

Some issues in Translating Nouns in Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Translation of the Meanings of the Holy Quran

Adnan Abu-Mahfouz

Department of Humanities, Al-Balqa Applied University, Al Salt, Jordan

Received on Nov., 7, 2010

Accepted on May, 29, 2011

Abstract

This paper highlights the problems and semantic issues related to nouns that Abdullah Yusuf Ali (undated), in his translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran, could not handle or handled but unsuccessfully. Although he exerted a great effort and succeeded to a large extent in most of his translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali failed to convey the meaning pertaining to some nouns. The paper is an attempt to tackle the semantic problems and issues and make helpful suggestions. It should not, in any way, be looked at as an attempt to undermine the great job done by Abdullah Yusuf Ali but a modest contribution to improve the translation.

Keywords: Holy Quran, Equivalent, Hyponym, Superordinate, Transliteration, Inconsistency, Synonymy, Nouns.

Introduction

The assumption that the Holy Quran cannot be translated across languages without losing the glamorous harmony inherent to verses and sacrificing the emotiveness of cultural and language-specific terms, among others, has been all-pervasive in the Islamic heritage, history and literature.

Briefly, the rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Quran are so characteristic, so powerful, so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendour of the original (Arberry 1955, 24).

However, Islamic scholars and professional translators fairly convincingly argue that only the meanings of the Holy Quran can be conveyed to other languages by means of translation. Surprisingly, some of them believe that the Holy Quran can not and should not be translated.

The Quran cannot be translated. That is the belief of old-fashioned Sheikhs and the view of the present writer. The Book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Quran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Quran – and peradventure something of the charm – in English. It can never take the place of the Quran in Arabic. Nor is it meant to be so. (Pickthall, iii).

Moreover, in the course of the past one and a half millenniums some of the terms once considered untranslatable and used to pose an insurmountable problem for both translators and scholars, are nowadays well-established words in the lexicon of many languages and can easily be translated. More to the point, in the past, terms like *halal* “permitted according to Islamic laws” and *imam* “the leader of prayers in a mosque” sounded awkward when transliterated or translated into other languages. These terms, however, can be found in many good modern dictionaries across languages; the thing that supports the fact that the meanings of the Holy Quran are by and large translatable in the sense that they can, in a way or another, be conveyed to other languages.

This, however, does not negate the “untranslatability” of some aspects of the Quranic discourse. To put it another way, some characteristics of the Quranic discourse: rhyme, rhythm, the pronoun of significance, the deletion of the subject, cognate accusatives, etc, are practically untranslatable. Al-Kharabsheh and Al-azzam (2008, 2) point out that this Arabic Quran has been translated, and the available translations convey the main meanings of the Quran but can never be considered the actual Quran.

Al-Salem (2008, 3) argues that some Moslem translators of the Holy Quran have been very careful to adhere to the Quranic text, maintaining its structure and vocabulary as much as the target language systems allow it. She points out that this attitude emanates from the translators' great respect for the Holy Quran and from their belief that they should not take liberties with the word of God.

Many translators spent a good portion of their life endeavouring to transfer the message of Islam contained in the Holy Quran; some of them died in the attempt. Ali (undated) was one of those who did a great job and came up with a respected translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran which is considered one of the most circulated translations among Muslims and non-Muslims; yet it has many shortcomings.

Problems and Suggested Solutions:

In this paper a close investigation of some semantic issues in Ali's translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran will be undertaken, and suggested solutions will be offered to overcome those issues which include:

1. using a hyponym as an equivalent to a superordinate where the TL has an equivalent superordinate;
2. using a superordinate as an equivalent to a hyponym where the TL has an equivalent hyponym;
3. translation by transliteration; and
4. inconsistency.

1. Using a Hyponym as an Equivalent to a Superordinate where the TL has an Equivalent Superordinate:

Hyponymy is a sense relation where the more specific entity is termed hyponym and the more general one is termed superordinate. For example, "cow" is a hyponym of "animal" and "sparrow" is a hyponym of "bird".

