



## Translating the Untranslatable: Issues in the English Rendering of Quranic Concepts

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### ABSTRACT

The current research aims to explore the apparent challenge of translating Quranic ideas into English and the argument that some parts of the holy book are simply untranslatable. The observed issues can be attributed to linguistic, cultural, and theological factors. The discourse of the Quran linguistically encompasses such complexities, which have been misrepresented by translation, as polysemy, semantic density, and peculiarities of a rhetorical structure. The fact that single Arabic words such as, al-hamd (praise/gratitude), and qalb (heart) have a multifaceted meaning, and an implication that is more easily revealed in translation, even in relation to Culture, and theology, concepts such as, Allah, Taqwa, Jihad, Ummah, and Sharia have a deep implication, and connotation that is more easily dissipated or distorted in translation, and further exacerbated by the so-called Quranic I'jaz (inimitability). The article considers a variety of strategies of translation, such as literal vs. dynamic equivalence, and how certain exegetical insights, footnotes, and glossaries can help overcome such gaps. Finally, the research paper suggests that although translations in English are necessary to make the works accessible, they are not enough to attain one hundred percent replication of the richness, depth, and spiritual effect that the original Arabic text has. This fact serves to verify the eternal importance of reading the Quranic text as it is, and the probability of misconception of non-Arabic speaking followers, and non-Muslim foreigners.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

The Holy Quran, the holy book of the Islamic faith, holds incomparable spiritual and theological value among Muslims in the entire world. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) revealed the Arabic version. It is deemed the literal word of Allah Almighty, and it is the main source of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, as well as the teaching of morals. Its verses are a guiding force in all spheres of life of a Muslim, both in religious obligations and social conventions. Along with its religious importance, the Quran has sacred linguistic and literary features, as well. It is regarded by a number of people as the pillar of Arabic eloquence and a masterpiece of classical Arabic literature. It possesses its own stylistic features, rhetorical devices, and profound layers of meaning that have baffled scholars and linguists as well through centuries, even non-Muslims. The Quran, as an essential belief in Islam, is inimitability where the perfection of the language and literature of the Quran cannot be duplicated by human means, and further boosts the faith of the Quran as unique (IHRC, 2022).

### **The Challenge of Quranic Translation: Why is it Considered Difficult or even Untranslatable?**

Because the Holy Quran is considered holy, and its language is so complex, it is really difficult to translate into other languages. Contrary to what happens in the case of ordinary texts, Quranic translation is not only a linguistic work, but also a significant theological work. The Arabic Quran is considered the direct word of Allah, and any translation is by definition an effort to interpret the meanings, and not the Quran itself. This clear idea is paramount, and it reflects the additional challenges. The idea of translating the untranslatable is frequently referred to when it comes to discussing Quranic translation, meaning that such a project has little chance of fully and correctly presenting itself in any language, and particularly in English (IHRC, 2022). These obstacles could be explained by a number of factors. These are the polysemy of the Quran, its elaborate rhetorical techniques, and the richness of the cultural and theological undertones inherent in the words of the Quran.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Statement of Problem**

The evident linguistic, stylistic, and cultural multiplicities of the Quran pose inherent difficulties that hinder a complete translation into English, and in most cases strip it of texture, richness, and context, thus affecting the interpretation and application of its followers.

### **Scope of the Research**

The article shall investigate the phenomenon of untranslatability as applied to notions of the Quran, particularly as it applies to select linguistic, stylistic, and cultural challenges that are presented during translations into English. It entails an evaluation of these examples cut off several ayyahs in the Quran, especially those found in Surat al-Fatiha, and Surat Al-Tawbah, with a view to illustrating these hurdles, and debating their implications, to both Arabic and non-Arabic speaking Muslims. The article will explore how various

translation strategies strive to overcome such gaps and explain the constraints they have.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The article is a qualitative research study based on an extensive literature review on Quranic translation, linguistics, and Islamic studies. It entails critical linguistic research of several Quranic Arabic words and concepts, and then comparing them with their translations in major English translations. The article will summarize the results of different academic materials to develop a sound argument on the issues and implications of the Quran translation. The main materials used in this article will be the scholarly articles and books that specifically address the untranslatability of the Quran's linguistic and cultural aspects, with specific emphasis on examples and case studies. The classical and modern Islamic exegesis (Tafsir) will also be included in the analysis to see the deeper meaning of the Quranic terms.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept of Untranslatability in Translation Studies**

#### **Defining Translatability and Untranslatability: Theoretical Perspectives.**

Translatability and untranslatability are the notions that form the backbone of translation studies, as the theoretical discourse and practice are determined. In its most simple sense, the term translatability is the possibility of a text or utterance written in one language (Source Language - SL) to be transformed into a different language (Target Language - TL) without significant alteration in both significance and impact. The concept can be related to the concept of commutability, in which it is possible to depict or transfer the meaning between languages (Alhaj, 2022). Hermans (2009) says that translatability is always achievable because the human experience is similar in all parts of the world, and therefore, though languages may differ in their mode of communication, the meaning behind them may be translated. Based on this, the rendition process entails a substitution of the source surface structure of the meaning by another in the target language.

Accordingly, untranslatability is a situation when such a direct or equivalent transfer of meaning is hard or unfeasible. Untranslatability, as it is defined by Catford (1996), is the fact that there is no equivalent of a source text or utterance in the target language. This complication in the interpretation of a certain term or phenomenon affects its essence and the performance of the translator. When these kinds of problems are faced by translators, it raises some basic questions as to the general translatability of the text. Untranslatability does not exist only on a theoretical level but is also a practical challenge, which translators have to face daily, especially when it comes to working with a text being rooted in a particular cultural or religious context.

