

***Sin* in English, Arabic, and Hebrew:  
A case of true translation equivalence<sup>1</sup>**

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مُلَخَّصٌ:

هَدَفْتُ هَذِهِ الدَّرَاسَةَ إِلَى الْبَحْثِ فِي مَعْنَى كَلِمَةِ حَطِيئَةٍ وَنَظِيرَتَيْهَا فِي اللُّغَتَيْنِ الْإِنْكِلِيزِيَّةِ وَالْعَرَبِيَّةِ. وَقَدْ ثَبِتَ مِنَ الْبَحْثِ أَنَّ كُلًّا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْكَلِمَاتِ الثَّلَاثِ هِيَ مُشْتَرِكٌ لَفْظِيٌّ وَأَنَّ لَهَا مَعَانِي ثَلَاثَةً. مَعْنَيَانِ اثْنَانِ هُمَا دِينِيَّانِ، أَيُّ مُرْتَبِطَانِ بِكَلِمَةِ اللَّهِ، وَمَعْنَى ثَالِثٌ غَيْرُ دِينِيٍّ. ثَبِتَ أَيْضًا أَنَّ الْكَلِمَاتِ الثَّلَاثِ مُتَكَافِئَةٌ تَمَامًا مِنْ حَيْثُ التَّرْجُمَةُ، إِذْ يَتِمُّ اسْتِعْمَالُهُنَّ بِنَفْسِ الطَّرِيقَةِ فِي أَيِّ سِيَاقٍ كَانَ. تُعَدُّ هَذِهِ الدَّرَاسَةُ مُسَاهَمَةً فِي مَجَالِ دِرَاسَةِ الْأَسْمَاءِ، وَهُوَ مَجَالٌ لَمْ يَحْظَ بِاهْتِمَامٍ كَافٍ مِنْ طَرَفِ عُلَمَاءِ الْمَعَانِي. هَذِهِ الدَّرَاسَةُ هِيَ أَيْضًا مُسَاهَمَةٌ فِي مَجَالِ عِلْمِ الْمَعَانِي الْإِلَهَوِيِّ، الْمَجَالِ الَّذِي يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَ الدِّينِ وَالْبَحْثِ فِي الدَّلَالَةِ اللُّغَوِيَّةِ.

**Abstract:**

The aim of this paper was to investigate English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts. It has been demonstrated that each of these three words is polysemous, having three meanings. Two of these meanings are religious, i.e. related to the word *God*, while the third is non-religious. It has also been demonstrated that the three target words are true translation equivalents, as they are used in the same way in all contexts. This paper is a contribution to the study of nouns, a field that has not been given adequate attention by semanticists. It is also a contribution to the field of theo-semantics, the interface between religion and the scientific study of meaning.

**Keywords:** English *sin*; Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*; and Hebrew *ḥet*; translation equivalence; theo-semantics

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the two reviewers for their invaluable insights and suggestions.

## 1. Introduction

Exact synonyms are said to be rare. Fromkin et. al. (2011) even claim that there are no perfect synonyms. This is because two supposedly synonymous words can indeed be synonyms in certain contexts but not in other contexts. For instance, the English words *big* and *large* can both be used interchangeably in certain contexts, such as “a big/large house,” but not in others, such as “my big/\*large brother” in which *big* means *older*. Even the apparent exact synonymy of words such as *father* and *dad* can be challenged on the basis that, unlike the former, the latter is restricted to informal contexts.

The case of true translation equivalents does not seem to be different from that of exact synonyms. Vihman (2002: 239) states that “true translation equivalents are rare, if they occur at all.” Take for example the English word *blue*. Since this word is said to represent a basic, universal color (Regier, Kay, & Cook 2005), one expects to find exact equivalents of this word in all languages; this word, however, does not have an exact equivalent in Russian, which uses two words, namely *gluboj* and *sinji*, to gloss English *blue* (Goddard 2011). Even if a word in one language has the same meaning of a word in another language in a certain context, both of these words may not have the same meaning in all contexts. For example, English *angel* as used by Catholic native English speakers should in principle have the same meaning as Arabic *malāk* as used by Catholic native Arabic speakers (on the basis that the teaching of the Catholic Church is the same everywhere); however, English *angel* can be used to refer to a rich person who invests in a new company (Walter 2005), while Arabic *malāk* does not have this meaning.

Having said that, one may still wonder whether true translation equivalents can be found. This paper makes the claim that true translation equivalents indeed exist. By analyzing English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts, the present author hopes to show that these three concepts are true translation equivalents, i.e. they have the same meaning in all the contexts in which they are employed.

Analyzing and explicating these words requires a method that can help us evade ambiguity in our definitions. If the definitions of these words are constructed from simple and universal words, then these definitions can be easily compared, and, as a consequence, it can be established whether or not these words have the same meaning in each and every context they are used in.

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) can help in this regard, as it provides ways of decomposing the meaning of a complex concept into simple, universal concepts (Wierzbicka 1972, 1980, 1985; Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002, 2014; Peeters 2006; Gladkova 2010; Habib 2011; Levisen 2013). These simple, universal concepts are known as ‘semantic primes,’ and their number stands at 65, as can be seen from Table 1:

Table 1: Semantic primes (English exponents) (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014)

I~ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	Substantives
KIND, PARTS	Relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	Determiners
ONE, TWO, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW, SOME, ALL	Quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	Evaluators
BIG, SMALL	Descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	Mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	Speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	Actions, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), BE (SOMEONE)'S	Location, existence, specification, possession
LIVE, DIE	Life and death
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	Time
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	Space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	Logical concepts
VERY, MORE	Augmentor, intensifier
LIKE~AS~WAY	Similarity

In addition to the use of semantic primes, NSM makes use of the so-called ‘semantic molecules.’ These are relatively complex words, but their complexity does not negatively affect the simplicity or universality of an explication (the NSM term for *definition*) because they can be readily decomposed to semantic primes. In NSM explications, a semantic molecule is followed by an ‘m’ in square brackets.

English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts are religious words, but their meanings are not going to be explicated based on how theologians understand them but rather based on how ordinary native English, Arabic, and Hebrew speakers use them in their respective languages. In order to demonstrate how each concept is used by ordinary native speakers, I will rely on corpus analysis.

