their tense is as follows:

Table (1): Frequency and percentage of tense in Surah Yusuf

Tense	Frequency	Percent
Simple past	234	63
Past continuous	6	2
Present	121	33
Present subjunctive	4	1
Future	1	0
Other	4	1
Total	370	100

The frequency and the number of verbs in Persian are different from those in Arabic. With regard to the difference in the number of verbs, it should be noted that firstly, not all translators have translated the verbs as shown; secondly, some parts of a sentence which were not verbs were translated into verbs. This can be put down to the ideology and style of the translator. Table (2) shows the frequency and type of tenses.

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Table (2): Frequency of tense in Persian translation of Surah Yusuf

Tense	Ansarian	Elahi Ghomshei	Makarem Shirazi	Fouladvand
Simple Past	262	247	259	264
Past continuous	14	14	16	17
Present perfect	24	24	22	22
Past perfect	11	21	19	14
Present continuous	58	60	55	51
Present subjunctive	11	10	11	7
Future	21	16	21	20
Total	401	392	403	395

P<0/001

As the comparison between Table (1) and Table (2) indicates, there are 370 verbs in the Arabic text of Surah Yusuf while there are in average 400 verbs in the translations. Moreover, there are tenses in the source language which do not exist in the Persian translation. Comparing simple past and other past tenses shows that in translating the verbs the translators have come to the conclusion that the tense of the past verbs is simple, that is, according to traditional grammarians, these verbs referred to action that were done and ended in the past without being continuous. Language of the text itself necessitates such a conclusion. In the Arabic text of this Surah and more generally in the whole text of *Quran*, there are a lot of stories and events which correlate with the use of simple past tense. As shown in Table (2) there does not seem to exist a major difference between simple past and past perfect. In Persian language, the frequency of simple past is much higher than past perfect which proves the prevalence of simple past. In *Quran* and generally in Arabic language simple past is used more frequently. There is not a big difference in the use of simple past and past continuous among the translations. Some of the uses of past continuous is to describe a habit in the past and to also to refer to an action which was repeated in the past. Given this function, it can be inferred that little use of this tense in *Quran* indicates that the parables and stories are not limited to the past. That is to say they do not refer to things which happened in the past without having any influence for the present; assuming an idea contrary to this would be in direct contradiction to the general goal of *Quran*. In fact, *Quran* is not limited to a particular place or people. This is substantiated by comparing these two tenses. Present perfect is used more frequently than past continuous and past perfect. This is also justified by paying attention to the function of present perfect tense. One of the important uses of present perfect is to refer to an action which has happened or has started in the past but its influence is still present. Another use of this tense is to refer to an action which has not happened yet but is most likely to happen. These uses are in line with the goal of *Quran* because the book was inspired to Prophet Muhammad long time ago but the principles are for the present as well as the future. In general, the number of simple past tenses is much more than present tenses. This means that simple past is used as a non-deictic form in *Quran*. Some of the existing ambiguities are then solved: firstly, the non-deictic use of simple past shows that most of the events in *Quran* are narrated from an earlier time which Prophet Muhammad had not seen by his own eyes. This highlights the universalism of *Quran* which proves the idea of most scholars that this book is the guidebook of having a truthful and meaningful life. Secondly, the use of this tense in expressing God's commandments and teachings shows the fact that *Quran* is not a book for a specific age but rather for all times. The difference between the use of present continuous and present subjunctive is also significant. Present continuous are used to refer to actions which are continuously happening. Present subjunctive is used to refer to states of doubt and uncertainty. The difference in use of these tenses justifies the difference in their frequency in *Quran*. The higher frequency of present continuous reveals that the events and stories of *Quran* do not just belong to a specific time; rather, they are continuously happening, denoting habit and repetition. On the other hand, the lower frequency of present subjunctive indicates that God did not have any doubt or uncertainty in presenting his commandments and axioms.

In light of Table (1) and Table (2) one can notice a significant difference between the use of grammatical tense by the translators of a single text. This is supported by Chi-squared test: it shows a significant difference between tenses in the source text and the target translations.