#### **Linguistic Untranslatability: Lexical and Syntactical Gaps between Arabic and English**

Linguistic untranslatability is a phenomenon that arises where a direct lexical or syntactical substitute of a source text item in the translated text is

absent (Alhaj, 2022). This is very common between languages with dissimilar linguistic structures and evolutionary courses. Such gaps are especially evident in the case of Arabic and English. Arabic is a Semitic language and has a rich morphology, with root words that form the foundation upon which many derivatives are created, and each has a subtle meaning. On the contrary, English has various rules of functioning as a Germanic language. It frequently makes use of prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and word order to provide the meaning that can be expressed in Arabic through the use of inflection or derivation.

The polysemous expression of most Arabic words, such as a single word having multiple meanings depending on context, is a major challenge. Translators have the right to select the best meaning, and the result is likely to be the absence of ambiguity or richness of the original. On the same note, direct translation can be cumbersome or misleading because of the syntactical difference between the SL and the TL. Arabic prose, particularly in the Quran, is frequently associated with the flow and rhythm of this language, which is complicated to reproduce in the English language without losing its naturalness or accuracy. The absence of direct translations of some of the grammatical particles or idiomatic expressions only adds to the issue of linguistic untranslatability.

### **Cultural Untranslatability: The Absence of Equivalent Concepts or Cultural Contexts**

Besides the pure language differences, there is the untranslatability, which is further complicated by the cultural untranslatability. This kind of untranslatability is most evident when a positive factor or concept is unavailable in the TL but is a part of the core of the source culture (Alhaj, 2022). Holy Quran is not a simple linguistic product; it is a vital document of a civilization, extremely rooted and bound up in culture, history, and the view of the world of the Arabs and Muslims. It is full of concepts that are culturally particular, and which represent a collection of beliefs, practices, and social norms that may not have direct counterparts in English-speaking cultures.

Therefore, the translators may find words that describe specific Islamic jurisprudence, social concepts, or theological assumptions that, to a large extent, bear a burden of culture and history, and the entire range of nuances cannot be fully represented with the help of a single term or expression in English. Translators, in turn, may be tempted to resort to certain tricks, such as transliteration, calque, or protracted commentary, but they may lead to the loss of the text flow and, at the same time, cannot produce the same cultural resonance and impact as the original text did. Here, the issue becomes not necessarily to identify a linguistic equivalent of the concept at hand but to replicate the whole conceptual scheme in which the word or phrase is embedded. With this kind of cultural gap, there would be a lot of misinterpretations or shallow knowledge of the Quranic message by the readers whose information comes only through translations.

### **The Quran as a Unique Case: Why General Translation Theories are Particularly Challenged by the Quran**

The Quran is a special case of translation research, since it is likely to push the theory of general translation to the limit. Since the text is defined by

the element of sacredness, not to mention the linguistic and rhetorical sophistication, it is raised above a normal literary or informational text. The Muslims insist that the Quran is the direct word of Allah and thus the meaning of the Quran is unchangeable and can only be preserved by Allah in the original Arabic language. Such a theological limitation means that any interpretation of it is not the Quran but only an effort by humans to render its meanings. This is the major difference and the difference between the Quranic translation and the rest of the translations.

Also, the inimitability (featured with Ijaz) means that it possesses a literary and linguistic perfection that is uncopyable. This fact is one of the essential dilemmas for translators, since they have a right to present a text, the very nature of which can be considered inimitable. Since the general translation theories usually revolve around reaching the similarity of meaning, style, and effect between any two languages, the occurrence of this distinctive quality further restricts their work. It has multi-layered meanings and hidden allusions with an immense effect on the Arabic listener/ reader that can hardly be adequately translated into another language. This has turned the translator of the Quran into not only a linguistic carrier, but also a theological decoder and translator of culture. Translation process in this case, may therefore, sometimes involve a lot of exegetical knowledge beyond mere understanding of the language.

The Arabic language version, and especially the classical Quranic Arabic, is a colossal burden to the overall achievement of the completeness of the equivalence in English translation. The difficulties go beyond the ability to find parallel words but include the ability to capture the complex layers of meaning, the rhetorical power, and the beauty of the text in its original form. Such challenges may be caused by inherent variations in morphological, semantic, and syntactic texture in Arabic and English.

### **Polysemy and Homonymy: Words with Multiple Meanings and Their Context-Dependent Interpretations**

One of the most evident linguistic issues in the translation of the Quranic text is the existence of homonyms and polysemic words in it. Polysemy denotes the word having several related meanings, whereas homony denotes those words that have the same spelling or pronunciation and have different and unrelated meanings. The Holy Quran is full of deeply polysemous words whose exact meaning is dictated by the immediate context of the words, the thematic context of the surah (chapter), and even the entire story of the Quran. This dependence on context implies that a rigid English counterpart in most of the cases is inadequate; the resultant effect is that the richness and ambiguity of the original Arabic is lost.

