A Study Of Two Major Translations Of The Holy Koran
(The Last Section) - A Linguistic Approach

A Ph.D.Thesis

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1989-1990
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION p. 1

PART ONE: Review Of The Literature

Chapter One: Approaches To Translation p.15
Chapter Two: Translations Of The Holy Koran p.41

PART TWO: A Study Of The Two Translations

Introduction p.67
Chapter One: Morphological & Syntactic Problems p.72
Chapter Two: Lexical & Semantic Problems p.179
Chapter Three: Stylistic Problems & Communicative Evaluation p.234

A SUMMING UP p.280

Conclusions & Suggestions

BIBLIOGRAPHY p.286
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude is presented to Professor Dr. Nuz Sherif who has always been understanding, encouraging, and extremely instructive in her supervision of this work. I am also indebted to Professor Dr. Abdu El Rajhy, for his technical guidance and enlightening remarks. It was with the guidance and help of the two supervisors that this thesis has come to its present shape.

I also stand in debt to Professor Dr. Saad Gamal and Professor Dr. Helmy Heliel who have always been ready with their kind help and valuable advice.

My thanks are due to all colleagues and friends who were of help to me while undertaking this research.

My profound thanks and gratitude are extended to my parents who were my first teachers of Arabic and English, and my wife, without whose cooperation and tolerance, this work would have never come into existence.
INTRODUCTION
Translation has become one of the major subjects of general interest in the second half of the twentieth century. It is now regarded not only as an art, but also as a new discipline inter-related to other more established disciplines, such as semantics, stylistics, and contrastive linguistics (Robins, 1966).

Translation is of a far greater importance to the under-developed world of which we form part, than it is to developed countries. As we strive to catch up with the rapid progress taking place in the advanced part of the world, we have to rely to a great extent upon translation.

It is equally important to present to the world some accurate and communicatively effective translations of our major works of literature, thought, and, above all, our religion as manifested in the holy Koran.

Several translations of the Koran have already appeared in many tongues, including English. But even for objective and neutral translators, the task of presenting an accurate translation of the Koran to the non-Arabic reader has remained almost impossible for two main reasons.

The first lies in the nature of the Koranic style which is renowned for its rich literary merits. With such a style, as
with poetry, there is bound to be a maximum degree of translation loss. The greater the literary value of a given work the more is apt to be lost in the translation process. In the case of the Koran, it may be quite possible to convey the content without much loss, especially in legislative parts with their stative style and clear cut instructions. But the reproduction of the literary effect of the original is by far too difficult to achieve. It is by definition impossible to imitate or reduplicate what is original and unique. So any translation of great literary works, including the Koran, is bound to be little more than an approximation of the source language text.

The second reason is that Muslim translators usually fear lest they should go astray in their translation of the Koran which they accept as the very words of God. They, therefore, tend to concentrate on lexical accuracy rather than convey the communicative value of the original work. Such translations fail to reproduce the grandeur of the Koranic style, and some translators even go so far as to refrain from calling their translations "translations" as such. Instead, they refer to them as "interpretations" or "translation of the Meaning of the Koran ", as if translation were usually concerned with anything other than meaning. Even as early as the fourth
fourth century A.D., St. Jerome the famous Biblical translator, simply stated that the essence of translation was "not word for word, but meaning for meaning." (El Shisheh, 1981p.11).

However, despite these problems, the translation of the Koran into other languages remains an issue of great importance, particularly to the Muslims themselves.

Several Muslims, including some religious scholars, have often held that the translation of the Koran is either impossible or sacrilegious, if not both. These scholars usually base their argument on the fact that the Koran consists of the very words of God which cannot and should not be substituted by any other words chosen by the finite mind of Man. The Koran, they say, was revealed in Arabic and, thus, must be available only in Arabic (سناعة 1986).

Such an objection to the translation of the Koran may be refuted if we agree upon two basic points.

The first is that translation is not basically the establishment of lexical equivalents across two different languages, but rather an attempt at the unification of two cultural contexts (Halliday et al, 1985), and the reproduction of the final effect of
the source language text, through the conveyance of the meaning and communicative value of the original. The translation of the Koran, in this case, does not aspire to provide a substitute for the divine words of God, but only endeavours to help convey the message of God through to other peoples by the transfer of meaning from one language to another.

