Marked Word Order in the Qurān and its English Translations

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To all lovers of the Qurān around the world

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"One who does not thank people will not thank God."

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

The following system of transliteration is used in this book:

The Alphabet:

ء	’	ض	ḍ
ب	B	ط	ṭ
ت	T	ظ	ẓ
ث	Th	ع	‘
ج	J	غ	Gh
ح	ḥ	ف	F
خ	Kh	ق	Q
د	D	ك	K
ذ	Dh	ل	L
ر	R	م	M
ز	Z	ن	N
س	S	ه	H
ش	Sh	و	W
ص	ṣ	ي	Y

Vowels:

Short	Fatḥah	A	Ḍammah	u	Kasrah	i
Long		ā		ū		ī

INTRODUCTION

The Qurān[1] is the Holy Book of Islam; the world's second major religion. Adopted by around 1.5-1.8 billion people, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. The Qurān is considered by Muslims to be the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic (Qurān, 12: 2, 20: 113, 26: 195, 39: 28, 41: 3, 43: 3) via the angel Gabriel (Qurān, 26: 192-194). It is composed of 114 *sūrah*s (roughly translated "chapters" or "sections"), each with its own title, usually relating to an image or a theme in it. These *sūrah*s vary in length and consist of a certain number of *āyah*s (roughly translated "verses"). Apart from the first *sūrah*, the *sūrah*s are arranged in descending order of length. The Qurān was revealed in part in response to events during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, between 610 (when he was 40 years old) and his death in 632 AD (al-Suyūṭī, 1969). Being illiterate, the Prophet had a number of scribes who wrote the revelation down. According to tradition, this copy was reproduced and spread around the Muslim world during the reign of the third caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (İhsanoğlu, 1986: xviii-xix; Ayoub, 1984: 1). For Muslims, the Qurān represents God's guidance, which they are meant to follow.[2]

Since the Qurān stands at the heart of the Islamic system, it has understandably received considerable attention from scholars, theologians, and lay people alike (Rahman, 1984: 73). In order to cater for the needs of non-Arabic speaking Muslims (only one in six Muslims is a native speaker of Arabic), and to present Islam to non-Muslims, the Qurān has been

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[1] Also transliterated as Quran, Qur'an, Qur'ān and Koran in the literature. It is worth mentioning that the original transliteration in quotes and titles of works has been reproduced here.

[2] Ayoub (1984: 18) writes that the Qurān consists of moral and legal precepts, commands and prohibitions with regard to lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*) actions, the promise of Paradise for the pious and the threat of punishment in Hell for the evil. It also contains reports of earlier prophets, parables, and admonitions. The Qurān is "deeply involved with the daily life of Muslim society. For this reason, in some way it had to reflect the problems of society directly and concretely. This it does in its very structure and history" (*ibid*). The Qurān is a treatise on theology, a source of laws, and a collection of moral sermons, amongst other things (Abou Sheishaa, 2001).

translated from Arabic, its original language, into many languages including English, French, German, Indonesian, Malay, Spanish and Urdu, to name but a few. And yet, in contrast to the extensive research undertaken on translation in all fields of knowledge, very few sustained studies of translations of the Qurān have been undertaken to date. The bulk of these studies has focused on the problems of translating the Qurān on the micro-textual level and on the limits of the translatability of the Qurān (Abdul-Raof, 2004; al-Lāwindī, 2001). Some have focused on the translation of Qurānic cultural references (Abdul-Raof, 2005), some of the stylistic features of the Qurān (Abdul-Raof, 2001), Qurānic ellipted structures into English (Ali, 1992), the prepositional phrase in the Qurān (Ali, 1993), "non-core lexicon" in *sūrah* 113 (Fatani, 2002), the rhythm of *sūrat al-'Adiyāt* (Qurān, 100) (Hajjaji-Jarrah, 2000), a variety of issues relating to the translation of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah* (Harun, 1996a and 1996b), and *kāna* (was/were) (al-Khawalda, 2004). Two bibliographies of the Qurān, one listing details of the publication of translations of the Qurān into different languages between 1515 and 1980 (İhsanoğlu, 1986) and another documenting reviews of translations of the Qurān between 1649 and 2002 (Kidwai, 2007) are also available.

To the best of my knowledge, the literature on Qurān translation has not engaged with a systematic comparison of the output of different translators dealing with the same linguistic feature in the same target language (TL), nor examined the issue of the translator's style, although the literature on *balāghah* (the art of Arabic eloquence) and *tafsīr*s (commentaries or exegesis of the Qurān) do discuss the style of the Qurān itself, generally stressing that it is "beautiful" (Guillaume, 1990: 73-74), "eloquent" (al-Bāqillānī, in Vasalou, 2002: 34; al-Jurjānī, in Vasalou, 2002: 39; Ayoub, 1984: 2) and "inimitable" (Ayoub, 1984: 2) (see 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 in chapter one). Moreover, word order, one of the most distinctive aspects of Qurānic style, has received no systematic attention from scholars interested in issues relating to the translation of the Qurān. This study will examine word order variation in the Qurān, focusing on ten published translations into English, as detailed in the section on Research Questions and Data below.

