EFFECTS OF TRANSLATION PROBLEMS ON RELIGIOUS CREED WHEN RENDERING HOLY TEXTS FROM ARABIC INTO ENGLISH

Mousab Alata Elseddig Adiel[*]

Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, P.O. No. 1982, Dammam, 31441, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the linguistic problems result because of word-for-word translation of holy texts from Arabic into English and their effect on non-Arab Muslims creed via reviewing many sources like related articles and websites concern with providing Quranic and Sunnah translations into English. Comparing provided translations with using his cultural background, the researcher was able to infer the problems that negatively affect the creed of Muslims, or distort the meaning of the source language, and he proposed a new approach for translating these sensitive texts to avoid the resulted problems with more focusing on the message and the addressee along with the proper signified.

Keywords: culture, equivalence, holy texts, Quran, Sunnah

1. Introduction

The idea of this study is built on reviewing publicly published websites of translated holy texts, particularly the texts related to Islam religion like Quran and Sunnah. There are other resources like articles include holy texts. This beside reviews of books discussed joint linguistic problems of translation some aspects. The focus that makes this study a unique that it puts a new approach for rendering such essential texts. This approach concentrates efforts on crossing the meaning of the messages of the religious texts instead of the common followed method that use word-for-word translation. The author named this new approach as whole-unit translation approach calling for avoidance of literality. This approach also calls for considering the receptor in a manner saves the creed of both the translator and the receptor. The article includes parts about discussion of the problems, providing vivid examples, importance of cultural background to the translator, words gaining when translating the source text, and a conclusion.

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[*]E-mail: maseddig@iau.edu.sa

2. Creed-bound translation problems

Among problems result because of translating holy text are the ones related to Allah-Self, but before wading into the topic, we should know that the Islam creed stipulated nothing look like the Allah-Self as in the explicit Quranic texts. Also, we should know from Islamic instructions that the Allah-Self is neither male nor female as well as not absent too while the pronoun 'he' is linguistically used for referring to an absent male (third person as in English grammar).

I simply noted that many translators and authors -because of translation- use the English pronoun (he) when writing about (Allah) in their articles or translation. The use of the pronoun (he) comes as a direct translation (word-for-word translation) for the Arabic pronoun (هو) which contradicts Islamic creed related to the Allah-Self because this English pronoun is "used as the subject of a verb to refer to a man, boy, or male animal that has already been mentioned", [https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/he]. Collins online dictionary tried to cure this claim mentioning that "In some religions, He is used to refer to God" [https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/he] as in Collin online dictionary, but this claim is untrue for Islamic religion. Then, who knows? May be Collins's dictionary inferred this from the contemporary translation copies of the Holy Qur'an (Muslims Holy Book) which is full of that strange use for below reasons:

* some are non-native translators where their culture background may affect;
* some are Arabic natives but has no background about the ,Tafsir' of the Quran and restriction of the creed. Tafsir is the science specialized in interpreting the Quran and it concerns with its meaning according to Quran itself, the prophet says, and opinions of the specialized scholars.

Accordingly, to avoid such fatal error in translating these essential texts, the translator must be:

* an Arabic native excelled in the target language too with a strong cultural background of both the source and the target language;
* has knowledge about Islam creed to avoid translation that may mislead the receptor, especially those are non-Arabs want to know about Islam.
    Has enough background about the Quran various Tafsirs schools.

2.1. Applied vivid examples

In this part, the researcher will provide some examples where this mistake is commonly committed. It is better to mention, before reviewing these examples, that this Arabic pronoun does not indicate to gender in the Arabic narrated holy texts and its translation into 'he' shapes a big distortion to the meaning and Islamic creed.

In his introduction about Islamic market and crypto-currencies, Al-Najjar used the below initiation: "Praise be to Allah, the Almighty. We praise Him, seek His help and His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Him from the evils of

ourselves, and from the evils of our deeds. He whom Allah guides, nothing misleads him." [1]

Neglecting the whole structure of this quote, the author used the pronoun 'he' with its derivatives in his expression about Allah-Self. This will delude the reader and let the reader think about gender like a question was directed to me by a lady from Europe seeks to know about Allah. She told me she researched about Islam, and asked me a direct question, why the talk about God as if they are talking about a man?

As a researcher I am not sure who translated this. A beginner translator, the author himself, or a machine. Anyhow, it is a common mistake in translating holy texts.