A corpus is a large collection of written, as well as spoken, material which is used to discover how language is employed. One may wonder how a corpus can help in analyzing the meaning of a certain word. Needless to say, part of the information about what ordinary people know about a certain word can be inferred from the language those people use. Goddard (2011) argues that folk knowledge about cats, for example, can be accessed through some expressions, such as *a game of cat and mouse*, *cat-burglar*, and *cat-walk*. Similarly, some information about the concepts of English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts can be derived through certain English, Arabic, and Hebrew expressions, respectively, as well as through examining the many contexts in which these three concepts occur. Corpora give the researcher access to such contexts.

In my analysis, I will make use of three corpora. For the analysis of English *sin*, I will rely on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (over 560 million words; henceforth, COCA) (Davies 2018), and for the analysis of the Arabic and Hebrew words, I will rely on ArabiCorpus (over 170 million words) and HebrewCorpus (over 150 million words). The three corpora are not of the same size; as can be seen, COCA is almost three times as big as ArabiCorpus and HebrewCorpus. This, however, should not diminish the value of these two other corpora. In spite of the fact that the three corpora are not of the same size, all of them give access to ample written and spoken material that can give the researcher the opportunity to examine how a certain concept in English, Arabic, or Hebrew is being used. COCA provides access to spoken material, as well as to written material coming from a variety of sources: short stories, popular magazines (for children and for adults), ten newspapers from across the USA, and nearly 100 academic journals. ArabiCorpus data come from newspapers (published in Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, and Morocco), colloquial speech, pre-modern and modern literature (The countries represented with the novels are Egypt, Palestine, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syria, and Lebanon), and nonfiction. HebrewCorpus includes material coming from news, Biblical literature, early fiction, modern fiction, colloquial speech, and movies.

The three corpora provide lists of the words that collocate with the target concepts. The collocation of some of these words with the target concept enables the researcher to gain some knowledge about the concept. However, not all the collocations are informative because a number of the words appearing on the list might occur with the target concept by chance. Some corpora, like COCA, provide statistical measures to identify these words; unfortunately, others, like ArabiCorpus and HebrewCorpus, do not. COCA provides the MI-score measure. The letters *MI* stand for *mutual information*, which is a calculation that denotes how strongly two words are related. If the MI-score value for two words occurring together is higher than 3, the two words are said to have a statistically significant semantic bonding between them, which, means that these words do not occur together by chance (Davies 2018). As regards ArabiCorpus and HebrewCorpus, since no such statistical measures are available, the researcher has to go through the whole list of collocates in order to avoid the so-called “cherry-picking” of certain collocates.

## 2. English *sin*, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*, and Hebrew *ḥet*

Polysemy is the case in which one word form has two or more different, albeit related, meanings. Consider, for instance, the word *mouse* and its two meanings, an animal and a device. Distinguishing polysemy may not always be a simple task, and, therefore, some linguistic tests may prove to be necessary. In the case of the word *mouse*, a grammatical test reveals that the word has two meanings; *mouse* has two plural forms, *mice* refers to an animal while *mouses* refers to a device. In the case of the word *faithful*, as Goddard (2011) explains, a semantic (and not a grammatical) test is needed; the existence of two corresponding nouns, *faithfulness* and *fidelity*, is evidence that the adjective *faithful* is polysemous. For some other words (such as *fork*), understanding the context is the only way to discover their polysemy. What can be said of the word *sin*?

English *sin* can be used as a count or mass noun; put differently, in some contexts, *sin* can be pluralized whereas in others it cannot. It can also be used with religious and non-religious senses. The following three examples are illustrative; all of them are taken from COCA.

- (1) *Such an exhibition of temper, such disregard for the moral as well as the physical effects of the deed—mark it as something more than a mistake. It is a crime against man, a **sin** against God!*

- (2) *Hey now, you know, they say everyone deserves their day in court, but there are some lawsuits happening that you might think twice about, like the lady in Nebraska who is suing all gay people on the Earth, all gay people on the Earth right now and those to come, claiming they are guilty of living a life in **sin**.*
- (3) *But the real reason was to find suitable husbands or wives they'd hopefully settle with over there (now that Communism was over) replenishing the nation and atoning for their parents' **sin** of emigration.*

In example (1), the word *sin* is preceded by the indefinite article 'a'; thus it is used as a count noun. In example (2), the word *sin* is not preceded by any article, and therefore, it is used as a mass noun. In both contexts, however, the word *sin* is used with a religious meaning, i.e. it is related to the concept of God. In example (3), *sin* appears to have a non-religious meaning; it does not seem to be perceived as an act against God's will. Note that the difference between *sin* in example (1) and *sin* in example (2) is grammatical, while the difference between *sin* in example (1) and *sin* in example (3) is contextual (and, arguably, semantic).

Like its English counterpart, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a* can be used as a count or mass noun; it can also be used with religious as well as non-religious senses.

- (4) *lays min qabīli ṣṣudfatī an takūna **ḥaṭī'atu** ādam waḥawwā' bisababi hādīhi ṣṣahwati.*  
 'It is not a coincidence that the **ḥaṭī'a** of Adam and Eve was because of this desire.'
- (5) *wasawfa ta'ūdu ilā sīratihā l'ūlā llatī kānat tumārisu fīhā **ḥaṭī'a** munḍu sanawāt.*  
 'She will return to her previous life, in which she was practicing **ḥaṭī'a** for years.'
- (6) *hal tawḥīdu lʒjayši llubnaniyyi **ḥaṭī'a**...?*  
 'Is uniting the Lebanese army a **ḥaṭī'a**...?'

Example (4) demonstrates that *ḥaṭī'a* can refer to an act against God's law, whereas example (6) shows that it can refer to an act against one's society and country.<sup>2</sup> In example (4), *ḥaṭī'a* is used as a count noun because it refers to the first *ḥaṭī'a* that Adam and Eve committed. In example (5),

<sup>2</sup> One may claim that the Arabic word in this context is used non-literally with a religious connotation. Yet the whole context from which the example is extracted is a non-religious one, and the word is deployed to refer to an act that is not against God but against morality.

on the other hand, it is deployed as a mass noun (the word *ḥaṭṭā* in this example cannot be pluralized, as will be discussed later).

Hebrew *ḥet* exhibits a similar behavior to that of its English and Arabic near equivalents. It can refer to an act against God's will, as in (7), to a state of repeatedly committing such an act, as in (8), or to an act against morality, as in (9).

