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An investigation of tenses in Persian and English translation of Al Rahman and Yasin Surah

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ABSTRACT

Since its emergence, Holy Quran has been discussed and researched by scholars and admirers. The present study investigates this valuable work based on grammatical tenses. This study is conducted through an analytical-descriptive method. Using the theory of traditional grammarians, the researchers have tried to find answers to different questions including the number of grammatical tenses used in the context of the Quran compared to the translations of different Persian and English translators. Hence, initially the verbs were detected in these three Surahs and then their Persian and English equivalents were found in four Persian translations as well as in four English translations. Finally, the results of the study led to significant conclusions; including significant differences among Persian and English translators in the use of diverse grammatical tenses. Although the ideology of translator has a direct impact on his/ her translation, there was no significant difference in the comparison of all tenses used by the Persian and English translators. So the comparison can be regarded as a very strong reason of Quran's comprehensiveness and the fact that it doesn't belong to a specific era.

Key words: Holy Quran, translator, tense, ideology

INTRODUCTION

In the field of Persian language and grammar, researches have been conducted, including theories of many scholars of different ages; however, there are still vague discussions as a clear and comprehensive definitions associated with tenses in Persian grammar. At first glance the concept of tense seems simple, but when thinking deeply, it is realized that the issue is not that simple. Many statements have been issued since the advent of Islam until today, in connection with the Arabic language and the language of the Quran. Concerning the language of the Quran, Saeedi Roshan (2009) writes that the most reasonable approach in the language of the Qur'an is "the language of guidance"; guidance towards the ultimate goal of human and the direction and inviting him to their utmost perfection. So that human's existential abilities and talents is fulfilled and the purpose of his/her creation to the fullest. The present study is an investigation of the grammatical tense in Persian and English translations of surah Yesin and Al Rahman. In fact, reviewing the use of tenses in Surah Al Rahman and Yasin we will consider the viewpoint of translators as well. In the following, it should be noted that there is a lot of debate regarding the tenses in Persian and English. The disagreements are so deep that there is not even a single comprehensive definition for this concept and researchers and linguists such as a Camaro (1976), Austin (1985) and Palmer (2001) continued to disagree over its limits. In this study, according to the nature of work, the grammar of traditional grammarians is used in Persian; however, a particular theoretical framework is not considered in English and Arabic.

1. The main argument

There are different theories in Persian regarding the tenses in Persian. Linguists, unlike grammarians, do not offer any traditional classification concerning tenses and each one offers his/ her own different classification. For example Sojoodi and Zir Rahi (2009), according to modern linguistics, have reviewed tenses according to the model of Weinrich and have examined the Weinrich foundations and roots of the tenses (according to Tadie, 1999) in the pattern of Binosef (1966).

Sadeghi (2008) has also regarded the verbs in traditional Persian grammar and reviewed the features of verbs according to the grammatical and semantic factors. Analyzing the grammatical terminology in Persian, he proposed a scientific and comprehensive definition of the verbs. According to his view which is consistent with the traditional grammarians, the verb is divided into three categories; past, present and future. Yet he disagreed with traditional grammarians in getting the varieties of verbs. In this study, the role of ideology of the translator is also discussed. In other words, all the factors that cause different translators make different choices when translating the same verse is due to their ideology. For example Karimnia (1997), writing about what to translate and what not to translate, discusses the issue through reasons and explanations. On the one hand the holiness and sanctity of the Quran is so much that has strongly impressed its translations. On the other hand, this intense impact has sometimes led to wrong and ungrammatical translations. Karimnia believes that the Holy Quran has the linguistic features of other texts. The author believes that in some of these cases, the translators have so carefully chosen an equivalent in Persian that is "so Arabic " and sometimes this insistence, has caused semantic or grammatical errors.

2. Questions and Methodology

In this study, using the descriptive analytical method and the library style, the following questions were dealt with: 1. Investigation of the application of tenses in the text of each Surah; Al Rahman and Yasin in different Persian and English translations. 2. A comparative study of the application of grammatical tenses in the Persian and English translations of the Surahs. 3. A comparative study of grammatical tenses in the original text of Al Rahman and Yasin.

In order to conduct the research and answer the above questions; first a book called Mu'jam Al Arab which is about the grammar of the Quran was studied, verbs were found in the text and their tenses were recorded, then their Arabic and English equivalents were observed in the translations using found Quranic Sciences' software and then were written in tables. Finally, data were analyzed by SPSS 21 software.