To solve this problem the researcher recommends the following:

- avoidance of using the pronoun 'he' and its derivatives, and use of the whole word 'Allah' instead when the text is about Allah-Self, or;
- making a note explains that the use of the pronoun here is not for gender as well as it is resulted because of the word-for-word translation of the Arabic pronoun (هو) which is not, according to Arabic language traits, indicating to gender. For more details about this issue relevant to this point, please see islamqa.info website, answer number (98689) for the similar question was asked by the European lady.
- a third solution proposed by the researcher is to create a new term which is the 'Hesim' of Allah to enable writers use 'he' and its derivatives along with notifying the readers that the hesim of Allah is not a heism of gender and the use of this pronoun or its derivatives is a metaphoric use for the purpose of language expression only. Thus, we could maintain Islam creed in the heart of the reader and save the translator or the writer from committing a linguistic mistake distorts the meaning or the truth of Allah-Self.

Another example is taken from the website of sunnah.com where we find translation for the says of the prophet from Arabic into English. In these translations, some of the pronoun 'he' derivatives are used referring to Allah. Allah is not a third person in the concept of Islam creed. In other words, the absence is not among Allah's descriptions but attendance. In this site, the translator translates word by word. I wish if he/she had provided the common meaning of the prophet's say. Wording holy texts literally might result in missing the holiness of the text, and sometimes might be unpleasant to the receptor.

More examples will also be discussed in the following part of this study.

3. Cultural background importance for translators of holy texts

The best words to cite regarding talking about this part is what affirmed by Muñoz-Calvo, from the University of Zaragoza, Spain, that translators need "cultural literacy, communicative language competences and cross-cultural competencies as well" [2]. And here the author also confirms that knowledge with Islam holy texts requires a strong cultural competence with Arabic culture

as well as English culture too. Arabic culture that might not find it available even for Arabic natives nowadays. Therefore, translating such texts by non-Arabic natives shapes a big risk affect the spirit of the text greatly. Another distance the researcher needs to highlight here is the deep knowledge with old Arabic language and culture where the shallow knowledge of Arabic language only is not enough for the translator to be competent in crossing the text and saving its spirit after translation.

Regarding this, it would be better here, to cite Santoyo, too, who considers the "Holy Grail of translation is the creation of an equivalent text" [3]. Accordingly, if translators of Islam holy texts provided an equivalent text, not equivalent words, we will see good rendering for these texts essential in Arabic culture because many of the translated texts reviewed as part of this study showed that the translators instead of caring about the equivalence text. They tend to mention every word from Arabic into English causing abnormal English language and violations regarding creed because of word-for-word translation. Translators must try their best to avoid inter-wording and be attention for cause-and-effect relation when translating cultural-bound texts. In other words, most of the translated texts reviewed reflect that the translators were keen to provide the equivalent of each and every word like a dictionary where the true role of the translator is to provide the total equivalent of the text meaning with special attention for the target language to be able to entertain the receptor. We could avoid this if we consider the traditional definition of translation by Catford: "Translation consists in the replacement of textual material in one language by the equivalent textual material in another language" [4] as well as the definition by Nida: "Translating consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, firstly in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" [5], where we can see the focusing on the meaning and the receptor language (target language), which are very important aspects for rendering these essential texts in a way assists avoidance of language abnormalities. Translation without considering these two crucial aspects will result abnormal target language and will also negatively depict source language culture.

In this context, the researcher also reviewed the book of *Problems and Strategies in Translation of Quranic Divine Attributes* by Abbasian and Nazerian [6]. They conducted a descriptive comparative study about the Fine Names of Allah translation from Arabic into Persian and English, by four translators. Their comparison focused on the strategies were adopted by the four translators in rendering the texts of the Quran to find the differences between the four copies and search related translation problems. They confirmed through their research an existence of problems when rendering holy texts from Arabic into English stressing the variety of equivalents.

This book touches an important part of Islamic creed, which is related to belief in names, and attributes of Allah. Rendering these names and attributes is dealing with a sensitive matter may affect, positively or negatively, the understanding of the receptors among non-Arabs.

The book confirmed finding of semantic voids between the four translations. To avoid this problem, rendering of Islamic holy texts must not be word-for-word translation as we see in many published translations. It is proposed to translate the explanations and comments of Islam scholars specialized in Tafsir, or the translation itself will be considered as a type of Tafsir, and here the differences between the four translations will be acceptable since the translation became a Tafsir, but another problem will appear because not everybody is qualified to be a Tafsir scholar. This why - in this study - the author considers it is essential to avoid the direct translation for the holy text and recommends keeping the original texts in Arabic attached with various translations for various Tafsirs. Here, we must remember that a translation for Quran is not a Quran, but it is a Tafsir as mentioned above.

Another dimension should be added here is that one Arabic word of the holy texts may have various synonyms in English as a normal result for the linguistic difference (semantic, syntax and morphology differences) between the two far languages.

Problems and Strategies in Translation of Quranic Divine Attributes book also took in consideration searching the possible relation between translators' gender in comparison to the problem or strategies adopted, but this is not involved in this study. This why the researcher neglected this aspect.

