

Translating the Quranic Discourse from Arabic into English “Peculiarities- Difficulties and Prospects”

ترجمة معاني النص القرآني من العربية الى الانجليزية
"خصائص- صعوبات و آفاق"

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Abstract

Translation of the Quranic discourse faces many challenges. Being the proper words of God, it requires more precision, carefulness and cautiousness. The current study aims at investigating the peculiarities of the Quranic Translation into English and the challenges the translators encounter. It is assumed that the religious text presents a major hindrance for the majority of translators. The researcher attempts to identify the effects of translating the Quranic discourse into English.

Keywords: Quranic discourse, source language, target language, translation

المخلص

تواجه ترجمة الخطاب القرآني العديد من التحديات. كونه كلمات الله الصحيحة، فإن هي تطلب المزيد من الدقة الحرص والحذر. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة خصائص الترجمة القرآنية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية والتحديات التي

يواجهها المترجمون. من المفترض أن النص الديني يمثل عائقاً رئيسياً لغالبية المترجمين. تحاول الباحثة التعرف على آثار ترجمة الخطاب القرآني إلى اللغة الإنجليزية في توصيل معاني القرآن لنشر الإسلام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطاب القرآني، لغة المصدر، اللغة المستهدفة، الترجمة

Introduction

God created humans with the unique ability to employ speech for communication. Since the creation of mankind, language is an essential means of communication between the members of society. Its perpetual use is the most certain proof of the historical continuity of a community. However, the differentiation in their languages and dialects has made the entity of the translators a must.

But when it comes to the Holy Quran, which was revealed in Arabic, we find the interest of many translators all around the world. Since the Quranic discourse is aimed to all humanity, this may incite the curiosity of translators to disseminate the divine message of faith and to transmit God guidance. Therefore, it is worth for translators to understand the original source text (ST), then transfer and transmit it with more precision and accuracy. Dickins, Hervey, and Higgins (2002) assert that, "The subject matter of religious texts implies the existence of a spiritual world that is not fictive, but has its own external realities and truths. The author is understood not to be free to create the world that animates the subject matter, but to be merely instrumental in exploring it" (p.178).

The multiplicity of the muslim tongues in the world has made an exclusive special privacy to the translation of the holy Qu'ran into different languages. The rationale behind its translation is to explicate the religious, ethical, cultural and historical values of this text. Notwithstanding the fact that it was revealed in Arabic, the Quranic discourse is universal. Its divine messages are conveyed to all mankind. However, translation of the Qur'an from the language of revelation into other languages, requires the evocation of the privacy of the source text associated with its religious, cultural, historical and

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miraculous doctrine. When it comes to translation, a tremendous challenge encounters translators and requires them to take cognizance of its meanings, symbolic contexts and its miraculous style which typically raises problematic issues in terms of rhetoric and figurative language that reflect the Arabic milieu. Therefore, the basic aim of this study is to investigate the effects of the translation of the Quranic discourse into English and how to take advantage from it. It also aims to shed some light on the peculiarities and the difficulties of the translation of the holy Qur'an.

In an attempt to deal with these issues, the following are the research questions:

- What is the effect of translating the Quranic discourse into English in communicating the meanings of the Quran in spreading Islam ?
- What is the historical perspective to the Quranic discourse translation?
- What are the peculiarities of the Quranic text?
- What are the best ways to preaching Islam and calling in the way of Allah?

I. Translation: Overview

1. Definition

The science of translation or 'translatology' has emanated in the 1940's as a new discipline making a revolutionary change. Being away from the old dichotomy of 'word vs. sense' or 'literal vs. free' translation, it has dominated the traditional translation theory. Translation can be perceived as a trajectory through which both ideas and cultures are exchanged (Hatem and Mason, 1990). It is rather a form of cross-cultural communication. Changing, transferring or interpreting from one language to another is an act of rendering what is expressed in one language by means of another language. Subsequently, the translator should be acquainted with both the linguistic and cultural aspects of the source language from which

he/she translates and the target language into which he/she translates as well. He/she should possess a thorough knowledge of the different sides of both, the source language and the target language. As the language is a set of linguistic, semantic, morphological, syntactic and cultural features. Texts usually consist of culturally oriented linguistic features, such as idioms, proverbs, metaphors, and collocations (Ghazala, 2001; Dickins, et al, 2002).

