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Problems of Literal Translation in Translating Selected Quranic Verses into English

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Abstract

This research demonstrates the concept of accurate translation and its effect on the translation of Quranic verses in general for target readers. This research aims to serve Allah's Book, "the Noble Quran", and it helps TL readers to understand the correct and accurate meanings of the verses, besides it shows the degree of accuracy for Quranic translators. This study hypothesizes that the TL readers are influenced by the translation issues, difficulties in finding out the correct meanings in some Quranic verses resulted from misinterpreting these verses by translators, while some the translators did not pay attention to the Quranic interpretations of the noble Quran, and most of them use the literal translation, this will often lead to inaccurate translations.

This research presents six verses with non-typical cases, and it presents the known interpretations of Ibn Katheer, Ibn Abbas, and Al-Zamakhshari to obtain the correct meanings for the selected verses, also, it selects five translators for analysis. and it suggests new translations when necessary.

This research reached some results; the most important is the one relying on the interpretations of the Noble Quran which is a necessity to know the correct meaning.

Keywords: Translation Accuracy, literal Translation, Quranic Interpretations

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اشكالات الترجمة الحرفية في ترجمة بعض الآيات القرآنية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية

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المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم الترجمة الحرفية وأثرها في ترجمة الآيات القرآنية الكريمة بشكل عام لدى قراء لغة الهدف. كما ان هذا البحث يهدف إلى خدمة كتاب الله عز وجل "القرآن الكريم" حيث يساعد قراء اللغة الهدف على فهم المعاني الصحيحة والدقيقة للآيات القرآنية، ويوضح نسبة الدقة لدى مترجمين القرآن الكريم. تفترض هذه الدراسة أن قراء اللغة الهدف يتأثرون بقضايا الترجمة بصورة واضحة ، وأن الصعوبات في معرفة المعاني الصحيحة في بعض الآيات القرآنية ناتجة عن سوء تفسير هذه الآيات من قبل المترجمين، حيث ان بعض المترجمين لم ينتبهوا او يهتموا للتفسير القرآنية للقرآن الكريم، واغلبية المترجمين يستخدمون الترجمة الحرفية، وهذا غالباً ما يؤدي إلى تراجم غير دقيقة.

يقدم هذا البحث ستة أبيات ذات حالات مختلفة، كم ويقدم هذا البحث التفسير المعروفة لابن كثير، وابن عباس، والزمخشري للحصول على المعاني الصحيحة للآيات المختارة، بالإضافة الى ذلك تم اختيار خمسة مترجمين للتحليل. واقتراح تراجم جديدة عند الضرورة. توصل هذا البحث إلى بعض النتائج وأهمها أن الاعتماد على تفاسير القرآن الكريم ضرورية جداً لمعرفة المعنى الصحيح والدقيق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دقة الترجمة، الترجمة الحرفية، تفاسير القرآن الكريم

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This research deals with the concept of accurate translation of the Quranic verses and its effect on such translation in general that is directed for target readers. The **problem** of confusion in the translation of accurate meanings of the Noble Quran into English arises when literal translations are used in different verses, or when the translators do not return to the interpretations of the Noble Quran.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The research **aims** to serve Allah's Book, "the Noble Quran", and it helps TL readers to understand the correct meanings of the Quranic verses, besides it shows the degree of accuracy for Quranic translators, by depending on the authoritative Quranic

interpretations of Ibn Katheer, Ibn Abbas and Al-Zamakhshari and decide the correct meanings for Quranic verses under investigation.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

This study **hypothesizes** that the translation issues is influenced on the TL readers, difficulties in finding out the correct meanings in some Quranic verses' resulting from misinterpreting of the verses by translators, this leads to an inaccurate translation, translators did not pay attention to the Quranic interpretations of the noble Quran, which led to lack of understanding and confusion among the readers of TL, especially if these readers were new in Islam, most of translators use literal translation, and it will often lead to an inaccurate translations.

1.4 The study Procedures

This research **presents** six verses with non-typical cases, and it presents the interpretations of Ibn Katheer, Ibn Abbas and Al-Zamakhshari to obtain the correct meanings of the selected verses. It is selected five translators for analysis. They suggest new translations when necessary.