Fazel and Mohammad Farhani searched the same problems encountered by translators when rendering Divine Names mentioned in Quran [7]. They followed the same methodology and compared Quran Arabic texts translated into English. Their study was about linguistic problems might face translators in rendering such holy texts, but they neglected the effect on the receptor when reads this translated work. In their abstract they mentioned something very annoying for Arabic native speakers which I consider it has also a very bad effect on the Islamic creed which is "were translated into English by three professional translators namely, who provided their translations in prose, phrase-by-phrase, and poetry forms respectively" [7]. Mentioning a phrase like 'poetry forms' is a big problem might mislead the receptor and leads the receptor to think that the Quran might be translated as a poetry text which contradict many of the Quranic explicit texts. If there is a translator provides translation for a Quranic text in a form of poetry, I advise this translator not to translate it. This will depict a negative mental image in the mind of the receptor. Quran, by any means, cannot be like poetry because Allah almighty is not a poet. Also translating the Quran in a poetry form is not accepted at all. The only safe method of translating Quran texts is to render the meaning by the method previously described away from direct and literal wording.

Omar wrote about Sale's translation of the Holy Quran [8]. He used a hermeneutic approach to study the assertions of the translator. His paper disclosed a complexity in the utterance when compared to the assertions made by the source as he divided both, the source and the assertion into various types. Leading a good discussion, he confirmed that Sale's assertions cannot be as strong as the Divine Word of Allah because they are the translator's own assertions. Moreover, this affirms what assumed by this study regarding

rendering the meanings of the various Tafsirs of the Quran per explanations of Muslims scholars specialized in this field, not the direct words of the holy texts. Tafsir is a science that has its own principles, rules, policies, and procedures. Accordingly, not everybody could easily interpret the meanings of the Quran.

Corpus.quran.com website is also a good source for comparison between seven translations provided by Sahih International, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Shakir, Muhammad Sarwar, Mohsin Khan, and Arberry. When I reviewed these seven types of translations, particularly the first page of the Quran Book, which is about Surat Alfatihah, I found that all these translations are not inner translations and still affected by word-for-word translation. Following this approach in translating the holy texts may not add to the reader faith and may even shape many questions in the reader mind. To keep the holy text spirit a translator should translate the meanings carried by the Arabic words instead of providing their synonyms in English. In these seven translations I only saw a competition about synonyms and did not see anything about the great meanings I know about this great Surah. For example, when a translator translates the mercy of Allah in only two English words affected by the two Arabic words it is off point (e.g. the translations provided from the second verse of the first Surah of Quran, which is only two Arabic adjectives). From where the reader of these two English words could perceive that the mercy of Allah is divided into two types: general and special, one for all existents and one for the believers only, one for here and one for hereafter. The reader can not perceive this if we keep the approach of only providing the equivalent-word of the target language. The translator should put the reader in mind as a target and a pivot. The translation should be reader-based translation via providing the gestures of the holy words and keeping the spirit of the one-unit meaning in conveying interpretation of each segment message.

Following the approach of providing the equivalent-word of the target language in translating the holy texts may open the door for problems like assaulting or attacking the Islamic religion or thought because of the immature idea depicted by providing the direct lexical equivalent of the target language. Accordingly, direct-text-translation (lexical translation) is not a solution for this problem, especially when the translated words are not words of a human, but they are words of Allah. Another dimension should also be considered, it is safe for the faith of the translator to translate the comments and elucidations provided by the scholar of Quran interpretation instead of direct translation because the Book of Allah never ever tolerates any mistake.

The problem of linguistic equivalence had been argued and searched by many scholars since the nineteenth century as [9, 10] confirmed that the apparent synonymy does not produce equivalence as well as sometimes the equivalence may be impossible. Considering this notion with referring to the seven translations of Surah of Al-ikhlas it is preferable not to translate it verse by verse but to give the general meaning of the whole Surah because mentioning 'He' and 'One' as direct translation shapes a problem affects the creed of the receptor if he is non-Arab Muslim and confuses those who need to read about Islam. Once again, the researcher confirms to keep the text and recite it in Arabic along with

delivering the general meaning of the whole message of the Surah instead, otherwise intellectual and creed problems will appear. For example, and for more illustration, this Surah can easily be translated as below: "Allah took no wife, no son, no daughter, and Allah not in need to any of that, and nothing like Allah. Allah created the things and Allah not in need to anything" to keep the spirit of the Surah in spirit-translation. And here the researcher seeks to notify the reader that the translated example provided here is not a parallel translation for the Surah of Al-ikhlas, but rather an attempt to provide the whole-unit meaning. In other words, these are not the equivalents of the Arabic holy words but a whole meaning in a manner that saves both the meaning and the creed to avoid translation problems result because of the restrictions of the target language.