- (7) *besefer berešit, mito`ar **ḥaḥet** šel ha`aḥila me`etz hada`at kema`ase šehevi et hamavet al ha`enošut.*

‘In the Book of Genesis, the *ḥet* of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is described as an act that brought about death on humanity.’

- (8) *vehareša`im yismehu **baḥet** uvareša.*

‘And the wicked will take joy in *ḥet* and evil.’

- (9) *behašva`a lifša`av šel sadam ḥuseyn, yalbinu kešeleg et **ḥata`eyha** šel yisra`el.*

‘In comparison with Saddam Hussein's crimes, the *ḥata`im* of Israel will turn as white as snow.’

Hence, I will posit that each of these three English, Arabic, and Hebrew words is polysemous, and I will demonstrate that they have three meanings. Two of these meanings are used in religious contexts, whereas the third is used in non-religious contexts. I will examine each of these senses in more detail in the following subsections. I will discuss the religious meanings of the count nouns in Subsections 2.1 and 2.2. Subsequently, I will discuss the religious meanings of the non-count nouns in Subsection 2.3, and the non-religious meanings in Subsection 2.4.

## 2.1 English *sin*<sub>1</sub>

A quick glance at the ten commandments (Exodus 20:2-17), which are known to practicing English-speaking Christians, reveals to us that a *sin*<sub>1</sub> could be perceived as any thought (“you shall not covet your neighbor's wife”), saying (“you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”), or deed (“you shall not kill”) which is against the will of God. Linguistic data show that native English speakers may be familiar with this view. Consider the examples below from COCA:

- (10) *Pride is a **sin** to which we're not immune, but there's more to it than that. Over and above our personal weaknesses, you and I—and even Iwaszkiewicz and his*

*sinister brotherhood, and the Holy Father with his maddening fundamentalism—we're all responsible for the faith of millions of people.*

- (11) *Not war, but the love of war, is a **sin**...In terms of the secular world, the Bible is as much directed toward justice as forgiveness. Just war is permissible, and is demanded, in certain circumstances.*
- (12) *"Lying is a **sin**. You know that, don't you, Henry?" "Of course I knew it. The nuns and priests had been drilling it into us since the first grade."*
- (13) *But the conflict is about more than land; many people on both sides feel profoundly that a compromise would be morally wrong. A significant minority of Israelis not only retain a fervent attachment to the land that makes up the Eretz Yisrael of the Bible but also believe that to settle and possess it is to fulfill a divine decree. For these Jews, it is a **sin** to surrender land that God has given them.*

These examples suggest that a person can commit a  $\text{sin}_1$  by thinking (e.g. pride or love of war), saying (e.g. lying), or doing (e.g. surrendering land) something. On this basis, I suggest that the concept of  $\text{sin}_1$  can be paraphrased in part as follows:

English  $\text{sin}_1$

- (1a) something of one kind
- (1b) people can say what this something is with the word *sin*
- (1c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- (1d) "it can be like this:
- (1e)
  - someone thinks something about something at some time, God [m] doesn't want people to think like this
  - someone says something at some time, God [m] doesn't want people to say something like this
  - someone does something at some time, God [m] doesn't want people to do something like this

A comment is in order regarding components (1a)-(1c). As can be noticed, component (b) has an explicit reference to the noun being defined, something which could result in the definition of that noun sounding circular. However, Goddard (2009) remarks that the noun used in this component functions as a word-form. I believe that the reason for adding this component is that the semantic prime SOMETHING can refer to abstract as well as concrete things. Without such a



component, the reader may not know what the ‘something’ talked about in the explication refers to, and thus, the explication would be less comprehensible. In the explications of a number of abstract nouns, components (a) and (b) are followed by the subsequent components (Goddard 2009a):

- c. someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- d. “it can be like this:
- e. ...”

Component (c) tells the reader that people can describe something with the word being explicated when they are “thinking in accordance with a certain mental model of how things can be” (Goddard 2009, 18).

Also component (1e) needs some further clarification. The component states that a person can commit a sin by thinking, saying, or doing something which is against the will of God. Two questions may be asked here. First, should the component include the idea that the person committing the sin knows that s/he is going against God’s will? Second, should it be stated that a number of people know what God wants and how they know what exactly he wants. My response to the first question is in the negative as the Bible itself speaks of sins committed unknowingly (see, e.g., Lev 5: 2). Also in the negative is my response to the second question; a reference to how people know what God wants them to do or not to do is part of the explication of the term *commandment* and not *sin*.

From the viewpoint of Catholics, sins<sub>1</sub> can be divided into two categories, mortal and venial. The Catholic doctrine teaches that, unlike committing a venial sin<sub>1</sub>, committing a mortal sin<sub>1</sub> can result in eternal separation from God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2000).

Whether the average native English speaker knows this Catholic meaning of these two expressions is doubtful, but it nonetheless appears that native English speakers understand that some *sins* are worse than others. In COCA, the word *mortal* occurs with *sin* 129 times, with an MI-score of 8.76, which shows that there is a semantic bonding between the two words and that they do not occur together by chance. Upon examining these contexts, one finds that, in 103 out of the 129 contexts, this expression is used to talk about a sin that leads to eternal damnation, while in 26 contexts, it is used to talk about a very serious mistake that someone has made. I would argue that native English speakers understand that a mortal sin<sub>1</sub> refers to a very serious sin<sub>1</sub> because the word *mortal* has at least one of the following meanings: (1) will ultimately die

(e.g. ‘a mortal being’), (2) causing death (e.g. ‘a mortal injury’), or (3) very serious (e.g. ‘mortal fear’) (Walter 2005). Here are some excerpts from COCA that lend support to this claim:

- (14) *At his lowest moments, the disease made Crespi, a devout Catholic, consider committing a mortal **sin**. [Crespi says,] “I was suicidal. I attempted to take my own life, from a car in the garage, running a car in the garage, hung off a bridge in California.”*
- (15) *She’s dead, my boy. You are trapping a human soul within the outward show of rotten form. She will have no hope of salvation. She will be the hopeless slave of earthly clay and the chattel of her circumstances. For you to do that to another human soul is a mortal **sin**. You will have to answer for that on the Day of Judgment.*
- (16) *The church officially viewed adultery as a mortal **sin**, regardless of whether it was committed by the husband or the wife.*