3. Analysis

A. Analysis of tenses in Surah Yasin

a. Analysis of tenses in Persian

The Arabic text of this Surah contains an average of 156 verbs, their frequency is shown in Table 1-5:

Table 1: frequency and percentage of tenses in the original text of Surah Yasin

Tenses	Frequency	Percentage
Simple past tense	63	40
Past continuous	7	4
Simple present	61	38
Subjunctive present	4	2
future	2	1
Total	137	100

Table 1 shows that in this Surah unmarked past tense is used. These tenses are not used like this in Persian. It is worth noting that the number of verbs in the Persian translation of this surah by surah not equal the number of verbs in the original text. It is worth noting that the numbers of verbs in the Persian translation of this surah-by-surah are not equal to the number of verbs in the original text. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of verbs in translations of different translators:

Tenses	Ansarian (the first translator)	Elahi Ghomshei (The second translator)	Makarem Shirazi (the third translator)	Fouladvand (the fourth translator)
Simple present	64	72	65	63
Present perfect	21	19	21	20
Past continuous	12	8	10	10
Simple present	25	25	23	25
Subjunctive present	7	3	8	8
Future	31	31	31	27
Other tenses	2	1	2	4
Total	162	169	170	167

$P < 0.001$

Interestingly, almost half of Arabic simple present verbs are translated as future tenses and the other half is translated into simple present. This shows that, out of the three tenses of past, present and future, expressing past tense in this way has a priority compared to other options. As it is observed, the number of tenses is not the same as that of the original text. Chi-square test was used to measure the differences and consequently some significant differences were observed. On the other hand the difference between tenses used in one verse and the translations of that verse are also available. To clarify the issue, look at Table 3.

Table 3: Differences in tenses of Arabic verbs and Persian verbs of Sura Yasin translated by Ansarian

Number of verse	Arabic tense	Persian tense
11	Present	Simple past
12	present	Future
15	Present	Simple past
16	Present	Simple past
18	Present	Future
18	Present	Future
19	Past	Future

b. Analysis of tenses in English

In English, such as Persian, the number of translated verbs does not match the Arabic verbs. Table 4 indicates this issue.

Table 4. The frequency of English grammatical tenses in Surah Yasin

Tenses	Arberry (the first translator)	Pickthall (the second translator)	Yusufali (the third translator)	Shakir (the fourth translator)
simple present	84	82	81	83
Present continuous	2	1	1	0
simple past	28	34	25	29
past continuous	0	0	1	0
Future	11	9	17	17
Other tenses	2	0	0	0
Total	127	136	130	139

$P < 0.05$

As it is observed, the number of translated verbs' tenses is not the same as that of the original text. Chi-square test was used to measure the significance of grammatical tenses and consequently some significant differences were observed in three tenses of past, present and future. On the other hand the difference between tenses used in one verse and the translations of that verse are also available. It means that some present or past tenses in Arabic have been translated differently. To clarify the issue, look at Table 5.

Table 5: Differences in tenses of Arabic verbs and Persian verbs of Surah Yasin translated by Arberry and Yusuf Ali

Number of verse	Arabic tense	Arberry's translation	Yusuf Ali's Translation
8	Past	Simple Present	Pst perfect
11	Past	Present	Noun
11	Past	Present	Simple past
15	Present	Present continuous	Negative simple present
22	Present	Present	Simple past
23	Past	Negative Future	Negative simple present
29	Past	Simple present	Negative simple present

This table indicates that translators have used different tenses to render the same verses; this shows the difference in their ideologies.

B. Analysis of tenses in Surah Al Rahman

a. Analysis of tenses in Persian

The Arabic text of this Surah contains an average of 60 verbs, their frequency is shown in Table 5-6:

Table 6: frequency and percentage of tenses in the original text of Surah Al Rahman

Tenses	Frequency	Percentage
past	12	21
Present	45	79
Total	57	100

It should be noted that not all translators, have translated all verbs into verbs and secondly, there is no unanimity among them.

Table 7. The frequency of verbs in Persian translations of Surah Al Rahman:

Tenses	Ansarian (the first translator)	Elahi Ghomshei (The second translator)	Makarem Shirazi (the third translator)	Fouladvand (the fourth translator)
Simple past	9	9	10	6
Past continues	2	2	5	1
Present perfect	5	8	5	33
Past perfect	3	0	3	0
Simple present	43	42	39	10
Future	3	3	3	5
Total	65	64	65	55

As the comparison of the tables 6 and 7 shows, different translators have used more tenses when translating past and present tenses, also variety of grammatical tenses used in translations is much more Arabic tenses.