In this translation provided by the researcher sure, he did not mention every word because the researcher is keen that the translators who follow the approach of word-for-word translation by providing the direct lexical equivalents of the target language - which is sometimes impossible - may claim that the researcher wasted some words. For answering this, the researcher confirms that it is better to waste some words for keeping the creed of the receptors among non-Arab Muslims and avoidance of intellectual problems emerging. The researcher is keen this supposition may not be convincing to other authors who hold different views in regard to wasting some words, but it is essential for the interest of the meaning when dealing with creed-bound holy texts because no one can make a parallel Quran in another language which is one of this holy book miracles.

In a related context, we could mention that among the scholars who discussed the problem of loss and gain in translation is who divided the equivalence into dynamic and formal [5]. One can understand from this categorization of Nida that dynamic equivalence is a sense-for-sense translation which named here by the researcher as spirit-translation, and formal equivalence as word-for-word translation which named by the researcher as direct-wording-translation. The first type puts readability in mind while the other type keeps the literal fidelity. Considering the above example of the translation provided by the researcher, the first type is the choice for keeping the proper understanding of the Quranic texts meaning without breaching to the Islamic creed principles.

4. Loss and gain calculation

In this part, the author shows tables about the translation of the above-mentioned example of the *Surah of Al-Ikhlas* to investigate the added and subtracted words, which lead to strengthen the meaning. This Surah was selected as an example because it is considered among the shortest in the Quran. If gaps are bigger in comparing only this short Surah, then for the longest ones many gaps will also be considered. Another reason for selecting this Surah as a sample for the investigated seven translations is because it is about the creed too. Table 1 shows the total words count of the Arabic source text of the Surah of Al-Ikhlas.

Table 1. Total words of the source text.

Verse number	Words count
1	4
2	2
3	5
4	6
Total	17

Table 2 shows the total words count per comparison between the translation of the researcher and the other seven translations. In this table we see that the gain for translating the Arabic text into English is obvious by all translations. The seven translations which their approach was verse-for-verse translation, their gain was not enough to depict the image, while the gain of the researcher translation which his approach was the whole-unit translation (the general meaning of the Surah), was greater to sufficiently depict the image. The researcher translation also avoided mentioning the pronoun (he) or any of its derivatives to save the creed of the receptor and keep the meaning proper. The only loss found was because of using the pronoun.

Table 2. Comparisons between translations per words provided.

Translator/ Verse	(Sahih International)	(Pickthall)	(Yusuf Ali)	(Shakir)	(Muhammad Sarwar)	(Mohsin Khan)	(Arberry)	The author
1	7	6	8	5	7	5	5	
2	4	6	4	7	3	10	4	
3	6	6	7	7	7	7	9	
4	7	7	7	5	7	9	8	
Total words	24	25	26	24	24	31	26	32

Table 3. Use of the word (Allah) versus the pronoun (he) with its derivatives.

Translator	(Sahih International)	(Pickthall)	(Yusuf Ali)	(Shakir)	(Muhammad Sarwar)	(Mohsin Khan)	(Arberry)	The author
Use of the word (Allah) times	2	2	2	2	God 2 times	1	God 2 times	5
Use of (he) or its derivatives	3	3	4	5	4	6	4	0

In Table 3 we observe the use of the pronoun (he) or any of its derivatives was (0) per the researcher translation while the use of the word (Allah) was (5) times which is important because the subject of the Surah is about Allah. For the seven translations we note the pronoun and its derivatives use is (3-6) times, and use of the word Allah is only (1-2) which is not enough to satisfy the meaning, and two of the seven translations (i.e, Arberry and Muhammed Sarwar) used the word (God) instead of (Allah), which is another creed related problem because the confirmed name of Allah per Quran is Allah. This why it should be kept (Allah) when translating into any language, moreover the word (God) does not mean Allah and it has a feminine in English culture (goddess) which is totally

and partially rejected in the religion of Islam according to the explicit texts of the Quran.

5. Conclusions

Generally, the researcher recommends adopting a new approach in translating the holy Quran and other religious sources by providing whole-unit meaning, not verse-by-verse or word-for-word translation. In addition to avoidance of rendering the holy text directly when translating the Quran or Sunnah (dos and says of the prophet Muhammed) as well as he recommends tending to translate the meanings of the various Tafsirs per explanations of Islam scholars, not the words of the direct text. This will help the translator to keep himself away from being among Tafsir specialists, which is a big religious responsibility. Another recommendation, the translator must avoid using 'he' or 'his' when referring to Allah, instead, the translator should use the full word 'Allah' and cure the text as far as possible considering related Tafsirs along with considering that the Arabic pronoun (هو) is not, according to Arabic language traits, indicating to gender.

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