That some sins<sub>1</sub> are perceived to be serious suggests that other sins<sub>1</sub> are perceived to be less serious. Here are some COCA examples that lend support to this argument:

- (17) *He said I must understand it was a serious **sin** because sexual intercourse was given by God to married couples for the procreation of children and we had stolen it and used it wrongfully, for physical pleasure, which was its secondary purpose.*
- (18) *Besides, maybe lying is just a little **sin** to God, he’s got so many big ones to deal with like murder and war and stuff.*

Example (17) presents premarital sex as a serious sin<sub>1</sub>, while example (18) portrays lying as a little sin<sub>1</sub>. This being so, I will add the following components:

- (1f) at some times, when this happens, it is bad
- (1g) at some times, when this happens, it is very bad

Breaking God’s laws can bring about punishment upon the sinner. This notion is supported by the co-occurrence of the words *punishment* and *sin*; the two words appear together 44 times in COCA with an MI-score of 4.8. The following two examples are illustrative:

- [19] *The loss of a limb would follow a man into the afterlife and most people considered it a punishment for some **sin** or a cruel nature.*

- [20] *Sometimes she looked at me as if my very existence was punishment for some unknown **sin**.*

The relation between  $\text{sin}_1$  and punishment can be captured as follows:

- (1h) if someone does something like this, after this, God [m] can do something to this someone because of this, this someone can feel something very bad

I should note that I did not say that God would do something bad to the sinner, but rather that God would do something to the sinner, the result of which is that the sinner can feel very bad. The reason for paraphrasing the idea of God punishing the sinner in this way is that God is perceived as good and the source of goodness (see Habib 2015). As a result, stating that God would do something bad to a person would be incompatible with his goodness and righteousness.

Even though  $\text{sins}_1$  can result in punishment, they can be forgiven by God, and punishment is consequently eliminated. This idea is evidenced by the co-occurrence of (1) the word *forgiveness* with *sin* and (2) the word *merciful* with *God*. The mercifulness of God strongly implies that he forgives sins. In COCA, the words *forgiveness* and *sin* occur together 36 times (MI=6.0), and *merciful* and *God* appear together 150 times (MI=6.86).

For  $\text{sins}_1$  to be forgiven, the sinner has to repent, confess his/her  $\text{sins}_1$ , and atone for them. In COCA, the word *repentance* occurs with *sin* 21 times (MI=7.76). The words *confess*, *confessing*, and *confession* appear with *sin* 25 (MI=6.02), 13 (MI=7.08), and 27 (MI=5.2) times, respectively. The word *atonement* is found together with *sin* in 21 contexts (MI=7.67). Here are some excerpts from COCA:

- (21) *I got a big grace from this ordinary celebration of the confession and forgiveness of **sin**.*
- (22) *For there to be up there must be down, for black there must be white, for good to be perceived there must also be evil, for repentance to be required **sin** must be present, for there to be mercy there must be justice.*
- (23) *His premise is that the empire has sinned and that appropriate action must be taken for atonement of **sin**.*

The forgiveness of  $\text{sins}_1$  by God means that the sinner will not be punished, especially after this sinner departs this life. Repentance involves the recognition that one has committed something wrong, and confession requires the sinner to tell God and/or another person what s/he has done.

Atonement refers to praying and/or doing some act that aims to express the sinner's repentance and, if possible, to fix the damage that has been done because of the  $\sin_1$ .

In universal human concepts, this can be anchored as follows:

(1i) it can be not like this if this someone does some things as God [m] wants"

This component may seem to be vague, and an elaboration—as in the components below—may appear to be necessary.

if this someone thinks like this: "I know that I did something bad, I know that God [m] didn't want me to do it"

if this someone feels something bad because of this

if this someone says to God [m]: "I know that I did something bad, I know that you didn't want me to do it"

if this someone does something good, God [m] will not do something to this someone, if God [m] does this something, this someone can feel something very bad

However, replacing component (1i) with the components above would mean including the explication of *repentance* in the explication of  $\sin_1$ , and it seems implausible that the meaning of  $\sin_1$  contains so many components about *repentance*. As a result, I will retain component (1i) as it is.

To recapitulate,  $\sin_1$  seems to be perceived as any thought, saying, or deed that is not in line with God's will. It appears that the general perception is that  $\sin_1$  vary in their severity, but they all entail punishment, unless the sinner repents. The next section will deal with the Arabic and Hebrew near equivalents of English  $\sin_1$ .

## 2.2 Arabic $\text{ḥaṭī}^{\text{'}}a_1$ and Hebrew $\text{ḥet}_1$

I would argue that the explications of Arabic  $\text{ḥaṭī}^{\text{'}}a_1$ <sup>3</sup> and Hebrew  $\text{ḥet}_1$  are identical to English  $\sin_1$  and can thus be explicated as follows:

Arabic  $\text{ḥaṭī}^{\text{'}}a_1$ / Hebrew  $\text{ḥet}_1$

(1a) something of one kind

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<sup>3</sup> According to Glassé (2002), Arabic has three main concepts that translate English *sin*. These are *itm*, *ḍanb*, and *ḥaṭī' a*. *Itm* is more serious than *ḍanb*, while *ḥaṭī' a* "is used in practice indiscriminately to refer to both" (p. 431). This being so, in this paper, I will explicate the term *ḥaṭī' a*.

- (1b) people can say what this something is with the word *ḥaṭī'a/ ḥet*
- (1c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
- (1d) “it can be like this:
- (1e) – someone thinks something about something at some time, God [m] doesn't want people to think like this
- someone says something at some time, God [m] doesn't want people to say something like this
- someone does something at some time, God [m] doesn't want people to do something like this
- (1f) at some times, when this happens, it is bad
- (1g) at some times, when this happens, it is very bad
- (1h) if someone does something like this, after this, God [m] can do something to this someone”
- because of this, this someone can feel something very bad
- (1i) it can be not like this if this someone does some things as God [m] wants