#### **Examples from Surah al-Fatiḥa (e.g., al-ḥamd)**

A good example of a polysemic word and how it poses a challenge in translation is the opening word of Surat al-Fatiḥa. While commonly translated as 'Praise' or 'All praise' in English, this rendering is unable to convey the complete meaning of the Arabic word. As Nazmina Dhanji (IHRC, 2022) highlights, al-ḥamd suggests both praise and gratitude. When recited by a

Muslim, this phrase is not only meant to praise Allah but also to express profound gratitude for all blessings and approval of Allah's plans, even if they conflict with personal desires. The dual nature of praise and gratitude is deeply embedded in this Arabic term, a nuance that is difficult to capture as it does not exist a single English word. According to some linguists and exegetists, such as al-Tabari, praise and thanks are two sides of the same coin, while according to others, they can be differentiated on the basis of the types of favors or the way of expression (verbal/heartfelt). Yet, the element of gratitude has always been an inseparable part of the primary definition of al-ḥamd by scholars over the ages (IHRC, 2022). The English word 'praise' lacks the same nuances of appreciation and gratitude that the original word 'al- ḥamd' encompasses.

**Examples from Surat Al-Tawbah (e.g., qalb)**

In a similar vein, another example is the Arabic word 'qalb'. While the word 'heart' in English mainly refers to the body organ responsible for pumping blood or, in a metaphorical sense, the seat of emotions, the Quranic concept of qalb is of far broader coverage and multifaceted. The word 'qalb' is mentioned 132 times in the Holy Quran, and its origin signifies rapid and frequent change (Alhaj, 2022, p. 102). In Islamic faith, qalb is not only related to feelings, passion, or affection; it is also associated with intellect, cognitive capabilities, choice, knowledge, aspiration, and faith (īmān) (Alhaj, 2022, p. 102). The Quran highlights its position as an undeniable fact, pointing out that a healthy qalb leads to a healthy human body, while a sick qalb leads to a weak body and evil conduct. According to the Quran. Three types of hearts exist: healthy, dead, and sick, with further subdivisions for each one of them. (Alhaj, 2022, p. 103).

When the word qalb is simply translated into 'heart' in English, it loses some of these profound intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions. For instance, in Surat Al-Tawbah, ayah 8, the phrase (wa ta'baa quloobuhum), meaning 'their hearts refuse', lends itself to analysis. While Pickthall's translation, "while their hearts refuse," is assessed as adequate because it captures the intended connotative meaning of the original, other translations like Abdelhaleem's "but still their hearts are against you" or Khan and Al-Hilali's "their hearts are averse to you" are considered less in terms of effectiveness. On the one hand, Abdelhaleem's translation is viewed as confusing and lacking the specified cultural connotations, while the rendering of Khan and Al-Hilali is described as awkward and lacking cultural equivalence (Alhaj, 2022, p. 105). This explains how a seemingly simple word like 'heart' carries multiple layers of meaning in the Quran, rendering the accurate conveyance of its meaning a challenging task.

Similarly, in Surat Al-Tawbah, ayah 15, wa yadh-hab al-ghaytha min qulūbihim, meaning 'and remove the rage from their hearts', can be examined. Here, the rendering by Khan and Al-Hilali into: "And remove the anger of their (believers') hearts" and by Pickthall into: "And He will remove the anger of their hearts", appear to have strong connotations and ensure an acceptable sense of the intended meaning.

Abdelhaleem's translation into "and remove the rage, from their hearts" is short of creating the same effect due to its weak connotation, as the cultural context of 'rage' and the embedded meaning of "ghaytha qulūbihim" are not fully captured (Alhaj, 2022, p. 106).

In Surat Al-Tawbah, ayyah 45, the ayyah, *wartaabat quloobuhum fahum fee raybihim yataraddadoon*, is translated into: (and whose hearts feel doubt, so, in their doubt, they waver). This ayah also illustrates the challenge. Abdelhaleem, Khan, Al-Hilali, and Pickthall opt to produce literal and word-for-word translations, such as (doubt in their hearts) or (hearts are in doubt). While endeavoring to reproduce the original sense, they often end up with the problem of untranslatability. This is attributable to the fact that adopting literal translation, the intended sense of the Holy Quran can be corrupted, and grammatical ambiguity can arise. This would result in loss of connotations due to cultural gaps and issues related to lexical equivalence (Alhaj, 2022, p. 107). Obviously, in spite of the clear endeavor by translators to adhere to faithfulness and providing literal meaning, the profound impact of the original can be lost due to the fact that such concepts are inherently untranslatable.

### **Semantic Density and Nuance: The Richness of Arabic Root Words and Their Derivatives**

As is the case with buildings, Arabic words are normally derived from just three basic letters. This is a "root" carrying the core meaning. Through the application of different patterns to the afore-mentioned roots, such a great number of words can be produced that each new word generated stands as a new further variation on the essential main idea. This creative system of generation adds exceptional semantic value to Arabic rarely achievable in English. Through this system, dozens of words can be derived from a single Arabic root, which, while each is inherently connected to the basic concept of the root, carries its own specific nuance(s) or shade(s) of meaning. This contributes to the production of remarkably concise and deep meanings within the Quran.

This density in meaning is a major challenge for translators, as they would fail to convey the full range of meanings found in a single root. They, therefore, often tend to utilize multiple English words or lengthy sentences to bridge this gap, disrupting the conciseness and rhythmic language of the Holy Quran. Although it is obvious to the native speaker of the Arab language who is well familiar with the root system of the Arabic language, the minor differences between the Arabic words that are closely related to each other may be either lost altogether or obscured during translation. This loss of nuance can significantly impact the reader's understanding of the Quran's theological and ethical injunctions, as precise distinctions in terminology often carry profound implications.