Marked Word Order and Foregrounding

Arabic and English are structurally very different. Arabic is a Semitic language while English is an Indo-European one. Of all the linguistic differences between the two, word order is the main focus of this book. Word order in English is relatively fixed and the meaning of the sentence

depends on the order in which its elements are arranged. Arabic, on the other hand, has fewer restrictions on word order thanks to its elaborate verb inflection system and case marking. This flexibility allows for the foregrounding of some elements within the sentence, resulting in a marked (i.e. non-canonical) word order and realising certain discursive functions (Lee, 2003; Choi 1996, 1999, see also the discussion of word order in Arabic in chapter two).

Lāshīn (2001) writes that each word has its position in the linear order of the sentence in Arabic. In this sense, there is a canonical, default structure which is assumed to be followed unless the writer or speaker wishes to foreground some element of the sentence for a particular purpose. Thus, word order may be inverted to achieve specific stylistic effects. This is called (التقديم والتأخير) *al-taqdīm wa al-ta'khīr* (foregrounding and backgrounding), a linguistic feature used to highlight or downplay certain elements in speech or writing. It constitutes one way of delivering meanings to the addressee as they are ordered in the mind of the speaker in terms of their importance, making the style an honest reflection of the speaker's mind and feelings, according to Lashin (1978: 217). Similarly, Lee (2003: 618) explains that "[i]n languages with fairly free word order, non-canonical [marked] orderings are preferred options to mark a special information structure."

Foregrounding some elements of the sentence may also be required by the context or the co-text (al-Na'imī, n.d.). A word or group of words may be foregrounded to sentence-initial position because of the context in which it is used (whether syntactic, textual or pragmatic; for example in order not to disrupt patterns of thematic progression). In his discussion of sentence structure in Arabic, Cantarino (1974: 31) writes that marked word order is intended "to give the predicate an emphatic effect" in nominal sentences and "to achieve an emphatic effect upon the subject" in verbal sentences (*ibid*: 42). Expressing this differently in his discussion of the pragmatic functions of the constituents of utterances, Moutaouakil (1989) writes that the element with the pragmatic function of contrastive focus generally occupies sentence-initial position. In other words, word order in Arabic is largely a matter of stylistic consideration and is available as a resource to achieve thematic progression, signal emphasis, care and contrast and to organise messages in a variety of ways. It is therefore important to reflect on and/or take into consideration in translation since it (i.e. word order variation) has a specific stylistic purpose and potentially an effect on meaning (Badawi *et al,* 2004; David, 1995).

This research is a descriptive study which views translation as a series of decisions made by the translator, having taken into consideration the stylistic differences between the source language (SL) and TL. It does not offer recommendations about how the translation of *āyah*s featuring inverted, that is marked or non-canonical, word order should be carried out. Specifically, the study will attempt to examine how several English translations of the Qurān have handled *āyah*s that feature lexical foregrounding. This involves identifying *āyah*s where foregrounding occurred in the first instance, then establishing the function realised by marked word order. This is followed by a close examination of some available translations of the Qurān into English, selected on the basis of clear criteria (as outlined in chapter three) and the ways in which they each deal with instances of lexical foregrounding in the ST (Source Text). Finally, I will examine the relationship between the translators' stated aims, context and background and their respective style, i.e. the set of choices they actually make in their translations.

Research Questions and Data

All examples of *āyah*s identified as realising marked word order (word orders other than subject-predicate and verb-subject-complement) discussed in al-Bayḍāwī's (أنوار التنزيل وأسرار التأويل) (*Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, or "The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation") constitute the main corpus of this study (a total of 68 *āyah*s; see chapter three on the selection of data and chapters 4 and 5 as well as the appendix for further details). The study examines how translations selected for analysis deal with these *āyah*s. It then focuses on how the preferred patterns of choice featuring in each of the three translations selected for closer examination may reflect the translator's(s') aim and historical context. The main research question posed is:

How are instances of marked word order in the Qurān rendered in English translations?

To answer this question, I attempt to address the following, more focused sub-questions:

- *Which instances of marked word order in the Qurān are identified and discussed by al-Bayḍāwī (and where relevant other commentators), and what function(s) does this lexical foregrounding serve?*

Addressing this question will result in a comprehensive corpus of all instances of lexical foregrounding in the Qurān discussed by *al-Bayḍāwī*, which will constitute the ST part of the corpus on which the study is based. It will also result in a systematic description of the functions of foregrounding and marked word order, specifically in the context of the Qurān. The functions identified will then form the basis for structuring the ensuing analysis of the data.