To begin with Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>1</sub>, this word is derived from the root *ḥṭʾ*, which means “to do wrong.” Another word which is derived from the same root is *ḥata'* ‘mistake.’ The Arabic dictionary *Lisān Al'arab* (1988) explains that the difference between *ḥaṭī'a* and *ḥata'* is that, unlike the latter, the former is done intentionally. Additionally, *ḥaṭī'a*, but not *ḥata'*, can be used as a religious term, and, in this case, it refers to any intentional thought, saying, or deed that is contrary to what God has said, an idea which is expressed in components (1a)-(1e). ArabiCorpus data indicate that Arabs are familiar with this idea, as can be seen from the following examples from ArabiCorpus:

- (24) ...*fa' innahu tasūdu...kabā'ir...miṭla lzaša'i wannifāqi...*  
 ‘...mortal *ḥaṭāyā* (pl. of *ḥaṭī'a*), such as greed, hypocrisy..., are prevailing...’
- (25) *alizdiwāziyyatu tadḥulu ḍimna ḥaṭī'ati lkaḍibi, li'annahā tatanāfā ma'a l'īmāni.*  
 ‘Hypocrisy can be classified as a *ḥaṭī'a* of lying, because it is incompatible with Faith.’
- (26) *inna li'tidā'a 'alā abriyā'in ḥaṭī'atun wazarīmatun wasayu'āqibu llāhu murtakibī hāḍihi ljarā'em.*  
 ‘Attacking innocent people is a *ḥaṭī'a* and a crime, and God will punish those who commit these crimes.’

A comment is in order with regard to the use of the word *God*. It can be claimed that Muslim Arabs believe in Allah and not in God, and therefore, adding the semantic molecule *God* to the explication of the Arabic word *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>1</sub> is misleading, as it suggests that Muslim Arabs and Christian native English speakers believe in the same entity. While a number of people may indeed embrace this argument, it should be noted that the Quran states that the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is the same God (Book of the Spider 29:46). Also, the Catholic Church officially teaches that the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is the same God (Second Vatican Council 1965). Furthermore, Habib (2011; 2015) has shown that, from a linguistic point of view, English *God*, Arabic *Allah*, and Hebrew *Elohim* can be said to have the same meaning.

From a Muslim theological perspective, *ḥaṭāyā* (pl. of *ḥaṭī'a*) can be classified into *kabā'er* (lit. 'big') and *ṣarā'er* (lit. 'small'), a belief that is found among Christian native Arabic speakers.<sup>4</sup> This belief is spelled out in components (1f)-(1g), and linguistic evidence from the corpus shows that the average native Arabic speaker is familiar with it. The words *kabā'er* and *ṣarā'er* are found 175 and 21 times in ArabiCorpus, respectively. As employed in the corpus, *kabā'ir* refers to major *ḥaṭāyā*, such as *qatl* 'murder,' *zinā* 'adultery,' and *sariqa* 'stealing.' *Ṣarā'er*, on the other hand, are minor *ḥaṭāyā*.<sup>5</sup> Here are two examples:

(27) *alqatlu huwa akbaru **lkabā'iri**.*

'Murder is the biggest of all *kabā'ir* 'mortal *ḥaṭāyā*'.'

(28) *attā'ibu yatūbu mina **lkabā'iri waṣṣarā'iri**.*

'The repentant repents his *kabā'ir* 'mortal *ḥaṭāyā*' and *ṣarā'er* 'venial *ḥaṭāyā*'.'

Components (1h)-(1i) aim to capture the notion that committing certain *ḥaṭāyā* can lead the sinner to hell, but atoning for them can bring him/her forgiveness. Example (29) below, taken from ArabiCorpus, lends support to this view:

(29) *aṣṣadaqatu tuḥfi'u **lḥaṭī'ata** kama yuḥfi'u lmā'u nnara.*

'Charity extinguishes the *ḥaṭī'a* like water extinguishes fire.'

<sup>4</sup> The word *kabā'er* is derived from the radical root  $\sqrt{\text{kbr}}$ , the same root from which the semantic prime *kabīr* 'big' is derived. Similarly, *ṣarā'er* is derived from the root  $\sqrt{\text{ṣrr}}$ , the same root from which the semantic prime *ṣarīr* 'small' is derived. As ArabiCorpus shows, these words can be used as nouns or adjectives. When deployed as nouns, they refer to big and small *ḥaṭāyā* 'sins,' respectively. When employed as adjectives, *kabā'er* means the biggest or very big, and *ṣarā'er* means the smallest or very small.

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, ArabiCorpus does not present any contexts in which certain acts are described as *ṣarā'er*. Even so, the meaning of the word *ṣarā'er* can be understood (1) because this word is derived from the same radical-root,  $\sqrt{\text{ṣrr}}$ , which the word *ṣarīr* 'small' is derived from and (2) because it co-occurs with the word *kabā'er*.

Moreover, the Quran teaches that all *ḥaṭāyā* can be forgiven if the person repents, viz. asks for God's forgiveness, prays, and does good deeds (Book of the Criterion 25:68-71; (Ibn Kathir 2002)). That Arabs are acquainted with this idea is attested by linguistic evidence from the corpus. In ArabiCorpus, the word *yaxfir* 'forgive,' with God being the agent, is found with *ḥaṭī'a* in 55 contexts. The word *nadam* 'remorse' appears with *ḥaṭī'a* 5 times, and the word *yukaffir* 'atone' occurs with *ḥaṭī'a* 25 times.

In respect of the Hebrew word *ḥet*, it can be used to refer to any transgression against God's commandments, much like its English and Arabic near equivalents. This notion is reflected in components (1a)-(1e) and is underpinned by example [30] below:<sup>6</sup>

- (30) *Onan ḥata ḥet kaful, ḥet dati avar al mitsvat pru urvu veḥet musari klaḥey aḥiv.*  
 "Onan committed a double **ḥet**: (1) a religious **ḥet** against the commandment [of God to Adam and Eve to] 'Go forth and propagate and fill the earth with men' and (2) a moral **ḥet** against his brother."

According to component (1e), transgressions against God's laws can be manifested in saying or doing something that God does not want human beings to say or do. As evidence for this claim, consider the following example:

- (31) *...vehu moḥel leḥol ben-yisra'el šehiḥ `iso...veḥata negdo...beyn badibur uveyn bama`ase.*  
 "...and he [God]forgives every Jew who angered him... and **sinned** against him either in speech or in deed."

Furthermore, a thought that is not compatible with God's will is also regarded as a *ḥet*. This notion is supported by the collocation *ḥet hayohra* 'sin of arrogance,' which occurs 19 times in HebrewCorpus.