1.5 Model of the Study

This research adopts the model of meaning-based translation by Larsson (1998). Larson writes, there are three important cases for a good translation, which are "accuracy," "clarity," and "naturalness." This model is determined to identify the accurate renderings based on the correct meanings by the context of the ST. The first criterion is "accuracy" which has been selected to analyze the translations because it refers to no omission, no addition, and no substitution, and the translation of the Noble Quran is unsurpassed in its accuracy of meaning and expression, and each word in the Noble Quran has its place that cannot be omitted, added, or substituted when conveying to the TL, for this, it is important for this research to connect with the notion of translation accuracy. For clarity, it is needed to discuss it with individuals who are unfamiliar with the ST and ask questions that will reveal their level of understanding. This method requires the preparation of a questionnaire with certain questions for those who are required to read the translated text to determine whether the message is understood and clear or not, which is undoubtedly outside the scope of this study and naturalness. Since the majority of Quranic translators are native English speakers, they are experts in using the receptor language's natural forms. Therefore, the study concludes that there is no justification for including it in the translation evaluation.

2. WHAT IS TRANSLATION?

Translation is very old human activity. It can be regarded as a uniquely human achievement that no other creature could share. Translation is the process for conveying the messages from one language into another. Catford (1965; 20) writes "translation as the replacement of material in one language Source Language by an equivalent material in another language Target Language". According to Nida (1969: 12) "Translation is reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and secondly in terms of style". Newmark (1988: 32) defines translation as "... rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text." Whereas Larson (1998: 3) mentions it as a "... conveying the meaning of the SL into the TL." This is done by departing from the form of the SL to that of the TL using semantic structure. Also he shows (1998: 17) two kinds of translation: "literal translation" in which the translators need to follow the form of the

SL, and the "idiomatic translation" in which the translators make their efforts to convey the meanings of the SLT to the TLT. ." Ghazala (2006:1) shows that "translation is typically employed to indicate all the methods and processes employed to transfer the SL meaning into the TL". Hussein & Najim (2023:318) write "in any communicative or translational activity, the translator transfers the ST from one language to another and attempts to make the textual material of the SL equivalent to that of the TL".

3. TRANSLATION ACCURACY

Accuracy in translation is considered one of the most important standards (criteria) that the translator relies on in translating the Noble Qur'an in particular and other translations in general. It mentions to the degree of similarity between the original text in source language and its equivalent in target language. Nida (1969:23) stated that, accuracy of translation is a set of strategies in order to convey the correct meaning from source language into target language to enable the reader to understand the translated text. According to Larson (1998:7) there are three important cases for a good translation, which are "accuracy," "clarity," and "naturalness." "accuracy," has been selected to analyze the translations because it refers to no omission, no addition, and no substitution, and the translations of the Noble Quran are unsurpassed in their accuracy of meanings and expressions, and each word in the Noble Quran has its place that cannot be omitted, added, or substituted when conveying it to the TL. Munday (2016: 50-51) writes that "accuracy is 'the very first condition for good translation", which can be thought of as the current linguistic counterpart of 'faithfulness' and 'truth.' He emphasizes that "accuracy" means conveying the correct information and complete comprehension.

4. LITERAL TRANSLATION

Literal translation is one of the important common translations that most of the translators depend on in their translations. It is also known as word for word uses exactly the equivalent words or phrases as were in the source language, It follows the form of the original text closely. Hamdan and Hussein(2024:283) show that "Literary translation is one of the types of translation that requires extensive knowledge of the culture and literary aspects of both languages". It is originally used in translating scientific, technical, and legal texts. Newmark (1988: 45) mentions that, literal translation is Grammatical constructions of the source language that are converted to their closest equivalent in the target language, but lexical words are translated singly, out of context. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995:33) write that, the intended meaning may be distorted if the translator relies on literal translation instead of conveying the intended meaning. Larson (1998:17) defines literal translation by which the translator seeks to follow the form of the source language, translating word for word. Therefore, it is not necessary to avoid using this type of translation in translating the Noble Quran.

5. QURANIC INTERPRETATION

Interpretations are books written by Muslim scholars from different Islamic eras, in which their interests, specializations, and approaches that they adopted varied. Interpretation is a science that refers to the Noble Qur'an, it is concerned with understanding the accurate and correct meanings of the verses, explaining the verses, the reasons for their revelations, arranging them according to Mecca and Medina, and explaining their rules.