Hyponymy is a transitive relation. If x is a hyponym of y and y is a hyponym of z then x is a hyponym of z. For example, 'cow' is a hyponym of 'animal' and mammal is a hyponym of 'animal'; therefore, 'cow' is a hyponym of 'animal' (Lyons 1977, 292).

Roughly speaking, one of the techniques that a translator resorts to in cases of non-equivalence at word level is using a hyponym as an equivalent to a superordinate. This is, however, unacceptable if the TL has an already well-established word as an equivalent to the superordinate. The following examples illustrate the idea further:

1. "وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا أَنْتَتَّخِذَنَا هُزُوعًا قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ" (سورة البقرة الآية 67).

1. "And remember Moses said
To his people: "God commands
That ye sacrifice a heifer."
They said: "Makest thou
A laughing-stock of us?"
He said: "God save me
From being an ignorant (fool)!"
(Surah 1: 67)

2. "لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُم مَّوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قِسْيسِينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ" (سورة المائدة الآية 82).

2. "Strongest among men in enmity

To the Believers wilt thou

Find the Jews and Pagans;

And nearest among them in love

To the Believers wilt thou

Find those who say,

"We are Christians":

Because amongst these are

Men devoted to learning.

And men who have renounced

The world, and they

Are not arrogant."

(Surah 5: 82)

In (1) above, the Arabic word 'بقرة' /baqarah/ in the SL text is a superordinate. It refers to any cow or to the extension of cow. On the other hand, the equivalent English term that Ali used is 'heifer' which is, in English, a hyponym of cow; it means a cow that has not yet given birth to a calf. To say the least, this kind of translation is unacceptable and inaccurate simply because the original text does not mean that.

In (2) above, The Arabic term 'قسيسين' /qisiisiin/, which means 'priests', has a direct equivalent in English. The translator chose a more general word postmodified by a reduced relative clause 'men devoted to learning'. Further, examples of using a hyponym as an equivalent to a superordinate where the TL has an equivalent superordinate in Ali's translation of the Holy Quran can be found in verses including, but not restricted to, (2:259; 2:185).

One might argue that in the interpretation books of the Holy Quran, we find that the term 'قسيسين' /qisiisiin/ means "العلماء" (scholars) and in this particular context "men of learning" should be more appropriate than "priests". This argument is valid to a large extent but the same context of the ayah tells us that the meaning is related to "religion" (And men who have renounced the world and they are not arrogant). The term "priests" might be closer to religion than "scholars". A scholar is (according to Cambridge Online Dictionary) a person who studies a subject in great detail, especially at a university. A priest, on the other hand, is a person, usually a man, who has been trained to perform religious duties in the Christian Church, or a person with particular duties in some other religions. "Men of learning" has the

same problem as "scholars" in being general and not connected to religion. To put it short, I think that the term "priests" would serve the purpose in a clearer way.

2. Using a Superordinate as an Equivalent to a Hyponym where the TL has an Equivalent Hyponym:

Baker (1992, 23) believes that languages tend to have general words (superordinates) and lack specific ones (hyponyms) because each language makes only those distinctions in meaning which seem relevant to its particular environment.

1. "قَالُوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثْتُمْ فَابْعَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى طَعَامًا فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ بِرِزْقٍ مِنْهُ وَلْيَتَلَطَّفْ وَلَا يُشْعِرَنَّ بِكُمْ أَحَدًا:" (سورة الكهف الآية 19).

1. They (all) said, "God (alone)
Knows best how long
Ye have stayed here
Now send ye then one of you
With this money of yours.
To the town ...
(Surah 18: 19)

2. "وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا" (سورة الجن الآية 18).