Components (1f)-(1g) show that *ḥata'im* (pl. of *ḥet*) vary in the degree of their severity. HebrewCorpus presents 133 contexts in which a *ḥet* is described as *gadol* 'big,' *me'od gadol* 'very big,' and *hagadol biyoter* 'the biggest.' In 104 of these contexts, the word *ḥet* or its plural form *ḥata'im* is used with a religious sense; consider the following example:

- (32) *ḥazal ra`u bidvarav elu ḥet gadol.*

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<sup>6</sup> All the Hebrew examples are taken from HebrewCorpus.

‘ḥazal [an acronym for *our sages, may their memory be blessed*] considered his sayings as a major **ḥet**.’

Components (1h)-(1i) state that *ḥata`im* bring about God’s punishment upon the sinner. Even so, God would refrain from punishing the sinner if s/he confesses his/her *ḥata`im* to God, asks for his forgiveness, and atones for these *ḥata`im*. In support of this claim, consider the following examples from HebrewCorpus:

- (33) *afilu hakadoš-baruḥ-hu lo yaḥol leha`aniš bli šeyeš eyzehu **ḥet** še`alav bonim et ha`oneš.*

‘Even God cannot inflict punishment [on someone] without there being a **ḥet** based on which there should be punishment.’

- (34) *elohim yaḥmir al bney yerušalayim veyā`aniš et ha`anašim **šeḥata`eyhem** ktanim yaḥasit.*

‘God will be strict on Jerusalem and will punish even people whose *ḥata`im* are relatively minor.’

- (35) *šlomo mevakešše`elohim yislaḥ la`am kšehu ḥoteumode **baḥet**.*

‘Solomon asks that God forgive people when they sin and confess their **ḥet**.’

- (36) *kedey še`elohim yislaḥ lahem al **ḥata`eyhem** aleyhem laḥazor bitšuvah ulešanut et dereḥḥayeyhem.*

‘In order for God to forgive them their *ḥata`im*, they have to repent and change their way of life.’

In addition, consider the Jewish holiday *YomKippur* ‘the day of atonement,’ which is an official holiday in Israel. On this day, Jews believe that God would forgive all their *ḥata`im* if they repent.

As can be seen, the meanings of the concepts of Arabic *ḥaṭī`a*<sub>1</sub> and Hebrew *ḥet*<sub>1</sub> fully overlap with that of English *sin*<sub>1</sub>. All three concepts refer to thoughts, sayings, and deeds which are incompatible with what God wants. Also, they imply that a person who goes against God’s will is doomed to be punished, unless s/he repents.

The fact that the three concepts overlap is further underpinned by the similar words in the three languages that collocate with the target words. A number of examples can be instructive. First, we find that similar adjectives modify these target words. For instance, to describe a certain



sin as a very serious sin, English uses words such as *deadly*, *mortal*, *cardinal*, and *grave*. According to COCA, these four words co-occur with *sin* on 36 (MI=4.63), 129 (MI=8.76), 108 (7.146), and 36 (MI=4.01) occasions, respectively. In ArabiCorpus, the adjective *mumīta* ‘mortal/deadly’ co-occurs with *ḥaṭī’a* 12 times, the adjective *kabīra* ‘big/grave’ 26 times, and the adjective *kubra* ‘biggest/gravest’ 144 times. In HebrewCorpus, the adjective *gadol* ‘big/grave’ occurs together with *ḥet* 76 times and the adjective *hagadol* ‘biggest/gravest’ occurs 36 times. The English expressions *unforgivable sin* and *unpardonable sin*, which are used to describe a very grave sin, are found 41 and 29 times in COCA, respectively; its Arabic counterpart *ḥaṭī’a lā turtafar* appears 28 times in ArabiCorpus, while its Hebrew counterpart *ḥet bilti nislāḥis* found 6 times in HebrewCorpus. Second, similar verbs in the three languages go together with the target words. The phrase *commit a sin* appears 288 times in COCA; its Arabic equivalents *irtakaba ḥaṭī’a* and *iqtarafa ḥaṭī’a* appear 174 times and 84 times, respectively, in ArabiCorpus, and its Hebrew equivalents *bitseya ḥet* and *asa ḥet* appear 15 and 85 times, respectively, in HebrewCorpus.

It is worth noting that some people may still argue that the three concepts do not really overlap owing to the different interpretations of the term *sin*. They may note, for instance, that drinking wine is a grave *ḥaṭī’a* in Islam but not at all a sin in Christianity or a *ḥet* in Judaism; therefore, so their argument goes, the three concepts are different. I would challenge this argument on the grounds that Christians, Jews, and Muslims view these terms as being identical and as referring to the breaking of one or more of God’s commandments. What they may disagree on are the commandments themselves. Furthermore, the argument that the three concepts are different because they can refer to the breaking of different commandments is also untenable because, on this basis, even the English word *sin* can have different meanings because English speakers of different religious backgrounds use it to refer to the breaking of different commandments. To give but a single example, Catholics, but not Protestants, view the missing of Mass on Sunday a sin; but would that render *sin* with two different meanings, a Catholic meaning and a Protestant meaning? The answer is in the negative because, otherwise, native English speakers would not really understand each other as they use the same words differently.

The next section will deal with another religious meaning of these three concepts.

### 2.3 English *sin*<sub>2</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>2</sub>, and Hebrew *ḥet*<sub>2</sub>

*Sin* can be used as a mass noun. The following examples from COCA show that the word *sin* is not preceded by an article, which indicates that it is used as a non-count noun. Thus the meaning of *sin* in these contexts must be different from *sin*<sub>1</sub>.