In addition, we have many approved and well-known interpretations, such as the interpretation of Ibn Kathir , Ibn Abbas, and the interpretation of Al-Kashif by Al-

Zamkhshari. There have been many words of scholars regarding the meaning of interpretation, the most accurate one is of Al-Zarkashi (2008:2:33) who mentioned "Interpretation is a science by which the Allah's Book revealed to His Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is understood and its meanings are explained specially the ambiguous meaning. Saalih, (2018: 19) and Al-Bagha (1998:28) said that the target of the interpretation is understanding the Qur'an, and to be guided by it in dealing with others regardless of their differences, and to warn them of what Allah has warned against, and to warn those who violate God's command of punishment.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

SLT (1)

"رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ" (ابراهيم 37)

TLTs

Hilali & Khan

"O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in an uncultivable valley by Your Sacred House (the Ka'bah at Makkah); in order, O our Lord, that they may perform As-Salat (Iqamat-as- Salat), so fill some hearts among (Muslims) with love towards them, and (O Allah) provide them with fruits so that they may give thanks.

Maulana

Our Lord, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord, that they may keep up prayer; so make the hearts of some people yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful.

Pickthal

Our Lord! Lo! I have settled some of my posterity in an uncultivable valley near unto Thy holy House, our Lord! that they may establish proper worship; so incline some hearts of men that they may yearn toward them, and provide Thou them with fruits in order that they may be thankful.

Khalifa

"Our Lord, I have settled part of my family in this plantless valley, at Your Sacred House. Our Lord, they are to observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), so let throngs of people converge upon them, and provide for them all kinds of fruits, that they may be appreciative.

Sarwars

"Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near your Sacred House so that they could be steadfast in prayer. Lord, fill the hearts of the people with love for them and produce fruits for their sustenance so that they may give thanks.

Discussion:

According to Ibn Kathir (1998:4/514), Al-Zamkhshari (1987:2/518), and Ibn Abbas (1415:1/214), if Allah had said "the hearts of all the people," the Persians, the Romans, the Jews, the Christians, and all the people would have crowded toward them, (Hagar and Ishmael), but He said: " hearts of some people," so the Muslim specified it specifically. The translations of Al-Hilali & Khan, Maulana and Pickthal are true, clear and accurate, The other translations are not accurate, understandable, or clear for TL readers, because

they did not differentiate between the meanings of the words of the verse, (the hearts of all the people and the hearts of some people.

SL	"فَجَعَلَ أَفئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ"	
Translators	TTs	Accuracy
Hilali & Khan	some hearts among (Muslims)	+
Maulana	hearts of some people	+
Pickthal	some hearts of men	--
Khalifa	let throngs of people converge	--
Sarwar	the hearts of the people	--
Percentage of Accuracy		40%

Table (1): SLT(1) Analysis.

SLT (2)

"فَأَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يَخْسِفَ بِكُمْ جَانِبَ الْبَرِّ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ وَكِيلاً" (الاسراء 68)

TLTs

Hilali & Khan

Do you then feel secure that He will not cause a side of the land to swallow you up, or that He will not send against you a violent sand-storm? Then, you shall find no Wakil
Maulana

Do you then feel secure that He will not bring you low on a tract of land, or send on you a violent wind? Then you will not find a protector for yourselves;

Pickthal

Feel ye then secure that He will not cause a slope of the land to engulf you, or send a sand-storm upon you, and then ye will find that ye have no protector?

Khalifa

Have you guaranteed that He will not cause the land, on shore, to swallow you? Or, that He will not send upon you a tempest (Rain that contains stones), then you find no protector?

Sarwar

Do you feel secure that We will not cause a part of the land to sink or engulf you with sand storms when you would find no one to protect you?

Discussion:

Ibn Kathir (1998:5/96), Al-Zamkhshari (1987:2/679), and Ibn Abbas (1415:1/239) show that, the meaning of (حاصباً) refers to the Rain containing stones. It is clear that the translations are unclear and inaccurate, because they use sand-storm, except the translation of Khalifa is accurate and clear.

SL	"فَأَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يَخْسِفَ بِكُمْ جَانِبَ الْبَرِّ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ وَكِيلاً"	
Translators	TTs	Accuracy
Hilali & Khan	violent sand-storm	--
Maulana	violent wind	--
Pickthal	sand-storm	--
Khalifa	Rainthat contains stones	+
Sarwar	sand storms	--
Percentage of accuracy		20%

Table (2): SLT(2) Analysis.

SLT (3)

"ولا يدخلون الجنة حتى يَلِجَ الْجَمَلُ فِي سَمِّ الْخِيَاطِ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُجْرِمِينَ" (الاعراف 40)

TLTs

Hilali & Khan

they will not enter Paradise until the camel goes through the eye of the needle (which is impossible). Thus do We recompense the Mujrimun (criminals, polytheists, sinners, etc.).

