TRANSLATION OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND THE MISSING LINK
VERSE (60:13) - ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Mousab Alata Elseddig Adiel[*]

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

Abstract

This study aims to review and analyse the corpora of seven English religious translations compared to their Arabic source for investigating the adequacy of these translations in conveying the cross-creed linguistic meaning through a mixed and corpse-based methodology where the findings proved that the three hypotheses of the study are true in response to the study questions. The study recommendations were directed to the readers, the pedagogists of religious translation curricula, and to the scholars interested in criticizing Quranic translations in their research articles, and of course for future translators who are interested in renovation of the current translations of holy texts, especially Quranic texts.

Keywords: culture, linguistic equivalence, social, relations, Islamophobia

1. Introduction

Translation of Quranic texts was abundantly studied and searched by many linguists and translators. The old translations of the previous century provided good corpora where such translations became disseminated widely in the era of technology and smartphones. The academicians of language and translation focused greatly on polysemy, homonymy, semantics, lexicality, stylistics and other subjects related to Linguistics in studies could be described as cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies. It is rare to find a study that did not blame the translators of the Quranic texts or did not recommend reconsidering the current different translations of Quran as a holy text. That calls which invited to renovate the current published translations of Quranic texts were comments about pure linguistic aspects. Some articles' authors attributed their calls of revising the current Quranic translations to culture factor - which is a broad topic - that hindered the translators of such essential texts to convey the proper meaning. From this point, the author could conclude that all these articles are either cross-linguistic or cross culture. The author believes that there is a missing

---

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

link represented in the absence of cross-creed translation studies. Cross-creed translation studies are very significant because they discuss the essence of religion. In other words, the religious translation studies that connect both the linguistic and creed factors would be ideal interdisciplinary studies.

In this article, an example of a translated religious text has been thoroughly discussed. The discussion is not based on linguistic analysis only, but also on the message of the text in relation to creed dimension since the language is the carrier of the meaning, which could not be studied away from the creed context. In other words, the study of the religious texts' translation is linked to religion science, and therefore their linguistic analysis or translation should consider the creed contexts because creed is the core of any religion.

The major problem that evoked the academicians to study the corpse of the translated Quranic texts is the strategy of word-by-word translation which is clear in many translations except for some words, phrases, or sentences their equivalence was hard to find. In any case, the available works are direct translation while they must be analytical translations attentive to the religious dimension and other contextual dimensions when dealing with such holy and sensitive types of linguistic texts in the social context.

1.1. Significance of the study

The importance of this study comes from linking between the linguistic context of the translated text and its effectiveness in conveying the cross-creed context of the original text that implies crucial signs for the reader, especially regarding the outlines that regulate the social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The particular significance of this study lies in the fact that it is a reader-centred where those who read such essential texts in English, whatever their orientation is, will receive the truths revealed by the original text.

1.2. Questions of the study

This study responds to the following questions:

- Is the strategy of word-by-word translation (also known as literal translation) of holy texts adequate to convey the linguistic meaning in its various contexts like cross-creed context, social context, or just beating around the bush?
- What are the expected complications of such translation strategy on understanding the religion correctly?
- Did the previous studies focus on the cross-creed context and other contexts, or were only confined to the linguistic and culture-bound?

1.3. Hypotheses

- The strategy of word-by-word translation is not valid in rendering holy texts, and the translation of such essential texts require translation renovation and renewal, specifically for creed-bound texts.
- Islamophobia and negative mental images about the religion of that texts, might be established in the mind of the reader, as one of the complications of translation inadequacy.
- The previous studies were only confined to linguistic and some cultural links without addressing the other essential issues related to creed and social contexts which is the message of the text that ought to be conveyed to the reader or the communities through translation.

1.4. Limitations of this study

This study deals only with Quranic signs translation as a translation of a holy text from Arabic into English per the provided example of the study.

2. Methodology

For the affirmation of the first two hypotheses, the methodology adopted in this article is of various dimensions where translations corpora of seven English translations were taken into analysis and were reviewed under consideration of the creed message carried linguistically by the source language in a corpus-based comparative study.

For the affirmation of the third hypothesis, a literature review for several previous studies was concluded.