- (37) *When we fall to sin, we wake up to bitterness.*
- (38) *In spite of her anger, revulsion and pain, she writes, that night she started choosing to forgive. "I turned and slid into his arms." Terrified as she was, she writes, "Somehow, I felt closer than ever to Ted." She says if he had not repented and if he had persisted in **sin**, she might have chosen differently.*
- (39) *The Egyptian raised his hierophantic hand in stern denial. "Humanity," he pronounced, "is steeped in **sin**."*
- (40) *Since his arrival, he had seen so much that this latest exposure to **sin** and sex seemed tame.*
- (41) *He cautioned them to realize that their captivity in Africa was temporary, but captivity to **sin** was much worse and only gave a foretaste of the eternal captivity to come in hell.*

*Sin* in the examples above does not refer to a specific act, but rather to a state. When a person is described, for instance, as being steeped in *sin*, the focus is not only on doing something against God's will but also on doing it for some time. *Sin* is also used as a mass noun in such expressions as *live in sin*, *die in sin*, and *state of sin*. In these expressions, *sin* might have a (slightly) different meaning from *sin*<sub>2</sub>. *Live in sin* refers to cohabitation, viz. living with a partner and having sex with him/her without being married to him/her. *Die in sin* refers to dying while being spiritually separated from God. *State of sin* refers to the state of being spiritually separated from God. In these three expressions, it could be that each meaning arises from the whole phrase and not merely from the word *sin*, particularly because each meaning does not occur in other phrases. Therefore, I will not posit that *sin* has more religious meanings besides *sin*<sub>1</sub> and *sin*<sub>2</sub>.

Akin to *sin*<sub>2</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>2</sub> refers to a certain action which is incompatible with God's law and that is repeatedly done over a period of time. The example below, taken from ArabiCorpus, lends support to this claim:

- (42) *wasawfa ta'ūdu ilā sīratihā l'ūlā llatī kānat tumārisu fihā **lḥaṭī'a** munḍu sanawāt.*

‘She will return to her previous life, in which she was practicing *ḥaṭī’a* for years.’<sup>7</sup>

This example is taken from a true story about a widowed woman who led a life of incest with her two sons. Note that, like *sin*<sub>2</sub>, *ḥaṭī’a*<sub>2</sub> is used as a mass noun. Unlike English, Arabic does not use indefinite articles. The only way to find out whether a certain noun is a count or mass noun is by attempting to pluralize it. Replacing *ḥaṭī’a* with the plural form *ḥaṭaya* shifts the focus of the sentence from the state in which the mother lives to the actions that the mother is doing. This being so, I will posit that *ḥaṭāyā* can be used as the plural form of *ḥaṭī’a*<sub>1</sub> but not *ḥaṭī’a*<sub>2</sub>.

Unfortunately, ArabiCorpus does not present more examples of *ḥaṭī’a*<sub>2</sub>. Google, on the other hand, provides such examples. Consider the following sentences:

- (43) *limāḍā l’iṣrāru ‘alā ḥaṭī’a’?*<sup>8</sup>  
 ‘Why should we persist in *ḥaṭī’a*?’
- (44) *man yaftaqidu lfaḍlata fa’ innahu munḥamisun fī ḥaṭī’a.*<sup>9</sup>  
 ‘He who lacks virtue is immersed in *ḥaṭī’a*.’

Similar to its English and Arabic counterparts, Hebrew *ḥet* can be employed to refer to the condition of being away from God for a certain period of time. Here are two examples from HebrewCorpus that illustrate this usage:

- (45) *hu hiṭḥil lehabit al atsmo lo ke’al ḥote šeṣakuwa baḥet ...ela ke’al adam ba’al kinyanim ruḥaniyim...*  
 ‘He started to view himself, not as a sinner immersed in *ḥet*..., but as a person having spiritual properties...’
- (46) *ketotsa’a min hasiḥa maḥlita haprutsa lintoš et ḥayey haḥet...*  
 ‘As a result of the conversation, the prostitute decides to leave her life of *ḥet*...’

<sup>7</sup>This use, while being readily understood by native Arabic speakers, seems to be limited to some Arab countries, especially those with a Christian population.

<sup>8</sup>“limāḍā l’iṣrāru ‘alā ḥaṭī’a’? [Why Should We Persist in Sin?]”. Retrieved from <http://nabd-islam.com/showthread.php?t=30516> (accessed October 12, 2016).

<sup>9</sup>Adam, Wamid (2009). “attalawwūṭ: taḥaddīn kabīr wama’ziq ḥaṭīr [Pollution: A Great Challenge and a Dangerous Problem]” Retrieved from [http://www.kaldaya.net/2009/Articles/October/31\\_Oct16\\_09\\_WamidShamonAdam.html](http://www.kaldaya.net/2009/Articles/October/31_Oct16_09_WamidShamonAdam.html) (accessed October 12, 2016).

*het* in examples (45) and (46) is used as a mass noun. Like Arabic, Hebrew does not use indefinite articles; therefore, establishing whether a particular noun is countable or not is done by attempting to pluralize it. I would argue that *het* in examples (45) and (46) cannot be pluralized because the meaning of the sentences would shift from focusing on the state of committing a *het* to focusing on committing a variety of *hata'im* ‘sins.’

As can be seen, the three concepts seem to be identical. Thus I propose the following explication for all three of them:

English *sin*<sub>2</sub>/ Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>2</sub>/ Hebrew *het*<sub>2</sub>

(2a) something

(2b) people can say what this something is with the word *sin/ḥaṭī'a/het*

(2c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:

(2d) “it can be like this:

someone does some things for some time, God [m] doesn't want people to do something like this  
this is very bad”

Note that component (2f) reads “this is very bad,” not merely “this is bad.” The reason the intensifier *very* is required here is because being in a state of *sin/ḥaṭī'a/het*—in which a certain *sin* is committed repeatedly—is, I presume, worse than committing the *sin* once.

In summary, this subsection has argued that English *sin*, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*, and Hebrew *het* have different, albeit related, meanings from those presented in the previous two subsections. English *sin*<sub>1</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>1</sub>, and Hebrew *het*<sub>1</sub> focus on an action that is incompatible with one or more of God's commandments. English *sin*<sub>2</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>2</sub>, and Hebrew *het*<sub>2</sub>, on the other hand, focus on the state of doing such an action repeatedly. The next subsection will throw light on yet another meaning.