According to Catford (1965), translation is defined as “the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language”(p.20). In the same line of thought, Nida& Taber, (2003) clarify that translation is “the reproduction in the receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style”, (p.12). However, Hasan Ghazala, (2008), viewed translation as:

“all the processes and methods used to render and/or transfer the meaning of the source language text into the target language as closely, completely and accurately as possible, using: (1) words/phrases which already have a direct equivalent in Arabic language; (2) new words or terms for which no ready-made equivalent are available in Arabic; (3) foreign words or terms written in Arabic letters as pronounced in their native origin; and (4) foreign words or terms made to fit Arabic pronunciation spelling and grammar” (p.1).

In his translation of the definition given by the French theorist, Dubois (1974), Bell (1991) gives more concern to the meaning and style by perceiving that:“Translation is the expression in another language (or the target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences” (pp.5-6). Stressing on its function, translation is defined by Reiss, (2000) as "a bilingual mediated process of communication, which ordinarily aims at the production of a Target Language text that is functionally equivalent to a Source Language text"(p.160). The translator seeks to reproduce in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, in terms of meaning and style.

Consequently, translation is the investigation of appropriate equivalents and expressions, meanings and messages from the source

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language into the target language, semantically accurate, grammatically correct, stylistically effective and textually coherent as the SL text. As Wilss (1969) states that, “the notion of translation competence, is aptly assessed in transfer situations that require at least some degree of adaptation to new and challenging textual demands which need structural adjustment”(p.95). Hence, the eligible translator should be creative and performing many tasks rather than looking for accurate semantic and mechanically replaced words.

Whatever definitions we come across, almost all of them can be subsumed under two qualifiers. The first is when we substitute a written work from one language to another with regard to its meaning. The second, Shiyab (2006) is “the transference of a message communicated from one text into a message communicated in another, with a high degree of attaining equivalence of context of the message, components of the original text, and the semiotic elements of the text” (p.22).

2.Types of Translation

Translation consists of a set of distinct procedures that starts first with the identification of the type of the text to be translated, the purpose of translation and the subject area. As there are types of texts that have their own characteristics and forms there are also types of translation that determine the translatability. Roman Jakobson (1959) makes a very important distinction between three types of written translation:

1. Intralingual translation: It consists of rewording or paraphrasing within the same language by interpreting the verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
2. Interlingual translation or translation proper: It is an interpretation of verbal signs from one language to another.

3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation: It is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign system for example music or image.

However, Nida discriminates between kinds of translation, like: free translation, word for word translation, literal translation, pragmatic translation, dynamic translation, ethnographic translation, aesthetic-poetic translation, semantic translation, linguistic translation and communicative translation.

3. History of Translation

The appearance of Translation as an active human movement goes as long as language itself. As an outcome for human activities such as business, military, politics, religion, etc, translation served as a means of communication between the people for a long period in a verbal form. Eric Jacobsen in Basnett (1988), goes so far as a hyperbolically displayed that translation is a Roman invention. Never theless, translated documents were found out “in the third and the second millennium B.C., in ancient Egypt and in Iraq. It stretched from the statements of Cicero and Horace on translation (in the first century BC) which they distinguish between word for word translation and sense for sense translation” (p.48).

In the fourth century (CE) St Jerome known for his translation of the Greek Septuagint Bible into Latin, and he was the first who suggest to separate between the translation of religious script and other texts. He elucidated that the correct translation depends on translator understanding of the original text and the degree of mastering target language. Translation for many years was exclusive to the religious themes till the sixteenth century, when translation center of attention was into other domain like literature, and politics . . .etc).

The invention of printing techniques in the fifteenth century helped translation to develop to the better and marked the appearance of many theorists. In 1540, the French humanist Etienne Dolet set forth a short outline of translation principles, entitled ‘La manière de

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bientraduired'une langue enautre' which means how to translate well from one language into another, John Dryden (1631-1700), in his Preface to Ovid's Epistle (1680), tackled the problems of translation by formulating three basic types: metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation, where the translator can abandon the original text as he sees fit and the publication of Alexander Fraser Tytler's Essay on the Principles of Translation in 1791.