Thus, the steps of the methodology and the procedures followed in this study could be summarized in: firstly: the author reviewed the corpora of seven common Quranic translations; secondly: the author analysed the corpora linguistically in related to creed interpretation for conveying the proper meaning to the readers along with the syntax context; thirdly: comparison of the source text indicators to the translated texts indicators was performed.

Thus, this methodology could be described as an analytical, comparative and corpus-based.

2.1. Data and sample used

The dataset used for this study is secondary data where the source of the texts selected for the critical analysis is taken from the website of (corpus.quarn.com) and retrieved on 29/09/2023. It is one example about one Quranic Ayah (sign) or verse as commonly used. It is a text of nineteen Arabic words, but its exegesis can make books. This is along with the fourteen articles that were taken from the Academia website for gathering evidence of the third hypothesis.

2.2. The example used in the study

As in the above foreword narrated in the section of the data used for this study, Table 1 below shows the original text in Arabic.

Table 1. Sign No. (13) as scripted in Arabic language from the Surah No. (60) of the Quran (Al-Mumtahanah).

Quranic Sign verse	Source
يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَتَوَلَّوْا۟ قَوْمًا غَضِبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ قَدْ يَئِسُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ كَمَا يَئِسَ ٱلْكُفَّارُ مِنْ أَصْحَٰبِ ٱلْقُبُورِ ﴿١٣﴾	https://equran.me/read-60.html

Table 2. Seven common translations of Quran as a holy text.
Source: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=60&verse=13.

No.	Translator	Translation from Arabic into English
1	Pickthall	"O ye who believe! Be not friendly with a folk with whom Allah is wroth, (a folk) who have despaired of the Hereafter as the disbelievers despair of those who are in the graves."
2	Yusuf Ali	"O ye who believe! Turn not (for friendship) to people on whom is the Wrath of Allah, of the Hereafter they are already in despair, just as the Unbelievers are in despair about those (buried) in graves."
3	Shakir	"O you who believe! do not make friends with a people with whom Allah is wroth; indeed they despair of the hereafter as the unbelievers despair of those in tombs."
4	Muhammad Sarwar	"Believers, do not establish friendship with the people who have become subject to the wrath of God. They do not have any hope in the life to come, just as the disbelievers have no hope in those who are in their graves."
5	Mohsin Khan	"O you who believe! Take not as friends the people who incurred the Wrath of Allah (i.e. the Jews). Surely, they have been in despair to receive any good in the Hereafter, just as the disbelievers have been in despair about those (buried) in graves (that they will not be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection)."
6	Arberry	"O believers, take not for friends a people against whom God is wrathful, and who have despaired of the world to come, even as the unbelievers have despaired of the inhabitants of the tombs."
7	Sahih International	"O you who have believed, do not make allies of a people with whom Allah has become angry. They have despaired of [reward in] the Hereafter just as the disbelievers have despaired of [meeting] the inhabitants of the graves."

The author shows the corpora of this sign as translated into English by seven various translations, but per the source website, they are following the translation strategy of word-by-word. Table 2 gathers the seven translations for the purpose of comparing the meaning offered by the translations in contrast to the meaning and indicators of the original source language for a better investigation to the adequacy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the translations provided in order to depict the whole and full image as in the source wide scope and exegesis.

3. Literature review

Considering the word-by-word translation strategy, and through reviewing the first six translations, we find them all focused on friendships between Muslims and those who incurred the Wrath of Allah, in a trial to manipulate the Arabic sentence (لا تتولوا) which is of spacious meaning than this narrow rejected meaning, and can easily be translated into (do not sponsor or patron). The author of this article believes that is the reason beyond the translation No. (7) which tried to modify this *friendship* into (*allies*) as wording process.

Linguistic problems of such translations always occur when the translators confine their mind to the linguistic equivalence, but it seems that the translators here indicate to the incident of the friendship that was between two of the Prophet's Companions with a non-Muslim man when this Quranic text was revealed to the Prophet. In any case, that was in the war time, not the time of peace, and putting the discourse like this, some readers will think it is an absolute injunction. The author believes that all the seven translations missed the true equivalent, and the meaning consequently. To solve such problems resulting from the loss of the linguistic equivalence when rendering holy texts like Quran texts, it is recommended for the translators to return to the exegeses because for capturing all aspects and contexts related to the Quranic sign like the sign connectivity with the previous and following signs from the same *Surah*, its study as an integrated part to other Quranic texts out of the *Surah*, and the various branches of Islamic Knowledge.

