

## **Linguistic Analysis of Retranslation of Some Verses of the Holy Qur'an**

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### **Abstract**

Human languages are complex and unequal in their social status, translation accordingly is a complicated process of communicating the meaning of a text from a source-language (SL) by means of an equivalent target-language (TL) text. Others view it as the transfer of a written or spoken language into another without changing the meaning of the source language, or turning an original or source text into a text in another language.

This study aims at comparing translation and retranslation of the meanings of some verses of the Holy Qur'an to find out linguistic development that occurred, in addition to the changes in translation standards adopted in different periods of time, other factors are: translation process that considers content, literary fashion, and circumstances. English translation and retranslation of the meanings of some short verses are compared for the purpose of this study; no doubt the source language is classical Arabic for both translators ([Abdullah Yusuf Ali](#) and Dr. Mustafa Khattab), the target language is English. Analysis is based on linguistic level for both translations.

### **Introduction**

Translation is not a process of replacing a word from one language with a word from another language, it is a process of transferring the meaning of a written or spoken language to other language or languages, and therefore, it is sometimes an interpretation of the intended meaning. The term 'translation' according to linguists refers to Latin roots (transferre), trans (across) + ferre (to carry or to bring). It is also defined as the process of communicating the meaning of a text from a source-language (SL) by means of an equivalent target-language (TL) text.

Meanwhile, interpreting is a different process of facilitating or explanation of oral or written language between users of two different languages.

Vicky Cremona and Helena Mallia (2001) explain the difference between the work of a translator and that of an interpreter:

“Translators work alone, facing a white sheet of paper and a text. They recreate the text by becoming its second author, understanding and recreating the author's writing skills... The interpreter's work is not a solitary one. The interpreter works directly with an orator, who possibly elaborates his text as the topic unfolds, expressing his thoughts directly without any time for re-elaboration or rewording. The interpreter also works directly with a public, the floor, who is listening simultaneously to him and to the orator.” Interpreters are like chameleons; they have to adapt to the situation and blend in with the surroundings. Some interpreters like to specialize in particular fields so that they can deal with the language peculiarities that come with them. Translation in general is not an easy work, and that of sacred books in particular is very difficult, expressions will not be as accurate as the source texts, and style will not be of excellence of the original ones, this may refer to the problem of equivalence in translation as a result of lexical differences between source language (SL) and target language (TL). Lyons (1977) maintains that lexical gaps are attributed to unlexicalized concepts or objects across languages. Bentivogli and Pianta (2009) underline that a lexical gap occurs whenever a language expresses a concept with a lexical unit whereas another language expresses the same concept with a free combination of words”. Karimi (2003) says: “To render a satisfactory translation the translator needs to be acquainted with phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, idiomatic, religious, and cultural systems of both (SL and TL) to find standard equivalents, give an explanation, or otherwise convey the author's intended meaning to the TL audience.” Re-translation, on the other hand is a translation of a previously translated text, analysis related to its field is often a comparative study, and in this respect, Toury (1985) classifies translation comparative study into three categories:

- 1- Comparative study of different target translations of one ST into one language.
- 2- Comparative study on different phases.
- 3- Comparative study of one text into different languages.

He says “One may compare several translations into one language done by different translators, either in the same period or in different periods of time...; or one may compare different phases in the establishment of one translation, in order to reconstruct the interplay of ‘acceptability’ and ‘adequacy’ during its genesis...; or, finally, several translations of what is assumed to be the same text into different languages, as an initial means of establishing the effects of different cultural, literary, and linguistic factors on the modeling of a translation”.

Due to the growing number of retranslation projects, as well as the increasing demand for translation studies, the present study highlights the importance of linguistic analysis of retranslated verses in order to examine closeness to the meaning of the source ones, taking into account the target audience and the message's intent. Its purpose is to employ text analysis to generate proof utilizing some Arabic to English translations that were took place at different times. In this regard the following main question need to be addressed: What is the linguistic evolution and changes in translation standards that occurred over time?

### **Literature Review**

The Holy Qur'an is the revelation of Allah the Almighty to the Prophet Mohammed (prayers and peace be upon him) in Arabic language; it should not be recited in other language. Translation is to convey its meanings to both Muslims and non-Muslims who are speakers of other languages, these translations are by no means having the characteristics of the Arabic original text, and thus they are regarded as interpretations or translation of its meanings.