### **Stylistic and Rhetorical Features: Metaphor, Simile, Assonance, Epithet, Irony, Repetition, Metonymy**

Holly Quran is greatly renowned as a book that has its exclusive features both rhetorically and stylistically. This aspect adds to great inimitability (iijaz) and the impressive effect it has on viewers. It entails a sophisticated approach

to such tools as metaphor, simile, irony, assonance, epithet, repetition, polysemy, and metonymy (IHRC, 2022). These literary devices are not designed to accomplish a formal purpose; instead, they are supposed to increase the persuasion, emotional appeal, and multiple senses of the Holy Quran. Arab native speakers are deeply moved by the rhythmic and phonetic qualities of the language of the Quranic text, including devices of assonance and alliteration, as these can create a powerful auditory experience.

### **Impact on Meaning and Emotional Resonance**

It is very difficult to translate these rhetorical features into English. When a translator opts for employing literal translation, the text is often stripped of its rhetorical force and emotional effect. For instance, while vivid and evocative in Arabic, metaphors and similes can become lifeless or even absurd when literal translation is used to render them into a language lacking the same cultural or linguistic conventions. The dual collaboration of sounds and meanings, which grants the Quran its unique rhythmic qualities and memorability, is hard to reproduce in English. In other words, unlike the propositional content which can be conveyed, the crucial aesthetic and emotional effects on Quran's audience, are greatly weakened or totally lost. Conveying how the message is said and the style chosen, and its profound effect on the message are as challenging as conveying what is said,

### **Grammatical and Syntactical Differences: Arabic Sentence Structure vs. English**

Arabic and English are distinctively different in terms of grammar and syntax, posing additional hurdles for translators. In Arabic, a verb-subject-object (VSO) word order is often employed, while in English, the word order of subject-verb-object (SVO) is followed. Translators would rearrange the sentences to conform to English frame is not to mention that when there is a reorganization the focus or the rhythm of the original process can be distorted at times. Similarly, Arabic is a very inflexible system that involves the use of prefixes and suffixes and vowel variations in words and may tell a lot about something. English, however is less inflexible language since it makes use of prepositions and auxiliary verbs more than the conveying of similar information.

In addition, In Arabic, more advanced system of particles and conjunctions is present where complex correlations exist between clauses and sentences. In Arabic, as well as, the more complicated system of particles and conjunctions, based on which, there are complex relations between clauses and sentences. These can contribute to the shaping of more cohesive and coherent texts. Consequently, it becomes difficult to find one or the other English counterparts to these particles, or how to render the optimum manner of transferring their semantic impact. Such brevity toward the Arabic by its morphology and syntax, tends to translate to more diffuse expressions in English, giving rise to the fact that the translations are in less direct or more strongly felt than the original. All these grammar and syntax variations makes the work of translators who not only need to have a sense of what the single words mean but also needs to apply it and have the same been translated to sound natural in English to be a complicated work.

### **Cultural and Theological Challenges in Rendering Quranic Concepts**

To deal with the translation of the Quran, there are cultural and theological issues to which the linguistic barriers are added to make the work extremely complex. The Quran is not just any secular product, and it is a world religion that is a holy text, very much rooted in a particular cultural unit and theological environment. Any effort to dissociate its message with these components to be translated into a radically different cultural and theological context, as in that of English, is unique and usually overwhelming.

#### **Islamic Terminology and Concepts: Terms Deeply Embedded in Islamic Theology and Practice**

The Islamic terminology abounds in ideas that are entrenched in the theology, jurisprudence and the historical evolution of the religion. These words usually have layers of meanings, history and jurisprudential implications that cannot easily be translated into one English word or phrase. Trying to do so is a danger of oversimplification, misrepresentation, or even loss of the original theological substance. Taqwa (God-consciousness, piety, fear of God) is a concept, Jihad (struggle, striving, holy war) is a concept, Ummah (global Muslim community), and Sharia (Islamic law) are the prime examples. All these terms represent a compound of beliefs, practices, and ethical issues that are developed during centuries of the Islamic scholarship and experience.

#### **The Challenge of Conveying the Full Theological Weight**

The issue is to express the theological volume and subtle meaning of these words. As an example, Taqwa can also translate as piety or fear of God, but has a wider meaning of mindfulness, awareness of the presence of God and the conscious choice to live according to the will of God. Jihad, often and provocatively translated as holy war in Western culture, literally means struggle or trying in the way of God, including internal spiritual struggle, intellectual struggle and defensive warfare, among others. The bare, unitary English translation does not reflect this complexity, and creates a possibility of misunderstanding and mischaracterization of the Islam values. In a similar way, Ummah is not merely a community but rather a transnational, spiritual brotherhood/sisterhood sharing a faith, having shared duties and goals. To unpack these concepts, translators frequently have to use long footnotes, glossaries or parenthetical explanations, which, although useful, do not flow with the text and do not provide a full replication of the immediate insight that an Arabic-speaking Muslim would have.

#### **Cultural Context and Historical Background: The Importance of Understanding the Socio-Historical Context of Revelation**

The Quran was revealed in a specific socio-historical context in 7th-century Arabia. Its verses frequently deal with modern day problems, rejoin certain happenings and with the local customs, culture, and literary precedents of that period. This historical and cultural background is very important in order to have a proper interpretation of the Quranic text. Allusions to pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, tribal traditions or historical events many of these verses are not described in the book itself, but in some way were familiar to the original audience of the book. As a translator, it is a big challenge to

communicate these implicit cultural references to non-Arabic speaking population of the contemporary world.

