

When punctuation marks are not so 'punctual': translating al-waqf marks at the pr...

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



In this paper I argue for a consistent equivalent punctuating pattern for translating al-waqf marks (pause marks) in the Holy Qur'an, based on the prosodic features of pauses as the Holy Qur'an is originally oral not written. The aim of this study is to examine how it is prosody that is rendered when translating al-waqf marks. I suggest that without the aid of a speech recognition tool, punctuation marks would be used inaccurately in conveying the meaning into English. This is done through scrutinizing a parallel corpus of seven translations of the Holy Qur'an provided in the Qur'anic Corpus, together with a speech analysis of the pauses at al-waqf marks using Praat Version 6. 0. 32. The results of the study shed light on some linguistic aspects of the translation of phrase junctures in the Holy Qur'an. These insights are of importance both to the field of linguistics, in general, and to translation studies, in particular. Keywords: Translation, punctuation, speech recognition, prosodic features, sentence boundary.

Introduction

Relating the prosodic features of the waqf-(pause) marks in the Holy Qur'an to the punctuation system in the English translation, is a newly trodden area. This is mainly based on a speech recognition analysis that relies heavily on pause detection and pitch height. The Qur'anic script does not contain any commas, full-stops or exclamation marks in the general sense. The Qur'anic discourse is mainly oral, rather than written. All orthographic symbols in the script are means of rendering the prosodic features into the written text. In this paper, I propose that translating al-waqf (pause) marks should not only depend on the written script, but rely mainly on recognizing the prosodic features of each waqf-mark. Pause duration in seconds as well as pitch

height at and after pauses (baseline and topline) are crucial in determining which punctuation mark is to be used when translating into English – possibly other languages too. In this, I further illustrate that the ad hoc replacing al-waqf marks with ordinary punctuation marks in the English translation may not be adequate. I argue that when translating al-waqf marks, it is prosody that is rendered. So, I suggest that without the aid of a speech recognition tool, punctuation marks would be used inaccurately in conveying the meaning into English. The punctuating system ‘in the spoken texts must be treated with caution’, as it reflects both prosody and meaning.

Four major waqf marks are scrutinized in the present study: ﻡ (compulsory pause), ﻻ (not permissible to pause), ﻻﺻﻞ (pause is allowed; continuation is preferred), ﻻﺗﻢ (continuation is allowed; pause is preferred). A quick reference is made to the non-frequent pause mark ﺱ , which means a light pause, usually not at phrase or clause junctures.

Background

Previous accounts have formulated both direct and indirect correspondences between punctuation and prosody. In his seminal work, ‘Punctuation and the prosody of written language’, Wallace Chafe holds a comparison between what he calls punctuation unit and intonation unit. Three major difficulties he postulated for relating intonation units to punctuation units: (1) writer’s lack of skill in punctuating, (2) varying styles of punctuation, and (3) punctuation that is determined by factors other than prosody. Sappok (2011) proposes that intonation directly drives punctuation and, thus, the use of comma and full stop would mark intonational phrasing, especially the length of pauses

between units. The full stop is associated with a longer pause, the comma with a shorter one.

Recent work has been devoted to mingling speech analysis software and Natural Language Processing, with punctuation marks. In a study conducted on the relationship between discourse boundaries and pauses, Yang (2011) investigated durational patterns in spontaneous conversation with a view to see how these prosodic elements can serve as boundary-marking predictors across different types of speech corpora. The average time duration for phrase boundaries that was found in the analysed corpus was as follows:

Major Boundary: 0. 461908

Minor Boundary: 0. 354539

Non-Boundary: 0. 277070

Igras and Ziolkó (2016) conducted a pioneer study in investigating acoustic correlates of punctuation in spoken Polish with a view to an automatic insertion of punctuation marks. These results are in line with Bodenbender (2003) who argues that punctuation is a linguistic system that not only represents some of the phonetic sentence structure but also syntactic as well as semantic sentence structures. The experiment conducted for this study involved three male and three female native speakers of Canadian English reading aloud a set of 20 sentences with parenthetical and non-parenthetical phrases. These sentences were analyzed with respect to

acoustic characteristics due to differences in punctuation as well as due to differences between parenthetical and non-parenthetical phrases.

Christensen et al. (2001) are concerned with automatically punctuating the output of a broadcast news speech recognizer. They present a statistical finite state model that combines prosodic, linguistic and punctuation class feature. Experimental results are presented using the Hub-4 Broadcast News corpus. The results of Yang (2011), together with Bodenbender (2003) and Christensen et al. (2001), will serve as the backdrop against which the acoustic features of al-waqf-(pause) marks in the Holy Qur'an are rendered into suggested punctuation marks in the English translation.