It is believed that there can be no flawless or absolute translation of the Quran, and the most that can be supplied is an interpretation of its known meanings.

It is beyond human power to produce an English translation of the Holy Quran's meanings that is as good as the Arabic version. If the Holy Qur'an is read in a passive, detached manner, many of its signs and objectives would be missed. However, reading it when actively immersed in the cause of establishing that "there is no deity but Allah" is a different story. One's heart will expand to receive meanings that one would otherwise miss, and conclusions that one was completely unaware of will be drawn.

In - Understanding the Quran in English- Devin J. Stewart (2000) said that:" it is widely agreed that the Quran is a beautiful text . . . what is it that makes the Quran so beautiful and that renders any translation a pale shadow of the original?"

### **Translation of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an**

Islam has spread widely over Asia, a continent known as multi-racial and multi-lingual one. Knowledge about Islam and the Qur'an was enormously needed; therefore, the need for translation has become a priority for some Muslim rulers of those countries, they encouraged

translators and scholars for that purpose. It is worth mentioning that most of the translations of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an were accomplished directly from Arabic language as follows:

- 1- Translation from Arabic into Turkish: (more than fifty translations), some of early translations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are: Sheikh Al-Fadl Mohamed Ben Idris (1842), Ahmed, B. Abdullah (1875). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century appeared many translations such as Ibrahim Hilmi (1913), Mohammed Hamdi Yazir (1935), HuseinAtay and Yasar Kutluay (1961) and others. Translation of the Quran in Turkish has continued to the present time, that the works of Yasar Nuri Ozturk (1993), Edip Yuksel (2000), and Ahmed Hulusi (2009) are examples for that.
- 2- Translation from Arabic into Asian languages (Urdu, Hindi, Bengli, and many other Asian languages).

The most famous translation of the Quran is *Tafheem ul Quran* by Saiyd Abul Aala.

English translations of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an were preceded by some attempts to translate the Qur'an in some European languages; they are divided into three stages:

- 1- Translation from Arabic into Latin.
- 2- Translation from Latin into German and Italian.
- 3- Translation from Latin and Arabic into French.

The first translator of the Holy Qur'an from Arabic into English was George Sale (1734); other translations were those of the clergyman John Rodwell in 1861, followed by E.H. Palmer in 1880, Richard Bell in 1937, and Arthur John Arberry (*The Koran Interpreted*) in the 1955.

The earliest and well-known translation of the Holy Qur'an in English by a Muslim was presented with the Arabic original text (*The Quran*) in 1910 by Dr. Mirza Abul Fazl (1865-1956).

The need for English translation of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an has become necessary with the increasing number of English-speaking Muslims as well as researchers and students. Following Dr. Mirza is the translation of Ahmadi Maulana Muhammad Ali (1917), Hafiz Ghulam Sarwas (1930), his translation is regarded as full summaries of the suras, but he has no notes to the text. The work of Marmaduke Pickthall - an English Muslim and an Arabic scholar - was published in 1930 with few notes to the text. Abdullah Yusuf Ali ( *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 1934), Sayed Abdul Latif (1967), Dr. Hashim Amir Ali (1974), Muhammad Asad ( *The Message of The Quran* , 1980), Ahmed Ali ( *Al-Quran: A Contemporary Translation*, 1984), Muhammad Khalilur Rahman ( *The Clarion Call of the Sayed Abdul Latif* (1967), Dr. Hashim Amir Ali (1974), Muhammad Asad ( *The Message of The Quran*

, 1980), Ahmed Ali ( *Al-Quran: A Contemporary Translation*, 1984), *Eternal Quran* (1991), Rashad Khalifa ( *Quran: The Final Testament*, 1992), Laleh Bakhtiar ( *The Sublime Quran*, 2007), and Talal Itani ( *Quran in Modern English*, 2012).

Since its revelation, the Holy Qur'an needs to be explained even for speakers of Arabic because of its unique, incomparable literary style; in addition to that, causes of revelation need to be known for better understanding of the meanings. Therefore, most of the translations were presented with 'commentary' such as Abdullah Yusuf Ali (*The Holy Quran*) and others.

## Methodology

The aim of this study is to compare translation and retranslation of the meanings of some verses of the Holy Qur'an, the verses were selected randomly as case of this study in order to find out the linguistic development that took place in different periods of time in relation to changes in translation standards adopted in each time, in addition to that, other factors like translation process that considers content, literary fashion, and circumstances.