In a related context, and according to these translations, a negative image about Islamic culture will be created in the mind of the readers who want to know about Islam where translation is not limited to cross-linguistic process only but includes culture too. Also, young non-native Arabic speakers will be confused by such translations. The issue of translation relation to culture in general was discussed by many scholars in various contexts, but the culture the author means here is Islamic culture, and interlinguistic culture of both Arabic and English languages.

Based on his understanding and cultural background, the author views that this great verse (sign) regulates and organizes the relationships of Muslims whether individuals or communities, countries or regions with non-Muslims individuals and communities at the level of economic, diplomatic, and social relations. This great sign is a legislation, and a law governs the Muslim's relations at all levels. Such a legislation constitutionally cannot be translated

easily into equivalent words even if the meaning was slightly considered to manipulate some phrases, because the meaning the author indicates to is not linked by the linguistic meaning only, but by the whole context and the glorious indicators implied in this sign or its verses despite the trial of the translators to convey the meaning of some phrases because the intended meaning here should not be lexical, but must consider the context of the Quranic sign linguistically and cross-creed together. This Quranic sign indicates to a big branch of knowledge about the creed of Muslims which is called (عقيدة الولاء والبراء), literally means (loyalty and disavowal) in the science of Islamic studies.

The author also does not neglect to point out that assuming the translation of this sign alone, without perceiving the meanings of the other Quranic signs related to this branch of Muslims creed is not sufficient to capture the rules and provisions this sign constitutes and legalizes. Certainly, the role of Islamic scholars is to set the indicators and guidelines of this signs along with its peers and other Islamic cognitive aspects as it is also known by cultured Muslims where the role of the translators and linguists is to address such translations for clarifying the reality.

Considering the side of the reader, the author semantically does not recommend adopting such simplified translations for they might lead to portray negative conceptions in the mind of the reader about Quran where many Quranic signs may need a whole book to convey the meaning and the implications of the subject they bear. The author recommends reviewing the meanings of every sign per the exegeses of Islam scholars who enjoy established knowledge with Quran.

Among the important issues, in a related context, it is necessary to avoid adopting the direct translation for educating or enlightening about Quarn as far as possible since that might be a call for increase of islamophobia or a cause for associating the Quran or Islam with terrorism. In other words, interlanguage translation alone is not effective for conveying the spirit of a religious text. Translation of a religious text must care about the whole scope of the religion the translator wants to render it. This is why a religious translator must be of a good background and strongly cultured about that religion subject for translation. Along with that, in case of Quran translation, the translator must be well versed in Arabic culture and has the scrutiny skill to consider the various opinions of Islam scholars.

Syntactically, and per the best knowledge of the author, the Arabic word (الكفار) is not the same as (الكافرون). Therefore, manipulating their equivalents into (disbelievers) or (unbelievers) hide some rhetoric touches of the source language where (الكفار) refers to the persons, and (الكافرون) denotes the action. Some people may allege that even Muslims themselves are unbelievers which is true when it comes to beliefs that contradict with their Book. Thus, the word 'unbelievers' should clarify unbelieve of what? In other words, it must be interpreted because the lexical equivalent alone is not a solution. From this point related to rhetoric of the source language, translation of holy texts, especially Quranic signs require grammaticalization, and this would enrich English language with many terms. It would be a great lexicography work, but it requires scholars of specific traits as

they should be native Arabic speakers and have studied both Arabic language and English language and have a long career in translation. Such great work requires conscious efforts from language academies coupled with suitable funding. Many terms, concepts, or even words might require Anglicization where the websites of Quranic translations are considered good sources for the materials, or in other words these translations shape wonderful corpora for corpus-based linguistics studies. Translations of Quran Corpus-based Linguistics might be considered as an evolved branch of linguistics and its area is still virgin with a need for many deep studies between English and Arabic languages where many Quranic signs could be explained in a book or books of science. Such studies will shape a platform for searching the possible similarities and differences between the two languages to a wide extent where the author believes this area will be promising for research. That was in regard of reviewing the seven translations literature corpora compared to their source.