Unto the forties of the twentieth century with the publication of the first papers on machine translation, the introduction of applied linguistics and contrastive studies in morphology and syntax facilitated the task for translators to determine similarities and differences between native language and foreign language. Therefore, till early 1960's, translation was set up as a discipline in a wide frame called translation studies, it became an important trend in language teaching and learning at school.

Many new theories have emerged in this contemporary era which offered a general model for understanding, analyzing and describing the functions and evolution of literary systems, its application to the study of translated literature. Shifting to a more functionally and socio-culturally oriented concept of translation, more consideration is given to the linguistic, cultural, and social, elements all of which overlap and interact with each other. The second half of the twentieth century and the need for the translation in different pragmatic domains, such as scientific, technological, academic, business, tourist guides, religious stresses the principle of intentionality in translation.

After the invention of computers, the translators' activities have been substituted, wherein the computer is fit out with the source text to be transferred in the target language, either with the aid of man or done automatically. This machine translation is a substantive complex and diverse field, represents a wide range of 'doers', which overlap and may alter in their order. Quah (2006) said that 'It employs a reference corpus of TTs and STs, particularly statistical-based approaches which use algorithms to match the new TL segments with

the built-in SL segments and their equivalents contained in the corpus, then compute the possibility that corpus-based TL equivalents are valid TL segments for the new text to be translated". (p.196)

4. Translation in the Arab World

Translation has witnessed a wide expansion with the Caliph Al-Mansour because of the Islamic conquests, and the necessity to make contact with Non-Arabic speaking communities. He made it a requisite to know their culture literature, and thus, civilization. Furthermore, translation was developed in the time of the Caliph Al-Ma'moun (813-33), who built 'Bait Al Hikma' in Baghdad, which was the greatest institute of translation at the time. During his reign, translation was in its golden era. According to Baker (2005), "the Arabs are credited with initiating the first organized, large-scale translation activity in history. This activity started during the reign of the Umayyads (661-750) and reached its zenith under the Abbasids (750-1258), particularly" (p.318). Later, Bait Al Hikma became the most celebrated center of translation in the Arab history, which has been elaborated in an academy, library and translation bureau which had a personnel of 65 translators.

During the era of Caliph Haroun Al-Rashid, translation reaches its peak. The Caliph treasured the work of the translators and generously paying them with golden money. Two methods of translation had been adopted: the first one identifies to Yuhana Ibn Al-Batriq and Ibn Na'ima Al-Himsi' Greek documents. The translation was purely literal and consisted of translating each word with an equivalent Arabic word. In the absence of the equivalence, the Greek word is adopted. This literal translations, did not achieve its purpose for it was later revised by Hunayn Ibn Ishaq and his followers focussed their attention to the requirements of the target language and the receptor. They adopted sense-for sense translation with an understandable and pleasant style. Correspondingly, the translation convey the meaning of the original without distorting the translated language.

II. Translations of the Qur'anic Discourse: Historical perspective

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The first translation of parts of the Qur'anic texts dates back to the lifetime of the prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) because of the growing need to spread the message of Islam to Non-Arabic speaking communities. The Prophet used to send letters to the governors of neighbouring countries introducing them the message of Islam and preaching them to embrace it. Most of these letters included some verses of the Qur'an. Salman Al-Farisi, the Persian companion, translated the meaning of Surat of Al Fatiha to Persian. Therefore, the letters of the Prophet were either explained by the delegation carrying those letters or by interpreters of rulers to whom those letters were sent. Besides, a Sindhi translation in 270/883-4 was done but none of these survives. One of the earliest extant surviving translations of the Qur'an is in Persian; it was made for Abu Salih Mansur ibn Nuh, Samanid ruler of Transoxania and Khurasan (350-366 A.H/ 961-976 A.D). This translation was accompanied by a translation Tafsir of Imam at-Tabari's, part of which still available in manuscript form. Nevertheless, the first translation of the Quran into the European Languages was done to Latin. It was made by an order from Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny in 1143 yet, the church has prohibited its publication. Four hundred years later, in 1543, it was first printed and published by Theodore Bibliander at Basel. Far away from its original copy, the translated copy was characterized by its unlimited mistakes, additions, omissions and distortion in many of its sections. Simultaneously, a century later, the first French translation was done by Andre' Du Ryer in 1647. The translation was ill, full of mistakes, and even additions. Two years later, The Scotsman Alexander Ross made the first translation into English in 1649. "This was indirect translation based on a French version by Sieur du Ryer and, like the Latin translation sponsored by Abbot of Cluny had a dubious aims . . ." (Baker, 2001, p.203).