In this part of the study, features and description of the case or subjects to be compared is specified, English translation and retranslation of the meanings of twelve short verses of 'Surah 78 *Al Naba'* are compared for the purpose of this study; the source language is classical Arabic for both translators: [Abdullah Yusuf Ali](#) (1934) and Dr. Mustafa Khattab (2015), the target language is English. Analysis is based on linguistic level for both translations, (a table is designed in a special way to show the differences between the two texts).

## Selected verses are

- 1 – 'Surah 78 *Al Naba'* (The Great News), translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an – Text, Translation and Commentary*, (referred to as text 1)
- 2 – 'Surah 78 *An-naba'* (The Tiding), translation of Dr. Mustafa Khattab, *The Clear Quran*, (referred to as text 2).

## Text 1

*Al Naba'* (The Great News)

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.*

Concerning what Are they disputing (1)

Concerning the Great News (2)

Verily, they shall soon (come to) Know (4)

Verily, verily they shall soon (come to) Know (5)

Have We not made The earth as a wide Expanse (6)

And (have We not) Built over you The seven firmaments (12)

And placed (therein) A light of Splendor (13)

The Day that the Trumpet Shall be sounded, and ye Shall come forth in crowds (18)

Truly Hell is As a place of ambush (21)

No Vanity shall they hear Therein, not Untruth (35)

## Text 2

*An-naba* (The Tiding)

In the Name of Allah—the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful

What are they asking one another about? (1)

About the momentous news (2)

But no! They will come to know (4)

Again, no! They will come to know (5)

Have We not smoothed out the earth 'like a bed' (6)

And built above you seven mighty 'heavens' (12)

And placed 'in them' a shining lamp (13)

'it is' the Day the Trumpet will be blown, and you will 'all' come forth in crowds (18)

Indeed, Hell is lying in ambush (21)

Never to hear any idle talk or lying therein (35)

## Texts analysis

The comparison chart below shows words selection and use as equivalents for each translation of Arabic original text to be analyzed, 12 verses were chosen randomly as representation to the whole text, translation of some verses which are (to some extent) similar were excluded:

| Verse number                | Text 1                           | Text 2                       | Arabic original Word |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Name of the <i>surah</i>    | <i>Al Naba'</i> (The Great News) | <i>An-naba</i><br>The Tiding | النبأ                |
| Formula of <i>Bismillah</i> | Gracious                         | Compassionate                | الرحمن               |
| 1                           | Concerning...<br>disputing       | asking ... about             | عم يتسألون           |
| 2                           | the Great News                   | momentous news               | النبأ العظيم         |
| 4                           | Verily                           | but no                       | كلا                  |
| 5                           | verily, verily                   | again, no                    | ثم كلا               |
| 6                           | wide expanse                     | like a bed                   | مهادا                |

|    |                   |                   |                   |
|----|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 12 | Firmaments        | mighty heavens    | شَدَادَا          |
| 13 | light of splendor | shining lamp      | سَرَاجَا وَهَاجَا |
| 18 | ye shall come     | you will all come | فَتَاتُون         |
| 21 | a place of ambush | lying in ambush   | مَرَصَادَا        |
| 35 | Vanity            | idle talk         | لَغْوَا           |

## Results

This part of the study is concerned with analyzing the data obtained by comparing (text 1 and text 2) on linguistic basis; stating and discussing the results, the differences found between translation and retranslation of each Arabic verse through analysis are discussed as follows:

The title (name) of the 'surah Al Naba' in text 1 is translated into (The Great News) whereas it is 'The News' according to the source text, this is different from the translation of the same word in other verses such as (verse 2) in the same *surah*, which means news of the resurrection or the hereafter, in other case like '*surah 67 Sad*', the meaning refers to the Qur'an or the message of revelation by the same translator. Transliteration of the Arabic word '*Al Naba*' is less accurate, the letter '*l*' must be silent according to recitation rules of the Qur'an '*ahkam tajweed*', therefore should be omitted when transliterating. This problem is overcome in the retranslation of text 2 '*An-naba*' by the translators who seem to be aware of Arabic language rules in general and those of recitation of the Holy Qur'an in particular.