## 2.4 English *sin*<sub>3</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>3</sub>, and Hebrew *het*<sub>3</sub>

Unlike *sin*<sub>1</sub> and *sin*<sub>2</sub>, *sin*<sub>3</sub> is used in non-religious contexts, as demonstrated by the subsequent examples, taken from COCA:

(47) *Pollution is a sin in the sense that it is a desecration of the earth that is ours to enjoy and preserve.*

- (48) *Thirty years ago, Sadat fell dead by the faithful men of Egypt, a penalty for his **sin** of signing the treacherous Camp David Accords with the Jewish entity occupying Palestinian [sic].*
- (49) *In America you can be forgiven for a lot of things. But not being a fully engaged mother is a **sin**.*

These examples are not talking about an act against God but against morality. Morality, in turn, refers to the notion that there is a set of standards for good and bad behavior, and that many people are familiar with these standards (Walter 2005). Moral deeds refer to acceptable deeds that conform to certain (social, human, etc.) standards. Immoral deeds refer to deeds which are totally unacceptable because they do not conform to some particular standards. COCA data show that what is classified as immoral are acts which are seriously bad, such as taking advantage of people or inflicting pain on others. By virtue of being completely unacceptable, immoral deeds are not only bad but very bad. Because *sin*<sub>3</sub> refers to an immoral act, it is viewed as something very bad.

One may wonder whether there is any syntactic difference between English *sin*<sub>1</sub> and *sin*<sub>3</sub>, as there is between *sin*<sub>1</sub> and *sin*<sub>2</sub>. The answer is in the negative. It is true that one indicator of the polysemy of a certain word is the presence of some grammatical properties, such as the countability of one meaning and the uncountability of the other. Yet, this remains one indicator. The NSM school, while relying on morphological and syntactic features to posit polysemy, also posits polysemy in the absence of these features if it proves impossible to propose an explication that could cover all the uses of the concept in question (Goddard 2000; Gladkova and Romero-Trillo 2014). *Sin*<sub>1</sub> refers to the breaking of a commandment given by God; for example, killing an innocent person is a *sin*<sub>1</sub> because it goes against the fifth commandment. On the other hand, *sin*<sub>3</sub> can refer to a very bad deed that does not necessarily classify as *sin*<sub>1</sub> because it does not violate any of God's commandments; the examples above, and in particular example [48], are instructive. Consider other examples of the same kind coming from COCA:

- (50) *Thus political apathy is a **sin**.*
- (51) *We must not be weak. To be weak is a **sin**.*
- (52) *I believe that every person should regard himself as a trustee of nature for the benefit of his fellows and posterity; and that the wanton destruction of animal life is a **sin** against nature.*

- (53) *This uncritical acceptance of the contractors' claims is a **sin** few congressmen or journalists would commit if the expensive new program were, say, a welfare initiative or a tax proposal.*

Like English *sin*<sub>3</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭī'a*<sub>3</sub> is a concept that is deployed in non-religious contexts to refer to an action which is perceived to be gravely wrong. The following examples are illustrative:

- (54) *assaṭwu 'alā alḥāni l' āḥarīn **ḥaṭī'atun** aw zunḥatun fanniyya.*  
'Stealing melodies is a **ḥaṭī'a** or an artistic offence.'
- (55) *wayanbarī an ya'lama llaḍīna waḍa'ū aydiyahum fī yaday hādā ssaḥḥāhi...anna muṣāfaḥata Peres **ḥaṭī'a**.*  
'Those who shook hands with a killer...should know that shaking hands with Peres [the Israeli President] is a **ḥaṭī'a**.
- (56) *alḥaṭī'atu liqtiṣādiyya awi lmiḥaniyya tardū **ḥaṭī'a** āydyōlōḡiyya.*  
'The economic or vocational **ḥaṭī'a** becomes an ideological **ḥaṭī'a**.'
- (57) *al'ifrāzu 'an madaniyyīn ba'da sittati sanawātin fī li' tiqāli yu' akkidu **ḥaṭī'ata** muṣādarati ḥayāri šša'bi.*  
'The release of a civilian after a six-year arrest demonstrates the **ḥaṭī'a** of confiscating the people's right to choose.'<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, Hebrew *ḥet*<sub>3</sub> refers to an act that is viewed as utterly inappropriate. The following examples from HebrewCorpus illustrate this usage:

- (58) *zilmir amar ki "ḥayavim lehakim va'ada" vehi "ha'avarat ha'inyan bli ḥakira zehu **ḥet**."*  
'Zilmir said that "we must form a committee" and that "letting the matter pass without investigation is a **ḥet**".'
- (59) *letsa 'ir šebeyado te'udat bagrut hazḥut lilmod bemosad lehaskala gvoha, **vehet** hu limnowa zot mimenu.*  
'A young person who has a matriculation certificate has the right to join a higher education institute, and it would be a **ḥet** to prevent him from that.'
- (60) *hatofa'a, hem yaḥrizu, nefotsa me'od, veyihye ze **ḥet** lehit'alem mimena.*

<sup>10</sup> This use, while being readily understood by native Arabic speakers, seems to be limited to some Arab countries, especially those with a Christian population.

‘The phenomenon [of ADHD], as they will declare, is very widespread, and it would be a *het* to ignore it.’

Hence, I propose the following explication for all three concepts:

English *sin*<sub>3</sub>/ Arabic *ḥaṭīʿa*<sub>3</sub>/ Hebrew *het*<sub>3</sub>

(3a) something of one kind

(3b) people can say what this something is with the word *sin/ ḥaṭīʿa/ ḥaṭīʿa*

(3c) someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:

(3d) “it can be like this:

people know that it is very bad if people do things of some kinds

at some times, some people do these things”

As has been demonstrated, the meanings of English *sin*<sub>3</sub>, Arabic *ḥaṭīʿa*<sub>3</sub>, and Hebrew *het*<sub>3</sub> appear to match up perfectly—at least, there is no evidence that they do not coincide. These concepts refer to any act that is not in line with social standards, and is therefore deemed to be outright wrong.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has thrown light on English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts. It has been demonstrated that each of these three words is polysemous, having three meanings. For each word, two meanings are religious while the third is non-religious. Of the religious meanings, one refers to an act, while the other refers to a state.

For each concept, I have provided a semantic analysis and constructed an explication using simple and universal concepts. The analysis has revealed that the differences between English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew equivalents are non-existent.<sup>11</sup> Rarely can we find two words in two different languages that can mean exactly the same thing in all possible contexts. In the case of English *sin* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts, however, the three words mean the same thing in all contexts.

This paper can thus be regarded as a contribution to the study of nouns, a field that has not been given adequate attention by semanticists. It also makes a contribution to the field of theo-semantics, namely the field that studies the meanings of religious words. Needless to say, the

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that any instance of any of the three words in the corpora can have only one of the three senses.

more words in general, and nouns in particular, are semantically analysed across different languages, the better understanding we have of these words and of the languages that employ them.

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