2. "And the places of worship
Are for God (alone):
So invoke not any one
Along with God;"
(Surah 72: 18)

According to Quran interpreters, the term "ورق" /wariq/, in (1) above, means "silver coins". This meaning is missing in this translation. It refers to a specific kind of money that is "silver coins". Obviously, a more general term is used as an equivalent to a specific one. "silver coins" would be more appropriate.

In (2) above, however, the term "مساجد" /masajid/ literally means mosques. "مساجد" /masaajid/ has a direct equivalent in English which is "mosques"; but the translator rendered it into "place of worship". A place of worship can be a place where, say, a Buddhist pray which is contrary to the fact. Why should we use a general word as an equivalent to a specific one when we do have the specific word in the target language?

In this surah (al-Jinn) Allah is addressing Prophet Mohammed, "Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of Jinns listened to the Quran." And "The mosques are for Allah alone: So do not ascribe any one along with Allah." There is no use translating the term "مساجد" into "places of worship" when the TL has a ready equivalent for the SL lexical item. Books of the interpretation of the Holy Quran suggest that in this particular Ayah "مساجد" refers to "mosques".

3. Translation by Transliteration:

A helpful and reliable strategy to deal with cases of non-equivalence that encounters translators in the course of their work is translation by transliteration. Transliteration has traditionally been defined as the process by which words in one alphabet are represented in another alphabet. In this strategy the translator uses the letters of the TL to transfer the meaning of a word from the SL when translation fails completely or is practically impossible. It is also opted for to deal with culture and language specific words, newly-coined words and buzz words. More to the point, the transliterated word becomes a loan word in the TL. Ali transliterated words that need translation. Consider the following examples:

1. "وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا". (سورة الانسان الآية 17).

1. "And they will be given
To drink there of a
Cup (of wine) mixed
With Zanjabil,"
(Surah 76: 17)

2. "إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا". (سورة الإنسان الآية 5).

2. "As to the righteous,
They shall drink
Of a Cup (of wine)
Mixed with Kafur,"
(Surah 76: 5)

3. "مِثْلَ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ لَبَنٍ لَمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ خَمْرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ كَمَنْ هُوَ خَالِدٌ فِي النَّارِ وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ" (سورة محمد الآية 15).

3. "(Here is) a parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water unstaling; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clean. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and

Forgiveness from their Lord, (can those in such bliss) be given to drink, boiling water, so that it cuts up their bowels (to pieces)?”

(Surah 47: 15)

4. "وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا" (سورة البقرة الآية 143).

4. "Thus have We made of you

An Ummat justly balanced."

(Surah 2: 143)

In his translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran, Ali transliterated words that directly lend themselves to literal translation. In (1) above, for instance, the Arabic word "زنجبيل" /zanjabiiil/ has a straightforward equivalent in English which is 'ginger'. The translator transliterated it possibly because of the fact that in the hereafter ginger would be different but the SL text uses the term "زنجبيل" /zanjabiiil/ in spite of the fact that it would be a different one in the Hereafter.

Strictly speaking, in authoritative texts like the Holy Quran and the Bible formal equivalence is choice number one and the interpretation, when the need arises, is to be left for a footnote. In (2) above, the translator transliterates the word 'Kafur' which means 'Camphor'. Similarly, what Muslims believe is that all things in the Hereafter would be completely different.

In (3) above, the translator used the direct equivalent of "خمر" /xamr/ which literally means 'wine'; he rendered the word "خمر" /xamr/ into 'wine'. For Muslims 'wine' is prohibited and drinking wine is one of the greater sins in this world. However, Muslims believe that the 'wine' in Paradise is permitted and it is at the same time a different one in that it does not make people intoxicated. Ali translated "خمر" /xamr/ as 'wine' but he transliterated "زنجبيل" /zanjabiiil/. The argument here is that the term "زنجبيل" /zanjabiiil/ should also have been rendered into 'Ginger'. Similarly, instead of transliterating 'Kafur', the English equivalent 'Camphor' should have been used.