There is a difference between the tenses in the Arabic text of Surah Yusuf and the tenses in the translations. For example, a translator has translated a present tense into past tense or vice versa. Such a thing proves that the translator's ideology (style, stance, perspective) is influential in translation. Table (3) explains this point.

167

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Table (3): Difference between tenses in the Arabic text of Surah Yusuf and tenses in Persian translations by Ansarian and Fouladvand

Ayeh	Tense in Arabic	Tense in Persian, Ansarian's translation	Tense in Persian, Fouladvand's translation
27	Past	Future	Simple past
36	Present	Past continuous	Present continuous
45	Future	Present	Future
48	Past	Present subjunctive	Present continuous
76	Past	Present	Past
80	Future	Present	Future

1.2. Analysis of tense in English translations
Similar to other Surahs the distribution and frequency of grammatical tenses are different in the English translations of Surah Yusuf. Table (4) shows these differences:

Table (4): Frequency of tense in the English translations of Surah Yusuf

Tense	Arberry	Pickthal	Yusuf Ali	Shakir
Simple present	104	114	137	134
Present continuous	3	0	3	0
Simple past	181	186	174	180
Past continuous	5	6	0	0
Future	33	27	28	21
Other tenses	2	1	4	1
Total	328	334	336	336

P<0/001

Comparing Table (4) and Table (1) indicates that the number of verbs in the source language is almost the same with the number of verbs in the target language. This shows that the translators have translated all the verbs in the source text and have not changed their functions. It must be also noted that in some cases the translators have decided either not to translate the verbs at all or change their function because of the type of sentence, context of the text, information of the text, and the syntactical structures. The same reasons have made some translators to translate some non-verbs into verbs. Similar to Persian translations, there is a noticeable difference between Arabic and English texts in terms of their use of verb tense. Simple present tense has been used more than others. In English language, simple present is used to refer to actions which are always true and happen all the time. This function is in line with the most important feature of *Quran*, that is, its universalism and importance for all times. There is a difference between simple present with the other categories of present tense, depending on various functions. There is also a big difference between simple past and other categories of past tense. It seems that simple present and simple past have been translated non-deictically by these translators. Given the various uses of these tense, this seems logical. There does not seem to be a lot of difference among the translators in terms of the number of using each tense. Therefore, the significant difference is between the highest and the lowest use of each tense. It appears then that though in some cases the translators have used different tenses, in general the ideology of the translators in using tense is not that different. It is worth noting that in studying ideology (method, style, stance, etc.) one needs to pay attention to more than the three aspects. Table (5) clearly shows the differences among the English translations of a single Arabic text.

Table (5): Differences among translations of a single text

Arabic verb	Tense	Tense in Arberry	Tense in Pickthal	Tense in Yusuf Ali	Tense in Shakir
جَعَلْنا	Past	Simple present	Simple present	Present perfect	Present perfect
قَدِموا	Past	Simple past	Simple past	Simple present	Present perfect
مُرسَلون	Past	Passive	Simple present	Passive	Simple present
يَعلَمونَ	Present	Simple past	Simple past	Simple past	Past perfect

The above table clearly shows the influence of ideology (style, perspective, stance, etc.) of the translator. It must be noted that the difference between two translators' ideology may be because of many reasons including religion, nationality, language, being an English native, etc.

CONCLUSION

In light of the tables presented in the study, and in response to the research questions, it can be noted that in the Persian translations of Surah Yusuf difference in the use of tense was limited to a specific range. This is also true

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about the English translations. In the Arabic text of Surah Yusuf, past and present tense were used more than others which is justified by the grammar of Arabic language. Tense categorization in Arabic language is different from those in Persian and English languages. In other words, the subcategories in Persian and English language are not always found in Arabic language. Nevertheless, little change has been made in translating the tenses in the Arabic language. In other words, if the tense in the source language is past, it has been retained the same in the translation.

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