The second point is that a translation remains, always, only a translation and nothing more. That is to say, a translation never claims to be the original. In other words, there can never be such a thing as an English or a French Koran; all such translations of the Koran are simply translations. Even if some translations are highly inaccurate, whether intentionally or unintentionally, this cannot be taken against the Koran itself. It can only discredit such translations. Moreover, it is almost common knowledge now that there is always some degree of loss in the process of translating any literary text, as such texts do not only aim at conveying a certain idea or a piece of information to a given addressee, but tend to be evocative, emotive, and/or persuasive. No one, then, should claim to be able to assess the stylistic value and literary merit of any great work of literature, let alone the Koran itself, through a translation only, without referring to the original work in its original language.
Thus, those who claim it is impossible to translate the Koran seem to overlook the above mentioned point as far as translation loss is concerned. If by 'impossible' what is meant is to have another Koran in English, French or German, then this is perfectly true. But the same applies to any translation of any great literary work. No translation of a great literary work can be taken as an exact copy of the original. Yet it would be an unforgivable mistake if for fear of losing some of the artistic effect of great works of literature in translation, we gave up translating literature altogether. We should rather admit that the very nature of literary translation allows a certain amount of loss on the stylistic level, and be content to provide the target language reader with an approximation of the source language text, as long as it is understood that such a translation is not to be taken as a criterion for judging the literary value of the original, no matter how accurate that translation may be.

It is worth mentioning in this respect that over-emphasis upon the miraculous nature of the inimitable style of the Koran might imply, though indirectly, an under-estimation of the valuable content of the book. It is true that the Koran was revealed to the prophet Mohammed in an age when composing poetry was almost an everyday activity among the Pre-Islamic Arabs who took pride in their
mastery of Arabic rhetoric and style, and thus the Koran was a literary miracle that challenged the unbelievers in their own special field. Nevertheless, the Koran was not only meant for those ancient Arabs of a bygone age; it is supposed to address humanity everywhere and at all times. So its great worth does not lie merely in the beauty of its style, but also in its content which can be preserved in translation.

However, regardless of all these theoretical considerations, as far as the importance of translation of the Koran is concerned, there remains a practical aspect which is perhaps much more vital than all the theoretical points above mentioned.

This practical aspect is that the Koran has already been, and will continue to be, translated whatever we may think of these translations. Our reservation on or even rejection of any translation of the holy Koran shall not hinder other non-Muslim translators from translating it. This is precisely the reason why we should at least try our best to ensure that the translation of the holy book of the Muslims is as accurate and effective as possible. If we cannot prevent others from presenting their own translations, we can at least study them, with the purpose of pointing out their merits, as well as their
demerits and, finally, clearing the way for a new translation that will convey as close an approximation as possible in form and content of the original.

Given the present situation, the presentation of a new good translation, in addition to the study of earlier works of translations of the Koran, becomes a duty rather than just a voluntary action (See الفرقان لابن الطفيل). It is the sacred duty of every Muslim to protect the Koran against bad translations. Hence the importance of our research. To attempt a new translation of the Koran is, however, the task of a lifetime, and cannot be achieved through individual work alone. The present research certainly does not aspire to do so, but only confines itself to the study and evaluation of two major translations of the Koran, which represent two different approaches to translation as well: the semantic versus the communicative. If this present research does not altogether succeed in performing the task as efficiently as it should, I hope it will at least help pave the way for other researchers to do so.

A final word on the legitimacy of the translation of the Koran into other languages may be illustrated through the following survey of previous discussions on the topic. Several Muslim scholars have dwelt upon the subject of the translation of the Koran. Some have opposed it, while others have approved of it, or even considered it a sacred duty. Among those who advocated the idea in modern times is
Shiekh El Marāghi, who presented a valuable research on the translation of the holy Koran and the rules governing it under the title of "بعد في ترجمة القرآن الكريم واحahrungenها".

This research appeared in two parts as appendices to the Azhar periodical in June 1936. In his research, Al Marāghi presents his argument to prove the legitimacy of producing translations of the holy Koran. He based his argument on various statements and opinions on the topic in question, given by religious scholars in earlier periods.

Quoting Al-Shatibi, in his book entitled "المواقف المتناقضة" Al-Marāghi states that as far as the linguistic nature of words in the Arabic language is concerned, they may be divided into two different categories: firstly, absolute words and phrases which indicate absolute meanings, and secondly, words and phrases confined to a particular context or set of particular contexts, thus usually indicating a particular aspect of meaning (المرازيق - 1937).

As for the first category, according to Al-Marāghi, it is common to all languages. The second category, however, is by nature particular to each given language. Thus, he argues that the translation of the Koran is quite possible, as far as the general or absolute aspect of meaning is taken into account. He quotes Sheikh El Shatibi where he states that the translation of the Koran is legitimate as far as the original