In (4) above, the translator adopted a transliteration of the word as if it was pronounced by an Indian. In Arabic the word "أمة" is pronounced as /ummah/ not /ummat/ which is an Indian or south-east Asian pronunciation of the Arabic term. Apart from that, the Arabic term "أمة" /ummah/ simply means 'nation'. Should we transliterate it or translate it? Transliteration is opted for to bridge the semantic gap resulting from linguistic and culture

specific terms, among others. To put it short, 'nation' is a straightforward equivalent and transliteration is to be excluded.

Issues of transliteration can arise from the fact that the word in the SL is a name and has a meaning as well. The translator tries to translate the word and the result is a different name that an SL speaker does not know any more. Consider the following examples:

1. "إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ." (سورة الكوثر الآية 1).

1. "To thee have we granted the Abundance."

(Surah 108: 1)

2. "تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ." (سورة المسد الآية 1).

2. "Perish the hands of the Father of Flame."

(Surah 111:1)

In (1) above, the translator rendered the term "الْكَوْثَرَ" /alkauθar/ into "Abundance". Generally speaking, names or proper nouns should not be translated albeit they sometimes do have meaning. In Arabic, the root of the noun has the meaning of "abundance" or "a lot" but when it is mentioned to a Muslim it is just a name of a river in Paradise; Muslims do not usually think of the name to mean "Abundance". Translation does not fit here and transliteration should be the choice. Perhaps a footnote should help the non-Moslem reader understand the meaning of the term. But why leave the interpretation to a footnote after we choose the right equivalent the thing that the translator did not do.

In (2) above, the translator rendered the name of an infamous person in the Islamic heritage and literature "أَبُو لَهَبٍ" /abu-lahab as "The Father of Flame". The name literally means that but translating this name in this way is inaccurate. Big Ben, for instance, was named after Sir Benjamin Hall. What would happen if we translated "Big Ben", into Arabic for example? The famous clock would be unknown to those who have known it for a long time. The same thing happens when we render "أَبُو لَهَبٍ" /abuulahab/ into "The Father of Flame". Therefore, "أَبِي لَهَبٍ" /abuulahab/ should be transliterated.

Again, the name "أَبُو لَهَبٍ" (Abu-Lahab) is part of the Islamic History and a reader of the Holy Quran, a Moslem or a non-Moslem, should become acquainted with this person (Abu-Lahab). I belong to this school of thought. The name "Kohl" (Chancellor of Germany from 1982 to 1998) literally means "Cabbage" but I have never heard of a translator who tried to translate this name.

4. Inconsistency

The issue of inconsistency in translating the meanings of the Holy Quran has been raised by many scholars and translators of the meanings of the Holy Quran. This, however, does not underestimate the effort exerted by many translators of the meanings of the Holy Quran throughout history.

Clearly no translation of the Quran can compare in beauty and style with the original Arabic, which has been described as: "by turns, striking, soaring, vivid, terrible, tender and breathtaking." However, I found when the context is the same, if the same English word is not used for the same Arabic word throughout the translation, it becomes difficult for someone who wants to learn to correlate the English and the Arabic to be able to do so. In other words, the twenty or so English translations put emphasis on interpreting a Quranic verse without precisely representing the original Arabic word. For example, in one translation, the English verb "to turn" is used for over forty-three different Arabic words and the noun "sin," twenty-three (Bakhtiar 2008).

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran is not free from cases of inconsistency in which the translator opted for more than one English equivalent to the same Arabic word when the context is the same. Consider the following examples:

1. " وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرَاوِدُ فَتَاهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ قَدْ شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا إِنَّا لَنَرَاهَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ " (سورة يوسف الآية 30).