In the absence of this understanding, the translation may be decontextualized resulting in a misunderstanding. As an example, some of the legal injunctions or social laws in Quran can be interpreted in the context of the social conditions that dominated during the time the revelation occurred. Translators are forced to choose the extent of contextual information to incorporate into the translation or to exclude it to the footnote or to make assumptions about what the reader already knows. This ruling has a direct effect on the availability of the translated meaning as well as the accuracy because the cultural context in most cases determines the specific use and interpretation of the Quranic principles.

### **The Inimitability (I'jaz) of the Quran: The Belief that the Quran's Linguistic and Literary Perfection Cannot Be Replicated**

The key doctrine of Islamic faith is Ijazi al-Quran/inimitability of Quran. According to this doctrine, the Quran, its linguistic expression, the rhetorical manner and the rich and deep content is miraculous and it cannot be reproduced by human beings, no matter their linguistic skills. This is not just a theological statement but it closely goes hand in hand with the claim of Quran to be the work of God. The Quran itself dares its audience to create a surah just like it, the challenge that Muslims suppose has never been fulfilled. This unimitable quality does not end with the eloquence of it, but with its internal consistency, with its scientific allusions (which are conceived by some), with its deep impression upon human hearts and minds.

In the case of translators, the doctrine of I'jaz poses the most common psychological and practical obstacle. Assuming the impossibility of imitating the original, then necessarily no translation can be that which is equal to it. It implies that the goal of translators would not be to produce a text as miraculous or as perfect in terms of rhetoric as the original one, but the reflection of its meanings as accurately as it could be with the awareness of the limitations. The knowledge of this influences the way the translator works, which tends to be more wary and exegetically accurate than a literary one. The aesthetic and spiritual aspects of the I'jaz that the Arabic speakers experience are nearly untranslatable and the reader is left with only the propositional text of the original text, without the miraculous form that it had.

### **Impact on Worship and Practice: How Translation Choices Affect the Spiritual Experience and Understanding of Religious Duties**

Decision-making in Quran translation is of significant consequences to the interpretation and practice of Islam, especially to the largest majority of Muslims in the world who do not understand Arabic as their mother tongue. In the case of these people, translations would represent their main gate to the message of divinity. As a result, any flattening, misunderstanding, or simplification of translation may have a direct effect on their spiritual experience, their understanding of religious obligations, and their theology, as a whole.

As an example, the specific definition of words surrounding the prayer (salat), fasting (sawm), charity (zakat), or pilgrimage (hajj) can impact the way

these worship practices are carried out and interpreted. When a translation does not render the entire meaning of a concept such as Taqwa, a Muslim who depends on such a translation may end up with a narrow or partial interpretation of what it means to be God-conscious. Moreover, the emotional and spiritual attachment that Arabic-speaking Muslims experience when reading the Quran in its original language, because of the beauty of the rhythm and great linguistic structure, is greatly lost with translation. This may cause disconnection among non-Arabic speakers who might find it difficult to have the same level of spiritual experience. Hence, translation is not only an academic practice, but it is a decisive factor of religious action and spiritual growth of millions of people, and the problems of untranslatability are of great religious importance.

### **Case Studies: Analysis of Specific Quranic Concepts and Their English Renderings**

To further demonstrate the difficulties that the translation of the Quran has been hit by, the following section is to be able to address certain case studies of some of the Quranic concepts by analyzing how this meaning is translated or even lost when translated to the English language. In these illustrations, the natural challenges based on linguistic, cultural, and theological differences between the two languages will be emphasized.

#### **The Concept of *Allah*:**

In English translations of the Quran, the Arabic word, الله (Allah), is almost universally rendered as 'God'. While this translation opts to provide a functional equivalent for the monotheistic deity, it is short of capturing the unique theological and linguistic qualities and nature of the concept of 'Allah' within the Islamic context. The word 'Allah', as it represents a unique, singular name encompassing all the divine attributes and implying absolute oneness and uniqueness, is not a generic term for a deity. From a linguistic point of view, it is largely seen as derived by means of contraction from (al-ilāh), meaning (The God), and it is also related to the Aramaic words (Elah) and ('Alāhâ) as well as the Hebrew word El (Elohim) for God. (IHRC, 2022).

Yet, translating 'Allah' as 'God' could potentially lead to conceptual dilution as the English word 'God' can be pluralized (gods) and feminized (goddess), and can be used in a variety of theological contexts (e.g., God the Father, God of Abraham, Hindu gods) that do not comply with the monotheistic concept (Tawhid) in Islam. In the same vein, the term 'Allah' is grammatically singular, having no forms for plural or feminine, and is exclusively used to denote the one, unique God of Islamic faith. The language specific nature of the word highlights the Islamic concept of Tawhid and emphasizes absolute singularity and incomparability of the God of Muslims. This transfer of (Allah) into (God) would involve the loss of some of these inner theological subtleties and incidental blurring of the focus on His oneness as God to the English reader, in which case Islamic monotheism would be confused.

### **The Concept of *al-hamd* (Praise/Gratitude):**

A further examination of its over allistic meaning, the word, *al-hamd*, in Surat *al-Fatiha*, does not translate well since it is polysemous in nature. It is normally translated to English as (Praise) or (All praise). However, it is not a perfect translation since it is not complete, where the Arabic word (*al-Hamd*) consists of praise and gratitude (IHRC, 2022). To say (*al-hamd*), a person recognizes the perfection and infallibility (praise) of Allah but at the same time, he gives thanks to His gifts and accepts His will (gratitude). This is a duality which is necessary to have a complete grasp of this notion.