Method

The analysis is divided into two sections using two different tools. The first section is examined using the Qur'anic Corpus parallel tool. A semi-automatic corpus analysis is employed in this study by depicting the punctuation equivalent for waqf-(pause) marks used in the parallel corpora of the seven translations under investigation, namely: Sahih International (SI), Picthall (P), Yusuf Ali (YA), Shakir (Sh), M. Sarwar (S), M. Khan (Kh), and Arberry (Arb). A panoramic view is given for the punctuational equivalent provided by each translator for each waqf-(pause) mark. The second part is to record and filter the authorized recitations of the collected verses, using the audio section in the Qur'anic Corpus. The recordings are analyzed using Praat, Version 6. 0. 32, digitized at 1600 Hz. Two phonetic measures are observed: time duration at junctures, and pitch level at and after al-waqf-(pause) mark (baseline pitch and topline pitch). By this, according to the

different manifestations of the specific prosodic features of each pause mark, punctuation marks would be suggested.

Results and Discussion

Translations of al-waqf marks

This section is devoted to analyzing translations of some waqf (pause) marks in the parallel corpus of the Holy Qur'an provided by Qur'anic corpus. A semi-automatic analysis of the verses that contain the waqf-(pause) marks under scrutiny reveals that there is no consistency among translators so as to rendering al-waqf (pause) marks into English.

Examining al-waqf-(pause) mark ۞ (= it is compulsory to pause) in the seven translations, it is noticed that only Sahih International keeps the punctuation mark (.) full-stop in verses: (2: 212) , (6: 20), (6: 36), (11: 20), (29: 26) and (36: 76). Picthall uses the full-stop except in (29: 26), where he uses comma (,). Yusuf Ali uses a full-stop in (2: 212) and (6: 20), a colon (:) in (6: 36) and (29: 26), and an exclamation mark (!) in (11: 20). Shakir uses a comma (,) in (2: 212) and (29: 26), and a semi-colon (;) in (6: 20), (6: 36), (11: 20), and (36: 76). Sarwar put a comma as an equivalent to the waqf-(pause) mark ۞ in (2: 212) and (6: 20); a full-stop for (6: 36), (11: 20) and (36: 76). In (29: 26), Sarwar put no punctuation mark for ۞, and rendered the two sentences into a compound English sentence.

رُبَّنَّ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْحَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَاللَّهُ
يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (2: 212)

Sahih International: Beautified for those who disbelieve is the life of this world, and they ridicule those who believe. But those who fear Allah are above them on the Day of Resurrection. And Allah gives provision to whom He wills without account.

Pickthall: Beautified is the life of the world for those who disbelieve; they make a jest of the believers. But those who keep their duty to Allah will be above them on the Day of Resurrection. Allah giveth without stint to whom He will.

Yusuf Ali: The life of this world is alluring to those who reject faith, and they scoff at those who believe. But the righteous will be above them on the Day of Resurrection; for Allah bestows His abundance without measure on whom He will.

Shakir: The life of this world is made to seem fair to those who disbelieve, and they mock those who believe, and those who guard (against evil) shall be above them on the day of resurrection; and Allah gives means of subsistence to whom he pleases without measure.

Muhammad Sarwar: The worldly life is made to seem attractive to the disbelievers who scoff at the faithful, but the pious, in the life hereafter, will have a position far above them. God grants sustenance (without account) to anyone He wants.

Mohsin Khan: Beautified is the life of this world for those who disbelieve, and they mock at those who believe. But those who obey Allah's Orders and keep

away from what He has forbidden, will be above them on the Day of Resurrection. And Allah gives (of His Bounty, Blessings, Favours, Honours, etc. on the Day of Resurrection) to whom He wills without limit.

Arberry: Decked out fair to the unbelievers is the present life, and they deride the believers; but those who were godfearing shall be above them on the Resurrection Day; and God provides whomsoever He will without reckoning.

□ إِنَّمَا يَسْتَجِيبُ الَّذِينَ يَسْمَعُونَ وَالْمَوْتَىٰ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ

Sahih International: Only those who hear will respond. But the dead - Allah will resurrect them; then to Him they will be returned.

Pickthall: Only those can accept who hear. As for the dead, Allah will raise them up; then unto Him they will be returned.

Yusuf Ali: Those who listen (in truth), be sure, will accept: as to the dead, Allah will raise them up; then will they be turned unto Him.

Shakir: Only those accept who listen; and (as to) the dead, Allah will raise them, then to Him they shall be returned.

Muhammad Sarwar: Only those who have understanding will accept your faith. (Those who have no understanding) are like the dead whom God will resurrect and to Him will all return.

Mohsin Khan: It is only those who listen (to the Message of Prophet Muhammad SAW), will respond (benefit from it), but as for the dead

(disbelievers), Allah will raise them up, then to Him they will be returned (for their recompense).

Arberry: Answer only will those who hear; as for the dead, God will raise them up, then unto Him they will be returned.