1. "Ladies said in the city:
'The wife of the (great) 'Aziz
Is seeking to seduce her slave
From his (true) self.
Truly hath he inspired her
With violent love: We see
She is evidently going astray."
(Surah 12: 30)

2. " قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ إِنَّ لَهُ أَبًا شَيْخًا كَبِيرًا فَخُذْ أَحَدَنَا مَكَانَهُ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ. " (سورة يوسف الآية 78).

2. "They said: "O exalted one!
Behold! he has a father,
Aged and venerable, (who will
Grieve for him); so take

One of us in his place,
For we see that thou art
(Gracious) in doing good.
(Surah 12: 78)

In (1) above, on the one hand, the translator transliterated the Arabic word “عزیز” as (‘Aziz) because, as he puts it. “‘Aziz: is the title of a nobleman or officer of Court, of high rank. Considering all the circumstances, the office of Grand Chamberlain or minister may be indicated. But ‘Aziz I think is a title, not an office. I have not translated the title but left it as it is (Ali 560).

In (2) above, on the other hand, Ali chose to render the meaning of the same Arabic word “عزیز” /‘aziiz/ as “exalted One!” which he once called a title that should not be translated. In a footnote, he explained the reason for translating the title in this case.

(‘Aziz: I have translated the title of ‘Aziz here as “the exalted one” when addressed to Joseph in order not to cause confusion with the other man, the ‘Aziz to whom Zulaikha was married, and who is apparently no longer now in the land of the living” (Ali 560).

Obviously, Ali did not want to cause confusion between the “عزیز” (‘Aziz) mentioned in verse ‘30’ above and the other “عزیز” (‘Aziz) who is Joseph. However, the context of the story of Joseph makes it clear that the first “عزیز” (‘Aziz) is the one who imprisoned Joseph who is the “عزیز” (‘Aziz) in verse (78). Therefore, consistency in translating the same term necessitate that the title in the two verses be dealt with in the same way. Moreover, verses 54 and 55 of the same Sura are the starting point of the era of the second “عزیز” (‘Aziz) (The era of the rule of Joseph).

Historically speaking, there were some titles used to address the ruler of the nation in question. For example, “Pharaoh” was the king of Egypt at a certain era. The same applies to “Caesar” and “Caliph” among others. No translator, to the best of our knowledge, attempted to translate these titles whether they would refer to “X” or “Y”. The title “عزیز” (‘Aziz) used to be just like a prime minister. I think the title “عزیز” (‘Aziz) should be used as is whether it refers to Joseph, “X” or “Y”.

Other translators of the meanings of the Holy Quran translated this term in different ways which aggravates an already complicated situation. It is rendered by Arberry (1955) as

"The Governor" in verse (30) and as "Mighty prince" in verse (78). Pickthall (undated) rendered it as "The ruler" in verse (30) and as "ruler of the land" in verse (78).

The issue of inconsistency in dealing with nouns is obvious in Ali's translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran. The Arabic term "عَذَاب" /aḍaab/ is a case in point. It is translated in more than one way which unjustifiably conveys the assumption that the word has more than one meaning in the context in which it occurs. Consider the following verses:

1. "وَلَيْنَ مُسْتَهْمٌ نَفْحَةٌ مِّنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ." (سورة الانبياء الآية 46).

1. "If but a breath of the Wrath
Of thy Lord do touch them,
They will then say, "Woe
To us! we did wrong indeed!"
(Surah 21: 46)

2. "كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ غَمٍّ أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ." (سورة الحج الآية 22).

2. "Every Time they wish
To get away therefrom,
From anguish, they will be
Forced back therein, and
(It will be said), "Taste ye
The Penalty of Burning!"
(Surah 22: 22)

3. "قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ" (سورة الزمر الآية 71).

3. "The answer
Will be: "True: but
The Decree of Punishment
Has been proved true
Against the Unbelievers!"
(Surah 39: 71)

4. "لَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ" (سورة النحل الآية 114).