The absence of one English term that can express this complex meaning may cause the English reader to fail to grasp the entire meaning of this significant worship act. The subtlety of gratitude, which is irremovable element of the Arabic word would largely be lost and the emotional involvement with the text is less intense. Although the method of inserting footnotes or explanations to explain the same, can be followed in the spirit of compensation, the acuity of immediate and instinctive comprehension that is accessible to an Arabic speaker appears to be hard to duplicate (*al-Hamd*). This example proves that even simple words that have layers of meaning that are hard to capture across linguistic and cultural borders are not that easy to express.

### **The Concept of *Qalb* (Heart): Its Multifaceted Meanings (Intellect, Faith, Emotion) in the Quran**

The Arabic word *قلب* (*qalb*) translated as (heart), is one of the most outstanding examples of linguistic and conceptual untranslatability in the Quran. In English, the common connotations of emotion or the physical organ associated with the word (heart) fails to convey the Quranic meaning of (*qalb*) which extends far beyond the English equivalent word. In Arabic, it is a multinuanced concept carrying several layers of meaning including, intellect, knowledge, cognitive capabilities, aspiration, choice, and belief (*īmān*) (Alhaj, 2022, p. 102). The (*qalb*) is frequently referred to in the Quran as the center of understanding, meditation, and spiritual perception, hence essential to man's accountability, spiritual tranquility and inner peace.

### **Analysis of Translations of 'qalb' in Surat Al-Tawbah**

An analysis of various translations of *qalb* in Surat *Al-Tawbah* (Chapter 9 of the Quran): Further highlights the difficulties: The ayya number 8 of Surat *Al-Tawbah* { *وايت قلوبهم* } "*wa ta'baa quloobuhum*", is rendered by Abdelhaleem into: "but still their hearts are against you" (Haleem, 2005, p. 189). This rendering is criticized for being confusing and lacking the specific cultural connotations of the Arabic phrase (Alhaj, 2022, p. 105). The nuance of refusal, which implies a conscious rejection, is somewhat diluted.

While Khan and Al-Hilali translate the ayya into: "their hearts are averse to you" (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1996, p. 244). This translation is also deemed to lack cultural equivalence and appears awkward, failing to capture the full intent of the original (Alhaj, .2022, p. 105). As for Pickthall, he renders it as follows: "while their hearts refuse" (Pickthall, 2001, p. 146). This translation is considered adequate as it successfully conveys the intended connotative meaning of the Arabic term, implying a strong sense of rejection (Alhaj, .2022, p. 105)

This example demonstrates how different choices in translating qalb and its associated verb can significantly alter the reader's perception of the spiritual state being described. The act of the heart refusing' is not just an emotional response but a conscious, intellectual, and spiritual act of rejection, a nuance that is not always clear in the English renderings. The other occurrence of the word qalb in Surat Al-Tawba is in ayya number 15: {ويذهب غيظ قلوبهم} - wa yudhhib ghaiza quloobihim (and remove the rage from their hearts). Abdelhaleem renders it into: "and remove the rage, from their hearts" (Haleem, 2005, p. 190). This translation is noted for its weak connotation, as (rage) may not fully capture the embedded meaning of ghaiza quloobihim (Alhaj, 2022, p. 106). Khan and Al-Hilali: "And remove the anger of their (believers') hearts" (Al Hilali & Khan, 1996, p. 45). This rendering, along with Pickthall's, is considered to have a strong connotation and to be more suitable in the cultural and situational context. (Alhaj, 2022, p. 106). Pickthall's translation of the ayya into, "And He will remove the anger of their hearts" (Pickthall, 2001, p. 146) is also seen as providing a proper sense of the intended meaning (Alhaj, 2022, p. 106). Here, the choice between 'rage' and 'anger' can subtly alter the reader's understanding of the emotional and spiritual state being addressed. While both words denote strong negative emotions, 'anger' might be perceived as a more general and less intense emotion than 'rage', and the translators' choices reflect their interpretation of the specific Quranic context.

(وَإِن تَابَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ فَهُمْ فِي رَيْبِهِمْ يَتَرَدَّدُونَ) Wartaabat' quloobuhum fahum fee raybihim yataraddadoon (Surat Al-Tawbah, Verse 45) and whose hearts feel doubt, so, in their doubt, they waver

Abdelhaleem, Khan and Al-Hilali, and Pickthall: All three translators use similar word-for-word renderings like "doubt in their hearts" or "hearts are in doubt" (Alhaj, 2022, p. 107). The article argues that this literal approach, while seemingly faithful, can "ruin the real sense of the Holy Quran" and lead to grammatical ambiguity and a lack of connotation due to the cultural and lexical gaps between Arabic and English (Alhaj, 2022, p. 107). This poses a very important dilemma to those who translate: literal translation might not necessarily be the best when it comes to delivering the intended meaning and influence of the original. These Surat Al-Tawbah case studies of qalb show that it is a multi-faceted idea that needs to be understood well to translate it and it only manifests itself in a particular context. How the English words are used may either bring out the intended meaning or hide it and this has far reaching consequences to the interpretation of the psychological and spiritual insights of the Quran by the reader.

### **Other Key Concepts**

Although it is in the scope of the article to examine each untranslatable concept in the Quran, it is useful to briefly note other prominent terms with similar issues to gain context.