In regard of reviewing the articles that criticized Quran translation, there are many previous studies about translation of holy texts in general and translations of Quran specifically. After reviewing many of those previous studies, the author focused on a sample of fourteen articles that were accessed via Academia website and application in April 2023. The subject of the reviewed literature was alike shared in one common factor. That common factor was focusing on language aspect exclusively, and culture-bound studies without any hints to the creed-bound subjects which affirms that the nature of their selected subjects was about picking some words and not full text or Quranic signs.

Among those studies was an article that made a nice gesture in relation to semantics, particularly the problems of homonyms as one of the problems encountered by translators of holy texts [1]. A corpus-based study has discussed the polysemy of holy words concentrating on one verb and how translators of holy texts dealt with that Arabic verb in rendering it from Arabic into English [2].

Scholars from Iraq, started their semantic study with an attacking abstract, led examples related to translation of general Arabic nouns and their different equivalents in English, and concluded their study with a strong recommendation to revise the Quran translation from Arabic into English [3]. Voices from King Khalid University in Abha city published an article stressing the difficulty of finding the equivalent of Arabic morphemes in their cross-phonology study [4]. The author views that they exaggerated because the absolute symmetry or similarity they sought was semi-zero between any two languages. Here, the author joins his voice to the view of the translators of the holy texts because Arabic language cannot be English language, and the vice versa while the Arabic letters also cannot be like the English letters, and the opposite is correct too**.** This is what exactly makes the current study different from the previous studies because in this study, the author does not blame the translators of holy texts for impossible linguistic aspect but blames them when they significantly deviate from the creed related meaning. When their approximation distorts the creed, changes the truth of the Islamic mission, reflects a bad image about Islam, the

translators are blamed for high-risk consequences related to intellectual problems.

Reviewing more articles even from out Academia website, the author found the correlation of many articles either crosslinguistic only or cross language and culture as mentioned above, with no cross-creed relation. Some authors have discussed the strategies followed by translators in translating of the Divine names (Names of Allah) semantically [5], and some searched the linguistic difficulties encountered by Quran translators in dealing with holy texts semantically, lexically, metaphorically, syntactically [6] where a study was about semantics and stylistics of language when translating holy texts [7]. Another scholar has linked his study about the semantic problems faced by translators of holy texts to culture [8]. Other aspects, except creed topic, were discussed by the previous studies included but not limited to: literal translation of holy texts, lexical ambiguity, mistranslation of holy texts, connotative meaning and translation loss, translation of implicit meanings of Quran, semantic issues about one Quranic verb [9-14].

The author reviewed fourteen linguistic articles that mainly criticized the Quranic translation into English, two of them linked the linguistic study with culture while none of them linked their study to creed which means that (85.71%) of the reviewed literature were pure linguistic studies, (14.28%) were cross language and culture, and (0.00%) were cross creed per the literature available on Academia website database. The zero percentage confirms that there is a missing link in translations of holy texts from Arabic into English specifically in Quranic translations. The author believes that creed related linguistic studies are so important for creed shapes the spirit and the axis of many linguistic studies about translations of religious texts.

Regarding the relations between linguistic studies and culture, it is noticeable that culture-bound articles represent the big percentage as part from the pure linguistic studies related to religious texts translation because of the prevailing understanding that believes in religion as part of culture. On the contrary, no creed-bound articles were found though the significance of creed when dealing with semantic analysis of religious texts translations as previously mentioned in the details of this study as discussed by a newly research related to such translations effect on creed explanation which proposed a strategy for translation of holy texts [15].

4. Findings of the study

According to the linguistic analysis of the corpora of Table 2 in English as a target language compared to the corpse of Table 1 in Arabic as a source language, and after reviewing many exegeses along with the author background, this study found that the first and the second hypotheses are true. That means the provided translations are not adequate to report the full image through word-by-word translation and that will lead to religious misconception and miscommunication as well. The study also found that many of the previous

studies are cross language and culture whereas they must be cross creed too as far as these studies are concerned with religious translation. In other words, considering the adequacy of the translated texts into communicating the issues related to the creed is essential too, or studying such translations will be useless since translation is about the message, and creed is one of the most important religious messages.