5. " There is nothing but disgrace
In this world, and in the world
To some, an exceeding torment."
(Surah 16: 114)

5. "مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أَكْرَهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ غَضَبٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ" (سورة النحل الآية 106).

4. "Any one who, after accepting
Faith in God, utter Unbelief, -
Except under compulsion,
His heart remaining firm
In Faith – but such as
Open their breast to Unbelief, -
On them is Wrath from God,
And theirs will be
A dreadful Penalty".
(Surah 16: 106)

Inconsistency at word level is a correlative of synonymy. Synonyms are words that have the same meaning, for example, "big" and "large". The Arabic word "عذاب" /'aḏaab/ is rendered into "the Wrath", "the Penalty", "the Punishment" and "torment" in (1), (2), (3), and (4) respectively. In those examples the idea of synonymy pops out each time we address the issue of inconsistency.

Moreover, the idea of perfect synonymy in language is altogether rejected. Synonyms might belong to different dialects or styles, have different emotive meanings, and are collocationally restricted. In the Holy Quran, some linguists fairly convincingly argue that there is no such thing as perfect or complete synonyms. To determine whether two words are synonyms or not we need to jot down all the possible contexts in which the two words might occur. This, however, is impossible. Therefore, using five different words as an equivalent for the same word in the SL text is, to say the least, confusing and unacceptable in an authoritative text like the Holy Quran and adds to the burden of understanding the translated text. Stylistically speaking, synonyms are resorted to to avoid repetition but this, however, does not fit here, again because of the Holy Quran being an authoritative text.

It can, however, be maintained that there are no real synonyms, that no two words have exactly the same meaning. Indeed it would seem unlikely that two words with exactly the same meaning would both survive in a language (Palmer 1976, 66).

The idea of synonymy in the Holy Quran has been a controversial issue that has not yet been settled. Most Muslim scholars argue that there is no such thing as synonymy in the Holy Quran. Every word in the Holy Quran communicates a message that no other word can communicate.

"But when a Muslim closely investigates the meanings of words in the Holy Quran, he/she finds out that each single letter in the Holy Quran was chosen carefully. And there is nothing called synonymy. Every word has a meaning that no other word can convey; even though the two words resemble one another" (Sharawi 1993, 47. vol. 1).

Strictly speaking, the same concept throughout the text should be translated in the same way; in other words, translation accuracy necessitates consistency. The translation of a concept in more than one way conveys the assumption that the word has more than one meaning which is contrary to the fact. This, however, does not negate the fact that a translator, as Newmark (1987) puts it, cannot do without synonymy; he has to make do with it as a compromise in order to translate more important segments of the text.

A synonymy is only appropriate where literal translation is not possible and because the word is not important enough for componential analysis. Here economy precedes accuracy (Newmark 1988, 84).

A synonym is resorted to when we do not have a word in the TL that conveys the meaning perfectly. It should not in any way be a technique to avoid repetition in a text like the Holy Quran because every word has a meaning that no other word can have. While a translator may try to avoid repetition he/she becomes inconsistent in his/her translation of an authoritative text like the Holy Quran. Consider the following examples:

1. "وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا" (سورة البقرة الآية 143).

1. "Thus have We made of you
An Ummat justly balanced."
(Surah 2: 143)

2. "كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ" (سورة آل عمران الآية 110).

2. "Ye are the best
Of peoples, evolved
From mankind,"
(Surah 3:110)

3. "إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ" (سورة الأنبياء الآية 92)

3. "Verily, this Brotherhood
Of yours is a single Brotherhood,
And I am your Lord and cherisher: therefore
Serve Me (and no other)."
(Surah 21: 92)

4. "تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ" (سورة البقرة الآية 141)

4. " That was a people that hath
Passed away. They shall reap
The fruit of what they did,
And ye of what they do
Of their merits".
(Surah 2: 141)

5. "وَإِنْ تَكْذِبُوا فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أُمَمٌ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ" (سورة العنكبوت الآية 18).