The term, تقوى - Taqwa, is usually translated as (piety), (fear of Allah), or (Allah-consciousness). Taqwa is a higher form of mindfulness, a conscious effort to be aware of the presence of Allah, and consciously to ensure one lives according to the law of Allah. But even this broad meaning cannot be displayed

by the equivalent using one word in English. Jihad, similarly, is frequently and controversially translated as (holy war). It primarily means (struggle) or (striving) in the path of Allah. This can include a range of meanings such as internal spiritual struggle, social reform, intellectual endeavor, and defensive fight. The reduction of this multifaceted concept to a single militaristic term would lead to significant misinterpretations of Islamic teachings.

In the same vein, Ummah is translated as (community) or (nation). It signifies the global Muslim community in which a transnational spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood is united by faith, with common duties and aspirations. The English words for equivalents are void of the sense of a providentially established, united body of believers inherent in the Arabic word. Likewise, *شريعة* - Sharia is often translated as (Islamic law). Its literal meaning is (the path to water) and signifies the heavenly guidance and moral system governing all aspects of the life of Muslims. As a concept, it covers a broad range of meanings including moral conduct, ethics, and religious teachings, gleaned from the Quran and the prophetic tradition "Sunnah" (the teachings and practices taught by the prophet). Using (Islamic law) as equivalent can be vague and misleading, as it may create a reductive, legalistic understanding that does not fully cover the all-encompassing scope of Sharia as a way of life. The above-mentioned examples, in addition to the case studies of (Allah), (al-ḥamd), and (qalb), show the significant challenges faced in the rendition of such and other Quranic concepts into English. Drawbacks including the loss of nuance(s), the watering down of Legislative significance, and probable misinterpretation are constant risks, underscoring that certain aspects of the Quranic text are inherently untranslatable.

### **Approaches and Strategies by Translators**

Due to the numerous challenges in translating the Quran, various approaches and strategies are employed by translators to grasp the linguistic, cultural, and theological gaps between English and Arabic. These strategies follow distinct philosophies of translation and give priority to different dimensions of the original text, ranging from literalness for accuracy to dynamic equivalence and exegetical vividness. Each approach is with its own areas of strength and weakness, and the type of strategy adopted would significantly impact the English translation of the Quran.

### **Literal vs. Dynamic Equivalence: Strengths and Weaknesses in Quranic Translation**

The problem of literal translation (or formal equivalence) versus dynamic equivalence is one of the controversial problems of translation theory, which is, certainly, applicable to the Quran translation. Although in the literal translation the goal is to stick as much as is possible to the original ST structure and form, even to word-for-word strategy wherever it is possible. Unlike the other style, the style in question is characterized by its unwavering adherence to the original since it claims to maintain the wording and syntax of the original. Nonetheless, similar to the situation with the translation of (qalb) in Surat Al-Tawbah, literal translation might in most instances create awkward, unnatural, or even incorrect translations in English. The original intended meaning,

rhetorical effect, and cultural subtleties might not be reflected upon and a text that can barely be interpreted and be enjoyed by the English reader is created.

However, in dynamic equivalence the emphasis lies on the transfer of meaning and effectiveness of the source text to the target reader in a natural and understandable form. This approach is concerned with getting a similar effect on the receiver, even to the point of abandoning the literal interpretation of the source. The dynamic equivalence is more suitable because it satisfies the readability and the accessibility. It is, however, weak in being too interpretative where subjective choices of the best way of communicating the original meaning have to be taken. In the translation of the Quran, this can be most problematic, because the interpretation and attitudes of the translator himself may be imposed into the holy book. The choice in favor of the use of either of the two strategies is one of the main decisions Quranic translators should make sense they should find a compromise between the urge to remain faithful to the original form and the urge to create a clear and understandable text in the target language.

### **Exegetical Translations: Incorporating Tafsir (Exegesis) to Convey Deeper Meanings**

Under the constraints of both literalness and dynamic equivalence, translators would resort to exegetical translations wherein a certain degree of understanding would be borrowed of the Tafsir (Islamic exegesis) in order to bring out the implicit meanings that the Quranic text entails. Tafsir refers to the science of the interpretation of the Quran, in which the linguistic materials, historical background and Islamic tradition are applied in order to derive the meaning of the ayyas of the Quran. The purpose of using exegetical translations is to transcend the superficial message of the text and make sure the reader gets a wider context of the theological, legal and ethical messages at hand.

The benefits of this methodology are the explanation of unclear texts, elaboration of cultural and historical allusions and the descriptions of the complexities of certain concepts in the Quran. An exegetical translation, as an example, can offer a more subtle translation of such terms as, (Taqwa) or (Jihad), by referring to the rich tradition of Islamic learning in order to describe the various aspects of them. However, this method also has certain disadvantages since it is possible to create wordier and less direct translations than the initial one, and one can easily lose distinction between the text of the Quran and the interpretation of it. Also, one may bring in sectarian or theological prejudices, particularly in making the decision as regards the exegetical sources to be used in the translation. Regardless of these disadvantages, the type of translation is usually appreciated due to its thoroughness and the capacity of delivering a better and more contextual interpretation to the English audience of the Quran.