Maulana

nor will they enter the Garden until the camel pass through the eye of the needle. And thus do We reward the guilty,

Pickthal

for them the gates of heaven will nor be opened not will they enter the Garden until the camel goes through the needle's eye. Thus do We requite the guilty

Khalifa

nor will they enter Paradise until the camel passes through the needle's eye. We thus requite the guilty

Sarwar

nor will they be admitted into Paradise until a camel passes through the eye of a sewing needle. Thus do We recompense the criminals.

Discussion:

Ibn Kathir (1998:3/415), Al-Zamkhshari (1987:2/103), and Ibn Abbas (1415:1/128) write that the word (الجمال) in this verse refers to the thick thread in the hole of the needle not to animal (camel). It is obvious that all these translations are faults and inaccurate, and no one of the translators succeeded in giving the real meaning of the verse because all the translators use the word (الجمال) (camel) instead of thick thread in their translations. Suggestion translation, they will not enter Paradise until the thick thread goes through the hole of the needle.

SL	" ولا يدخلون الجنة حتى يَلِجَ الْجَمَلُ فِي سَمِّ الْخِيَاطِ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُجْرِمِينَ "	
Translators	TTs	Accuracy
Hilali & Khan	The <u>camel</u> goes through the eye of the needle	--
Maulana	the <u>camel</u> pass through the eye of the needle	--
Pickthal	the <u>camel</u> goes through the needle's eye.	--
Khalifa	the <u>camel</u> passes through the needle's eye	--
Sarwar	a <u>camel</u> passes through eye of a sewing needle	--
Percentage of accuracy		0%

Table (3): SLT(3) Analysis.

SLT (4)

"وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا لَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ لِيَذَكَّرُوا فَأَبَى أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورًا" (الفرقان 50)

TLTs

Hilali & Khan

And indeed We have distributed it (rain or water) amongst them in order that they may remember the Grace of Allah, but most men refuse (or deny the Truth or Faith) and accept nothing but disbelief or ingratitude.

Maulana

And certainly We repeat this to them that they may be mindful, but most men consent to naught but denying.

Pickthal

And verily We have repeated it among them that they may remember, but most of mankind begrudge aught save ingratitude.

Khalifa

We have distributed it among them in exact measure, that they may take heed. But most people insist upon disbelieving.

Sarwar

We send them rain from time to time so that they may take heed. Many people have responded, but ungratefully

Discussion:

Ibn Kathir (1998:6/116), Al-Zamkhshari (1987:3/285), and Ibn Abbas (1415:1/304) show the attached pronoun "هـ" in "صَرَفْنَا" refers to water or rain specifically, the translators (Maulana , Pickthal and Rashad) use (this or it) and this pronoun is unclear and ambiguous for TL reader because, the translators use the pronoun "it" without referring to its antecedent correctly and clearly, also TL reader could be (non – Muslims) even for new Muslims who have not read the interpretations of Glories Quran. It looks like the best translations of all of these are the ones by Al-Hilali & Khan and Sarwar. They are accurate, clear, and understandable because, they specify and set the return of the pronoun antecedent and explain the reference of "it, to rain or water, not to anything else.

SL	" وَلَقَدْ صَرَفْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ لِيَذْكُرُوا فَآبَى أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُوراً "	
Translators	TTs	Accuracy
Hilali & Khan	have distributed <u>it</u> (rain or water)	+
Maulana	We repeat <u>this</u>	--
Pickthal	We have repeated <u>it</u>	--
Khalifa	We have distributed <u>it</u>	--
Sarwar	We send them <u>rain</u>	+
Percentage of accuracy		40%

Table (4): SLT (4) Analysis.

SLT (5)

"إِنَّ الَّذِي فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لَرَادُّكَ إِلَىٰ مَعَادٍ قُلْ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَمَنْ هُوَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ" (القصص 85)

TLTs

Hilali & Khan

Verily, He Who has given you (O Muhammad SAW) the Qur'an (i.e. ordered you to act on its laws and to preach it to others) will surely bring you back to the Ma'ad (place of return, either to Makkah or to Paradise after your death, etc.). Say (O Muhammad SAW): "My Lord is Aware of him who brings guidance, and he who is in manifest error.

Maulana

He who has made the Qur an binding on thee will surely bring thee back to the Place of Return. Say: My Lord knows best him who has brought the guidance and him who is in manifest error.