Formula of '*Bismillah*' is slightly different in both translations, (*gracious*) in text 1 implies not only mercy which meaning is limited to pity, but grace that have wider meaning of protection from doing wrong, as well as guidance to the right path. In text 2, the word used as equivalent is (*compassionate*) which means doing good or being generous, such use of simple words by the translator helps for better understanding of the Holy Qur'an. This is also observed in verse 1, the '*surah*' begins with a form of question (*concerning what are they disputing?*) a high literary style in text 1, but the meaning of (*concern*) may take the readers into a wider concepts of anxiety or worry, not a mere question as we can see in text 2, (*what are they asking one another about?*) a direct and simple question about the Holy Qur'an as stated by some scholars, this is similar to using (*great news*) and (*momentous news*) in the second verse of the '*surah*', the meaning in the latter is clear and close to the real picture of that event, which is the revelation of the Holy Qur'an that informs about the resurrection in the hereafter.

Verse 4 in text 1 begins with (*verily*) and repeated in verse 5 to add force to the meaning of (*surely or absolutely*) for the Arabic word '*kalla*'. The same Arabic word is translated differently in '*surah 96 Al'Alaq*' by the same translator, he used one word (*nay*) in verse 6 and verse 19, and a phrase (*by no means*) in '*surah 104 Al Humazah*' verse 4.

In text 2 a combination of words (*but no*) is the equivalent of the Arabic word '*kalla*', it gives exactly the same meaning and in verse 5 the repetition is expressed by (*again*) which renders a satisfactory

translation of the intended meaning. Consistency is obvious in the use of (*but no*) in some verses of other '*surahs*'.

Verse 6 in both texts is a description of the earth, in text 1 it is described as (*wide expanse*), but in text 2 (*like a bed*) means that it is specially made for the benefit of mankind. In verse 12, text 1, the word (*mighty*) was omitted and translated as (*seven firmaments*), but the same word (*mighty*) was used by the same translator in '*surah 65, Al Talaq*' verse 12 in his commentary to give similar meaning, while (*seven mighty heavens*) in text 2, mean that they are seven heavens, exceedingly strong and solid.

Verse 13 in text 1 is a description of the beautiful light of the sun (*light of splendor*), the focus is on the overall meaning as well as the beauty of the source text (the Arabic verse), whereas the same verse in text 2 (*a shining lamp*) describes the sun, and the word (*lamp*) is the closest equivalent to it, also (*shining*) is used to refer to the light and heat of the sun.

It is obvious that the translator of text 1 uses words that are not commonly used, such as (*ye*) in verse 18 (*ye shall come*), it is also used in other verses like '*surah*' 79 Al Nazi'at' verse 27 (*What! are ye the more difficult to create of the heaven*), and '*surah* 12 Yusuf ' verse 40 (*ye worship nothing but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers*). On the other hand, (*you will all come*) is the translation of the same verse in text 2, simple words and clear meaning.

The translation of verse 21 in text 1 is (*Truly Hell is as a place of ambush*), the meaning of (*ambush*) to describe Hell may have the meaning of a (hiding place). While in text 2 it is (*Hell is lying in ambush*) meaning watchful, awake, and observant which is near to the Arabic word in the verse.

(*No vanity shall they hear*) is the translation of the verse 35 in text 1, the word (*vanity*) is understood as pride. Verse 35 of text 2 is slightly different (*never to hear any idle talk or lying therein*), the translator used (*idle talk*) which is nonsense or empty talk to give the meaning of source language.

## Conclusion

This study is concerned with comparing translation and retranslation of the meanings of some verses of '*surah 87 An Naba*'; It is an attempt to determine the fundamental linguistic differences between the two translations as well as the degree to which they are close to the source's meaning.

Analyses on different linguistic levels in text 1 have shown obviously the difficulties facing the translator in the area of phonetics when transliterating some Arabic words, as reciting the Holy Qur'an is a goal in itself which is required to be correct and accurate; such errors of pronunciation were corrected in text 2.

Morphological system of English and Arabic is another problematic area for translator of text 1; whereas in text 2, this disparity was considered in word selection in order to convey the intended meaning.



On lexical level the translator of text 1 tended to use (meaning as reference) in place of other patterns of meaning of the Holy Qur'an, such confusion was avoided in text 2.

Ancient vocabulary used in text 1 does not help understanding some verses for users of English in our present time, words like (ye, thou, nay) were substituted in text 2 and translated into contemporary vocabulary.

Retranslation of (*The Clear Quran*) by Dr. Mustafa Khattab is intended to convey meanings of the Holy Qur'an more fully, it is an attempt to avoid drawbacks and shortcomings of (*The Holy Qur'an – Text, Translation and Commentary*) a translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

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