5. "And if ye reject (the message),
So did generations before you:
And the duty of the apostle
Is only to preach publicly
(And clearly)."
(Surah 29: 18)

6. "كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنْذِرِينَ" (سورة البقرة الآية 213).

6. "Mankind was one single nation.
And Allah sent Messengers
With glad tidings and warnings."
(Surah 2: 213)

7. "وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً." (سورة المائدة الآية 48).

7. "If God had willed,
He would have made you
A single People,"
(Surah 5: 48)

In the above examples, the translator rendered the Arabic term "أمة" /ummah/ in many different ways. He transliterated it once (as in (1) above) and translated it in more than one way as in (2), (3), (4), (5), (6) and (7) above. The term "ummat", in (1) above, is a mere transliteration. In (2) above, the term "brotherhood" is "a feeling of loyalty, an organization or group of people.

However, the Arabic term "أمة", in its general sense, simply means "nation". In (5) above, the term "أمم", which is the plural form of "أمة", is translated as "generations". In (4) the translator used the term "people" as an equivalent to nearly the same term "أمم" in example (5). Not to mention inconsistency, the translator used a more specific term "a hyponym" as

an equivalent to a superordinate when the TL has an equivalent superordinate which is "nation" or "people". The translator confused the reader by giving many translations for the same Arabic word. Examples (6) and (7) above are the clearest among the mistranslations. The term "أمة" has exactly the same meaning in the two examples.

In some cases the translator seems to be unaware of the meaning of the Arabic word that has more than one meaning depending on the context in which it occurs. The term "آيات" /ʔayaat/ means "verses" of the Holy Quran or "signs", "evidence" or "miracles". In some cases, it can mean all of the possible meanings it communicates. Consider the following examples:

1. "وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا انْتِ بِقُرْآنٍ غَيْرِ هَذَا أَوْ بَدِّلْهُ قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُ مِنْ تِلْقَاءِ نَفْسِي إِنْ أُتْبِعَ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابٌ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ." (سورة يونس الآية 15).

1. "But when Our Clear Signs
Are rehearsed unto them,
Those who rest not their hope
On their meeting with Us,
Say: "bring us a Quran
Other than this, or change this, ..."
(Surah 10: 15)

In this example, the translator mistranslates the term "آيات" /ʔayaat/ by rendering it as "signs". However, the context in which the word occurred makes it clear that it refers to the "verses" of the Holy Quran. These "verses", as mentioned in the verse itself, are rehearsed or recited. More to the point, the unbelievers would say: "bring us a Quran other than this". In short, the context in which the term "آيات" /ʔayaat/ occurred makes it clear that it refers to the verses of the Holy Quran not the "signs" or "miracles" of the prophets in spite of the fact that the word lends itself to such a meaning, not in this context though. The translator translated this word and similar occurrences thereof, including but not restricted to (1: 129; 2: 113; 10: 1; 2: 11), inaccurately and incorrectly.

2. "الر تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ." (سورة يونس الآية 1).

2. "A. L. R.
These are the Ayats
Of the Book of Wisdom"
(Surah 10:1)

3. "كَذَّابِ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَآخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ. (سورة آل عمران الآية 11).

3. "Their plight will be
No better than that
Of the people of Pharaoh,
And their predecessors:
They denied our Signs.
And God called them to account
For their sins.
For God is strict
In Punishment."
(Surah 3: 11)

In this example, the translator argues that the term "آيات" /aayaat/ here means signs or verses of the Holy Quran at the same time. Here, as the translator suggests, both meanings are to be understood. So he transliterates the term because it means "signs" or "verses". What we understand is that each time the term "آيات" /ayaat/ has the two meanings it should be transliterated to maintain consistency in the translation, the thing that the translator does not do. Ali uses the term "signs" to mean "verses" as in (1) above, used the term "signs" to mean "miracles or evidence" as in (3) above and above all he unjustifiably transliterated the same term in (2) above. Is the translator consistent in his approach? Of course, not.