Pickthal

Lo! He Who hath given thee the Qur'an for a law will surely bring thee home again. Say: My Lord is Best Aware of him who bringeth guidance and him who is in error manifest.

Khalifa

Surely, the One who decreed the Quran for you will summon you to a predetermined appointment. Say, "My Lord is fully aware of those who uphold the guidance, and those who have gone astray.

Sarwar

(Muhammad), God, Who has commanded you to follow the guidance of the Quran, will certainly return you victoriously to your place of birth (Makkah). Say, "My Lord knows best who has brought guidance and who is in plain error.

Discussion:

Ibn Kathir (1998:6/259), Al-Zamkhshari (1987:3/436), and Ibn Abbas (1415:1/321) state that, (معاد) refers to Makkah or Paradise. It is noticed that the translations of Hilali & Khan and Sarwar are accurate, clear and understandable, but the others' translations are not for TL readers because, their translation contain (home again, Place of Return and predetermined appointment) which don't refer to Makkah or Paradise. All of them use literal translations which make the TL readers confused about the meaning of this verse.

SL	”إِنَّ الَّذِي فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لَرَادُّكَ إِلَىٰ مَعَادٍ“	
Translators	TTs	Accuracy
Hilali & Khan	(<u>place of return, either to Makkah or to Paradise</u>)	+
Maulana	the <u>Place of Return</u>	--
Pickthal	<u>home again</u>	--
Khalifa	<u>predetermined appointment</u>	--
Sarwar	<u>place of birth (Makkah)</u> .	+
Percentage of accuracy	40%	

Table (5): SLT (5) Analysis.

SLT (6)

”قال يا قوم هؤلاء بناتي هن اطهر لكم " (هود 78)

TLTs

Hilali & Khan

“he said: "O my people! Here are my daughters (i.e. the daughters of my nation)”

Maulana

“He said: O my people, these are my daughters ”

Pickthal

“He said: O my people! Here are my daughters!”

Khalifa

“he said if you take my daughters instead. You shall reverence GOD” Sarwar

“ He said, "My people, here are my pure daughters”.

Discussion:

Ibn Kathir (1998:4/238), Al-Zamkhshari (1987:2/414), and Ibn Abbas (1415:1/189) say that, the meaning of this verse (هؤلاء بناتي) refers to the all the women of nation or tribe of Noah and not to his specific daughters. According to this explanation, all the translations are inaccurate, unclear and misunderstood, because the

translators utilized (my daughters) to refer to Noah’s specific daughters, except the translation of Hilali & Khan is accurate and clear, because they give the correct meaning to this verse.

SL "إِذَا قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ هُوَ لَاءِ بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ"		
Translators	TTs	Accuracy
Hilali & Khan	<u>the daughters of my nation</u>	+
Maulana	<u>my daughters</u>	--
Pickthal	<u>my daughters</u>	--
Khalifa	<u>my daughters</u>	--
Sarwar	<u>my pure daughters</u>	--
Percentage of accuracy		20%

Table (6): SLT (6) Analysis.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following tables show the percentages of translation accuracy of the correct meanings for the selected verses of the Noble Quran.

STs Number	Percentages of accurate and inaccurate Translations	
	Accurate Translations	Inaccurate Translations
1	40 %	60 %
2	20 %	80 %
3	0 %	100 %
4	40 %	60 %
5	40 %	60 %
6	20 %	80 %

Table (7) Percentages of accurate and inaccurate Translations

According to this study, Quranic interpretation is very important that deals with the misunderstanding of correct and accurate meanings in general and for the translators of the Noble Quran specifically, many translators Also, failed to give the true and correct meaning for the verses of the Noble Quran, which caused in an unclear understanding for the target reader. Because the translators did not rely on the Noble Quran interpretations and used literal translations in their translations. Having checked the accurate and inaccurate renderings of the translators under study, the following table shows the corresponding percentages:

No.	Translators	Accurate Translations	Inaccurate Translations
1	Hilali & Khan	66.6 %	33.4 %
2	Maulana	16.6 %	83.4 %
3	Pickthal	0 %	100 %
4	Khalifa	16.6 %	83.4 %
5	Sarwar	33.3 %	66,7 %

Table (8) Translators Accuracy.

The table shows that Al-Hilali and Khan were more successful than the other translators, as they were more accurate in translating Quranic verses with greater accuracy, because they were able to determine the correct meaning with the highest percentage of accuracy (66.6%) among the other translators.

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