Another Latin translation done by father Ludovic Maracci in 1698 was later pursued by many English translations. The most known version was translated by George Sale in 1734. Though it contains many inaccuracies and misunderstandings because of his bad style in the Arabic language and serious faults, his version was in turn translated

into many other languages, such as: French, German, Russian, and Swedish.

Plentiful other attempts endeavour to translate the Qur'an into English, among them Professor Arberry's translation in 1955 and was described as one of the greatest literary distinctions. Nevertheless, by Muslim translators, an English version entitled the Holy Quran, translated by Dr. Mohammed Abdul Hakim Khan in 1005 with short notes. In 1911, at Allahabad, Ashgar and Company printed the version entitled the Arabic text with English translation, arranged chronologically, by Mina Abu'lFazl.

II. Peculiarities of the Quranic Translation into English

1. Quran: Definition

The Quran is the speech of Allah sent down upon on his prophet Muhamed (pbuh) through the angel Gabriel in its precise meaning and precise wording, transmitted to us by numerous people, both verbally and in writing, in a clear Arabic language. Allah says:

{وهذا لسان عربي مبين}
{وانه لتنزيل رب العالمين نزل به الروح الأمين على قلبك}

The Quran is a record of the exact words revealed by Allah. It was memorized by Muhamed and then, dictated to his companions, and written down as scribes. The Quran has been put forth as a miracle in both word and meaning. It can never be imitated in its style, prose or content. It is an open challenge for all mankind to produce even a verse similar to it. Its recitation is a worship. i.e it is an act of worship to recite the Quran. The Quran is Allah's promise to be preserved from any distortion. Allah says in the glorious Quran:

{انا نحن نزلنا الذكر وانا له لحافظون}

It is the only sacred book that remains unchanged; not one word of its 114 chapters (Surahs) has been changed over the fourteen centuries. The Quran is the sacred book of Islam and a collection of the direct recitations of Allah as received by the prophet Muhamed (570-632

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AD) since it was first revealed and written down for over than fourteen hundred years ago. Allah says:

{ان علينا جمعه و قرانه . فاذا قراته فاتبع قرانه}

This miracle challenged all the Arab of that period and in all the times, the style used, the high level of language, the terms, all that made it impossible to equalize the miracle of our prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) although in the abode of Arabic language.

2. Translation of the Quranic Text

The religious translation is an attempt to remain as close as possible to the original text to offer a periphrastic script of it. Being more expressive and very accurate in choosing the lexical items that serve the target, the translator requires an extra effort to convey the message. Nida cited in Shunnaq (2012) that "Translation consists of providing, in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style" (p.281). Therefore, the translator must be significant and as precise and expressive to the SL as possible in order not to let a room for ambiguity.

Undoubtedly, translation into other languages is not an easy task; hence the translation of the Quranic text, in the main, is problematic. Being the proper words of God, the Qur'an is revered by Muslims as miraculous and inimitable and should merely be recited in the Arabic language. Translation of the Quranic discourse is one of the challenging and most difficult kinds of translation as it requires much more precision, carefulness, and cautiousness. The main challenges lie in overcoming ideational obstacles in translation as well as in dealing with terminology. A single word may have a range of meanings depending on the context; besides, the usage of words has changed a great deal between classical and modern Arabic. Notably, Arab native speakers admit that some Qur'anic passages are not easy to understand even in the original Arabic and may not represent the original meaning of the verse.

The exigency and the need of translating the Quranic discourse and the Islamic texts into English is vitally important for it stems from the conversion of a considerable number of people of different nationalities, languages and ethnicities into Islam. Yet, it has been a challenge for muslim translators both Arab natives and non-natives to spread the right teachings of Islam and preaching to the way of Allah especially when we know that the big majority of muslims do not speak Arabic; fewer than 20 percent of Muslims speak Arabic. This implies that the big majority of muslims exclusively acquire the Islamic knowledge through the medium of translation that leads to the problem of Islamic religious items. According to Schwars (2003), these items are called culture-bound or culture-specific items; they require special attention in translation so as to convey their right meaning and to avoid any misunderstanding or wrong interpretation by the reader of the translated text. Certainly, the translator of the Quranic discourse or the Islamic religious texts skips the role of a translator to the role of a preacher and a veritable caller to Islam and being a trustworthy in his translation and faith.