Also, to the best benefit for the readers, the author adds that the term 'creed' refers to the faith in heart as defined by Islam scholars. In other words, what your heart believes in is your creed.

5. Recommendations of the study

The recommendations of the present study vary per the following categories or communities. For readers, it is recommended not to depend mainly on such translations because misconception about the religion is probable. Consult a theologian instead for explaining. For linguists, or academicians interested in religious translation, it is recommended to link your linguistic articles to the religion mission. In other words, consider the question: does the translation report the religious mission and vision? Instead of mere language-based criticism. For pedagogists and curricula experts, including religious translation in the curricula of translation studies will provide many linguistic benefits to the students. Specialized institutes for religious translation are highly recommended. For publishers of such translations, a big challenge of renovation is on the horizon for the improvement of the religious discourse. For researchers specialized in languages other than English, it is recommended to investigate such issues in translating Quran from Arabic into the languages of their specialties.

6. Conclusions

Considering the above discussion with the linguistic analysis of the study example, the author found that the first hypothesis is correct where the direct strategy followed by the translations given in Table 2 never convey the comprehensive meaning of that Quranic sign, and the equivalent of the mentioned Arabic sentence has complicated the result of the translation where its meaning is not reported adequately. Also, following such a strategy means neglecting its various contexts related to creed and the organizing of relations in communities of various trends. The author could add that a sign translated word-by-word is not a Quranic sign since Quran is miraculous in its all details. For decoding these signs, the solution might be in the exegesis, and the translation must be about the guidelines or the indications of the Quranic signs, which confirms that the translation of Quran needs renovation.

Considering the linguistic analysis of the translations provided into English, this sign is not about the absolute friendship as depicted by the various translations. This confirms that the second hypothesis is proper too, and negative mental images might be created in the mind of the reader, which will probably

lead to Islamophobia as one of the expected complications and may be the calls for burning some copies of this great Book are because of the misunderstanding shaped by mistranslation of Quarn.

The general survey performed by the author about the previous studies that dealt with translation of holy texts from Arabic into English confirms they were not creed-bound, but they were linguistic viewpoints, sometimes mixed with culture-bound topics whereas the author views the significance of linking religious translation studies to the mission of the religion itself. The ideal solution is to study translation in an interdisciplinary method that gathers language and religion and discusses translation linguistic analysis against its effect on creed conception.

Finally, and since this study is related to religious translation, mainly the Quranic texts, it is better to allude to the variety of exegeses and the difference between Muslims' doctrinal schools which are not applicable for the example text of this study, and that is per reviewing the exegeses of various doctrinal schools among Muslims.

References

[1]   V. Hossein and Z. Bahareh, Journal of Language & Translation, **10(1)** (2009) 45-79.
[2]   S. Emara, Arab World English Journal, **7(1)** (2016) 229-278.
[3]   Y. Yassir and O. Ibrahim, College of Basic Education Researchers Journal, **11(3)** (2011) 816-829.
[4]   E. Tamiri and E. Eddin, Arab World English Journal, **5(2)** (2021) 2-17.
[5]   F.A. Amjad and F. Mohammed, International Journal of Linguistics, **5(1)** (2013) 128-142.
[6]   A. Abobaker, M. Alsalih, Z. Munif and S. Ismail, International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, **2(6)** (2012)588-590.
[7]   S. Sadiq, Sayyab Translation Journal, **1(1)** (2008) 37-58.
[8]   A. Alhaj, Arab World English Journal, **6(4)** (2022) 32-47.
[9]   N. Abdullah, International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, **5(9)** (2022) 143-152.
[10] A, Basmah, Journal of Arts &Humanities, **8(12)** (2020) 73-79.
[11] A. Yasir, Theory and Practice in Language Studies, **13(2)** (2023) 385-395.
[12] A. Noureldin, Arab World English Journal, **2(1)** (2018) 76-87.
[13] S. Abdunnasir, Arab World English Journal, **5(Special issue)** (2016) 77-99.
[14] J. Al-Saudi, Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, **50(2)** (2023) 265-274.
[15] M. Adiel, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **19(4)** (2023) 47-55.