Of course, it is necessary to note that the Arabic language unlike Persian or English does not categorize the tenses into three main tenses of past, future and present and sub-categories of continues, past/ present perfect, and so on. To clarify the issue, look at the table 8 below.

Table 8: Number of past and present tenses in Persian translation of Al-Rahman as compared to the original text

Past/ Ansarian	Past/ Elahi Ghomshei	Past/ Makarem Shirazi	Past/ Fouladvand	Total	Total of past tenses in the text of the Surah
16	16	20	37	89	14
Present/ Ansarian	Present/ Elahi Ghomshei	Present/ Makarem Shirazi	Present/ Fouladvand	Total	Total of present tenses in the text of the Surah
46	45	42	13	146	47

P < 0.0001

As it is shown in Table 8, not only there are differences between translators in translating a single text, but this difference is also between different translations of the original text. According to the two tables of 5-8 and 5-7, a significant difference is expected between tenses in the translations. Based on the results of the Chi Square, the difference for the three tenses is significant. On the other hand there is a difference between tenses used in a verse and the translations of the same verse. It means that some present or past tenses in Arabic have been translated differently. To clarify the issue, look at Table 3.

Table 9: Differences in tenses of Arabic verbs and Persian verbs of Surah Al Rahman translated by Ansarian and Makarem Shirazi

Number of verse	Arabic tense	Ansarian's translation	Makarem's Translation
11	Past	Present	Past
8	Past	Subjunctive Present	Simple present
76	Present	Future	Present

b. The analysis of tenses in Surah Al Rahman

In English, such as Persian, the number of translated verbs does not match the Arabic verbs. Table 10 indicates this issue.

Table 10. The frequency of English grammatical tenses in Surah Al Rahman

Tenses	Arberry (the first translator)	Pickthall (the second translator)	Yusufali (the third translator)	Shakir (the fourth translator)
simple present	12	12	12	12
Present continuous	1	0	0	1
simple past	7	3	7	7
Future	33	34	33	33
Other tenses	0	1	0	2
Total	53	60	24	54

P<0.001

As it is observed, the number of translated verbs' tenses is not the same as that of the original text. Chi-square test was used to measure the significance of grammatical tenses and consequently it is observed that the ideology of translators is different. Like previous sections, some significant differences were observed between translators. Yet, this difference not only existed in tenses the original text but also existed in translations. It seems that Persian translators, as compared to English ones, have used more similar tenses to the original text. Finally, a rough statistics of the number of tenses used by the translators in the target language and comparison of them with the source language is necessary.

Table 11: Number of tenses used by the Persian translators in total

Tenses	Ansarian (the first translator)	Elahi Ghomshei (The second translator)	Makarem Shirazi (the third translator)	Fouladvand (the fourth translator)
Simple past	73	82	75	79
Past continuous	14	10	15	11
Present perfect	26	27	26	53
Past perfect	3	0	3	0
Simple present	68	67	62	35
Subjunctive present	7	3	8	8
Future	34	34	34	42
Other tenses	2	1	2	4
Total	227	224	225	232

Table 11: Number of tenses used by the English translators in total

Tenses	Arberry	Pickthall	Yusufali	Shakir
simple present	96	96	95	96
Present continuous	3	1	1	1
simple past	35	37	35	36
past continuous	0	0	0	0
Future	44	53	50	50
Other tenses	2	1	0	2
Total	180	189	181	185

There are differences between the tenses in English as well as Farsi translations. It seems that the translators the unmarked present and past tenses in their translations. According to the applications of these two senses, the unmarked use of them is reasonable.

Table 12: Comparison of grammatical tenses used in the source and target texts

The number of tenses in the source text	Ansarian	Elahi Ghomshei	Makarem Shirazi	Fouladvand
194	227	223	222	224
The number of tenses in the source text	Arberry	Pickthall	Shakir	Yusuf Ali
194	180	176	177	184

CONCLUSION

Results showed that there is no absolute consensus on the same text and in smaller units, in a sentence to use a grammatical tense in Arabic language, especially language of the Qur'an. Of course, in many cases all the translators have translated the tenses identically but there also exists significant difference between them. As the tables suggest, the use of tenses is not the same in the texts of three chapters. Also the translators have not used the same tenses in their translations. It is worth noting that the use of grammatical tenses in the two chapters is not the same. The results showed that the use of grammatical tenses is not the same. In other words translators have not shown an agreement in translating a single tense. We can say that in general, more consensus was observed in the Persian translations when compared to English translations. The results showed that the used tenses and verbs in the different translations of the Quran are not consistent.

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