Hence, the main concern of this paper is to bring into perspective the peculiarities of the Quranic text and the best ways to preaching Islam and how we could help the translator improve the quality of his product.

3. Peculiarities of the Quranic text

Translation is an art as well as a science, so the translator needs reasonable knowledge of a foreign language to produce meaningful as well as accurate translation. Linguistically, an item is a word or a group of certain utterances that refer to a specific meaning and belong to a specific language and expresses it accurately (Hejazi:1996). As for translating Islamic religious items, there are some items that the translator still have some doubts about or unsatisfied with their translation. Such feelings stem from the lack or absence of adequate equivalence in the target language to convey the message in the best way.

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The translator of Islamic religious items, needs to be bilingual, bicultural, or multicultural, and equipped with good knowledge of cultures as possible (Vemmer 1986). He should be a cross-cultural transmitter of culture and truths by attempting to interpret concepts and speech in a variety of texts. He is also required to make culture familiar to readers, by means of changing the Source language culture into the Target Language culture in translation (Fawcett, in Baker, 1998). He needs to be well knowledgeable of his religion so that he could properly translate it to those who have a different set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules, Naguib(2002). He is required to use the appropriate equivalent if it is available or use the appropriate strategy if it is not (ibid).

While dealing with religious Islamic items translation, the translator must stick to certain strict norms and rules and should pay more attention to the relationship between cultures, because the meaning of words and texts depends so largely on the corresponding cultures. He must be neutral and away from any involvement, perplexity and confusion in any forbidden area. Translating religious discourse involves obstacles at a linguistic level, including lexical and syntactic manipulation and the reformulation of concepts, that need to be mediated between the source text producer and reader. The translator is not totally free to change, modify or alter the original text. Nida(1964) winds up that the spirit of the text is as equally important as the words and structures included in the text. According to him, the meaning of words are not dead words and an extreme precision owing to the sensitivity of the subject as an integral part to the linguistic structures should be considered about when translating Islamic religious texts.

III. The impact of Quranic translation into English and ways to take advantage of it

Translation of the Quran is initiating the Arabic language to foreigners and it is a kind of continuity to this language through the Holy Quran. Non-native speakers of the Arabic language, familiar with the

Qur'anic translation, certainly understand the value of the Holy Quran, which has saved the Arabic language from disappearance. They may recognize and estimate its value as one of the few languages remaining constant in the face of historical variables.

The universality of the Arabic language is due to Islam. It is commonly known that after the conversion to Islam, people endeavour to learn the Arabic language for it serves as a tool to learn the teachings and guidance of Islam in order to strengthen their faith. Besides, non-native speakers of Arabic would acquire new lexicon related to new religion. Proofs and evidences of the oneness and greatness of God Almighty which were new even to the Arabs themselves.

Non-muslims influenced by the translated copy and their discovery to the cleanness of the Quran being away from any kind of manipulation and distortion. These people are the orientalis, scholars and even common people who try to reveal the secrets and identifying the differences and similarities of the Quran finding themselves in front of the gates of conversion and embracing Islam. The investigation of how some Quranic sensitive issues are translated and transmitted to the target reader and their discovery to Quranic topics that deserve to be studied and analysed. The Quran is considered as a Cultural linguistic communication tool with muslimnon-native speakers of Arabic.

4. Conclusion

Translation of the Quranic discourse into English is a wide field of study. Since translation involves two languages and two cultures, a proper translation has to bridge this gap as far as possible. The translator should be a cross-cultural transmitter of culture and religious guidance by interpreting concepts and items in the source language to the target language. When such items or expressions are heavily and exclusively grounded in one culture, the translator, then, is faced with the problem of translating such untranslatable items. Researchers highlighted the necessity of making additions that did not exist in the original text, as a good strategy since it may help the translator to convey his message. Yet, this might take the form of ideas culturally to preach and could be

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acceptable when the source language and the target language words are cross – culturally equivalent, having the same referents and connotations in both cultures. Using transliterated items is the best strategy that could be used by a translator when pursuing it by an elaborated explanation in being faced with a culture specific item.

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