The researcher, however, understands that "آيات" /aayaat/ in this particular context, in (1) above, exclusively refers to the verses of the Holy Quran. In the verses of the Holy Quran, we are told about different kinds of miracles or evidence brought by many prophets. In (3) above, the people of Pharaoh and their predecessors denied the "Signs" of Allah. It is historically and ideologically known to Muslims, Christians and Jews that Moses came to Pharaoh with miracles and signs not verses (like The Holy Quran or The Holy Book). The Torah, however, was sent to the people of Israel not to Pharaoh.

Conclusion:

This paper has investigated the problems and semantic issues related to nouns that Ali in his translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran tackled but not successfully. It was found out that those problems can be traced back to at least four reasons: the translator used synonyms, transliterated words that have straightforward equivalents, and translated words that needed translation. Again, the paper should not be looked at as an attempt to undermine the great job done by Ali but a modest contribution to improve the translation.

Notes:

1. There is more than one publication (or version) of the same translation done by Ali with additions and omissions. The translation adopted by the researcher is the one cited in the bibliography.
2. The examples discussed in the paper do not exhaust all the nouns that have problems but sample cases to highlight the problem.
3. The paper should not, in any way, be looked at as an undermining of the wonderful job done by Abdullah Yusuf Ali but a modest contribution to improve the translation.

بعض المشكلات المتعلقة بترجمة الأسماء عند عبدالله يوسف علي في ترجمته لمعاني القرآن الكريم

عدنان أبو محفوظ

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على بعض المشكلات الدلالية، المتعلقة بترجمة الأسماء عند عبدالله يوسف علي في ترجمته لمعاني القرآن الكريم. حيث أنه لم يوفق بشكل تام بمعالجة هذه المشكلة بنجاح. وعلى الرغم من الجهد الكبير والجليل الذي بذله في ترجمته للقرآن، وعلى الرغم من نجاحه في معظم الحالات، إلا أنه لم يوفق في بعض الحالات المتعلقة بدلالة بعض الأسماء. وتعتبر هذه الدراسة محاولة متواضعة لرأب هذا الصدع بتقديم مقترحات عملية. وهذا الدراسة ليست إلا إضافة متواضعة على الجهد الجليل الذي قدمه عبدالله يوسف علي.

كلمات مفتاحية: القرآن الكريم، الترادف، الأسماء، المقابل اللفظي، عدم الإنسجام، اللفظ العام، اللفظ الخاص، الترجمة

الكتابية للفظ.

References

- Ali, Abdullah. (Undated). *The Holy Quran*. Beirut. Dar Al - Arabia.
- Al-Kharabsheh, Aladdin and Al-Azzam, Bakri. 2008. "Translating the invisible in the Qur'an". *Babel* 54:1, 1-18.
- Al-Salem, Reem. 2008. *The Translation of Metonymy in the Holy Qur'an. A Comparative, Analytical Study*. Doctoral Dissertation. King Saud University. Riyadh.
- Arberry, Arthur. 1955. *The Quran Interpreted*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Bakhtiar, Laleh. 2008. *The Sublime Quran* www.sublimequran.org.
- Baker, Mona. 1992. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Dawood, Nessim. 1986. *The Quran, Translated with Notes*. Penguin books.
- Farghal, Mohammed. 1991. "Evaluativeness Parameter and the Translator from English into Arabic and Vice Versa". *Babel* 37(3): 138-151.
- Hurford, James and Heasley, Brendan. 1983. *Semantics: a coursebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, John. 1977. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Newmark, Peter. 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd.
- Palmer, Frank. 1976. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pickthall, Mohammed. (Undated). *The Meaning of the Glorious Kuran*. Universal Book Stall: New Delhi.
- Sharawi, Mitwali. 1993. *Mu`jizat Al Qura`n Al Kareem*, vol1.