### **Footnotes and Glossaries: The Role of Supplementary Information**

To overcome the inevitable constraints of translation, the translators of the Quran can use the opportunity to use the footnotes and glossaries, as well as other auxiliary materials. Their benefit is that they allow a translator some room of freedom to add more information, demystify unclearness, and explain

linguistic and cultural peculiarities that are difficult to render to the target text. Footnotes, e.g., might be exploited as a provider of alternative translations in which the historical context of an ayya is explicated, or advice of Tafsir could be gained. Similarly, the glossaries may also be used to define some of the main terms and concepts in the Quran whereby the reader is given a wider context of what he/she is intended to come up with. Although the tactics of the use of footnotes and glossaries are the necessary tools of the English audience, they are not devoid of restrictions. First, they disrupt the continuity of the narrative, which makes the process of reading disjointed. Second, these additional sources give extra information depending on the selectiveness of the translator and represent their personal knowledge and interests. Despite the said restrictions, both the footnotes and glossaries still continue to play an indispensable role in the work of the Quranic translators in their quest to fill in the linguistic or cultural gaps that are bound to emerge during the translation process. They admit that there are some features of the Quran, which could not be translated and which are the instruments thanks to which readers could approach the text with a more informed and critical approach.

### **Challenges of Standardization: The Diversity of English Translations and Their Impact**

The fact that there are multiple and diverse versions of the English translations of the Quran, each with its own approach and methodology, has its merits and demerits. Although such plurality of translations allows English readers to contrast their various translations and develop a more multi-layered interpretation of the Quran, it may become confusing and may cause the issue of standardization. This variety of translations is achieved by the application of various terms, the provision of opposing interpretations, and the inclusion of various views regarding theology or sectarian translations.

This non-standardization in vocabulary may at times be very confusing to new Muslims or non-Muslims looking to analyze the Quran. They are not aware of which translation is credible and how to understand the differences between them. The selection of a particular translation over another can significantly affect how a reader understands Islam, as their understanding of the major Islamic beliefs and practices can be inevitably influenced by the translation they choose. Although only one, universal English version of the Quran is neither possible nor appropriate, there is a great variety of existing versions of the translation of the religious text into other languages, which reminds us of the never-ending struggles and complications of the Quran translation. It underscores the importance of a cautious approach to the different translations and their inescapable shortcomings.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The current study has examined the various difficulties encountered in the translation of various ideas in the Quran to the English language, and this has revealed why some parts of the holy book are usually perceived as not translatable. It goes without saying that the challenges are caused by a complex combination of linguistic, cultural, and theological factors. Linguistically, the

Quranic language is characterized by massive polysemy and semantic density because of how its morphological system is structured and an array of stylistic and rhetorical devices that, when translated into English, a lot is lost. The examples of (al-hmad) and (qalb) evidently show that words in Arabic language have a multidimensional meaning that, to fully express it in English, additional interpretation would be needed, and thus a loss of the meaning and its peculiarity would follow. Considering Culture and theology, the Quran is closely associated with certain historical conditions and a certain vision of the world. When these words are used with such advanced theological meaning and cultural overtones as (Allah), (Taqwa), (Jihad), (Ummah), and Sharia, they become watered down or misunderstood as translated into English concepts that have less conceptual depth or historical meaning. The idea of Ijaz al-Quran (inimitability of the Quran), in its turn, increases the theological problem of the impossibility of the complete reproduction of the miraculous form and effect of the original text in another language. The challenges that are more inter-woven further widen the gap that already existed between the original Quranic text and the English translations.

#### **Future Directions in Quranic Translation**

Despite the inherent challenge of translating some of the ideas presented in the Quran, the ongoing struggle of enhancing the translation of the Quran is critical not only to the Muslim communities across the globe but also to the development of interfaith dialogue. Future efforts in Quranic translation must centre on how these limitations may be addressed as an effort to attain more accuracy and subtlety. This incorporates:

1. **A Wider Exegetical Incorporation:** Translators need to utilize Tafsir-classical and modern in its whole breadth to contextualize their work and to be theologically wise. This can include the incorporation of additional footnotes and endnotes, and other such commentaries explaining the various levels of meanings that Quranic words and verses have.
2. **Collaborative Team Work:** this involves promoting forming teams of linguists, Islamic scholars, and native speakers of both Arabic and English. This may help in closing linguistic and cultural gaps in a more effective manner. With the help of such interdisciplinary work, it is possible to create linguistically proper and, at the same time, theologically correct translations.
3. **Technological Assets and Aids:** applying the technologies of the virtual world to produce interactive translations when TL readers can view the original Arabic text, etymological roots, different exegetical interpretations, and cross-references that can enrich their knowledge significantly. Likewise, one can also use such aids as hyperlinked glossaries, audio pronunciation, and contextual explanations.
4. **Audience-Specific Translations:** they are translations addressed to particular audiences, and/or purposes (e.g. academicians, youth, and interreligious dialogue). They would help to include various levels of detail and description and meet the varied needs of the receivers.

5. Prioritizing Conceptual Equivalence over Lexical Equivalence: Searching for one-to-one lexical equivalents is out of fashion, and translators must strive to express the underlying ideas and their implications despite the need of using more descriptive language or paraphrasing.

In conclusion, English translations are the bridges that are necessary, through which the Quranic message is reached, however it is at most just translations and guesses at the original. The original Arabic version of the Quran is the actual message, the aesthetic worth, and the spiritual life of the Quran. The fact that some of the conceived concepts cannot be translated is not a flaw but testifies to the fact that the Quran is special in its language and divinity. It points to the unbelievable genius of its revelation in the specific language, viz. Arabic, which initiates incomparable strata of meaning and rhetorical power.

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