- *What options and/or patterns are employed by translators to render the different functions of marked word order?*

To address this question, a total of ten English translations of the Qurān will be selected on the basis of clear criteria and systematically examined in terms of how they handle each instance of marked word order in the ST corpus.

- *Are there recurrent options and/or patterns for rendering different types of word order variation?*

Following the close examination of individual strategies identified in each of the ten translations, an attempt will be made to identify recurrent patterns of choice across different translations in relation to each function of lexical foregrounding resulting from word order variation.

- *What potential factors influence the choice of particular strategies by different translators?*

This question addresses the issue of translator style, and involves selecting three translations for closer examination, identifying recurrent patterns of choice within each translation and linking these patterns to each translator's stated aims and his or her personal background (or what is known of it).

The Book in Outline

Chapter one starts with a brief history of the translation of the Qurān into European languages, particularly into English, followed by reasons and motivations for translating the Qurān, various approaches to the translation of the Qurān and relevant debates (e.g. the inimitability of the Qurān, and its translatability versus its untranslatability). The chapter then examines several linguistic issues relating to translating the Qurān,

including: lexical difficulties (mainly lack of equivalents for some Islamic terms and concepts), synonymy (or rather lack of it, which means that often a word cannot be replaced by another, close equivalent without distorting the meaning to some extent), polysemy (polysemous words in the Qurān undergo a reduction of referents in translation), consistency in the choice of equivalents, frequency and hence relative (un)familiarity of a lexical item used in the Qurān versus its translations, the communicative function of particles (since most of their meaning is drawn from the context), the choice between transliteration and translation of proper names (e.g. the rendering of *Allah*), the use of certain lexical items as well as masculine pronouns and/or affixes to refer to God in translation, *iltifāt*, or change of addressee, the Qurānic rhythm and *fāṣilah* (end-of-*āyah* sound, which are conspicuous by their absence from most translations), and strategies used to deal with tense and their potential effect on meaning in translation.

To identify the functions of marked word order, chapter two reviews the relevant literature in English and Arabic, in relation to history and effect on meaning. Drawing on *balāghah* literature, the chapter then focuses on the functions of word order variation (resulting in foregrounding an element to/towards sentence-initial position) in Arabic in general and ends with a summary of the functions of foregrounding in the Qurān, taking into consideration the functions used by al-Bayḍāwī to describe the effect of marked word order in the Qurān. These functions are *specification*, *restriction*, *emphasis*, *glorification/amplification* and *denial*.

Chapter three discusses criteria for the choice of data to be analysed from the Qurān and the selection of *āyah*s discussed by al-Bayḍāwī in his *tafsīr* (commentary of the Qurān); this is one of the most widely used *tafsīr*s, and scholars have come to regard it as "the standard commentary on the Qur'an" (Bell, 1970: 169). The chapter also provides details of the procedures followed to identify the relevant *āyah*s from al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr*. It then outlines a number of parameters to select a manageable number of translations of the Qurān into English. The final selection, consisting of 10 translations, takes into consideration several factors, for example, the ideological orientation of the translator(s), mainstream *Sunnī* Muslims (e.g. Abdel Haleem, Fakhry and Hilālī and Khān), *Shi'ī* (e.g. Ahamed and Quli), *Sufī* (e.g. Bewley and Bewley), *Qaḍiyānī/Ahmadī* (Muhammad Ali) and orientalist (Arberry); the linguistic abilities of the translators, native speakers of Arabic (e.g. Abdel Haleem, Fakhry) and native speakers of English (e.g. Arberry); and different translation formats, plain prose (e.g. Hilālī and Khān's translation), phrase-by-phrase

translation (Quli) and rhymed-prose (A. Y. Ali). These parameters clearly overlap in some translations.

Chapters four and five examine a number of *āyah*s featuring foregrounding as representative of all different functions assigned to marked word order in the Qurān, according to al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr*. Chapter four examines (6) *āyah*s realising Specification, (5) *āyah*s realising Restriction and (7) *āyah*s realising Emphasis. Chapter five examines (2) *āyah*s realising Amplification/Glorification, (6) *āyah*s realising Denial and (8) *āyah*s realising multiple-functions. Drawing on al-Bayḍāwī's as well as several other *tafsīr*s, each *āyah*'s structure and the function of its marked word order are discussed. All ten translations are examined in order to establish whether they feature (un)marked word order in English and whether they use other strategies, e.g. lexical compensation and punctuation, to render the force of the *āyah*. The reminder of the *āyah*s discussed by al-Bayḍāwī and not examined in chapters four and five are analysed in the appendix.

In order to examine the issue of preferred patterns of choice at the level of individual translators, chapter six focuses on three translations: Abdel Haleem's, Hilālī and Khān's and Arberry's (relevant selection criteria are discussed in the chapter). The chapter discusses the linguistic choices these translators opt for in rendering the corpus of *āyah*s and the relationship between the patterns of choice that distinguish the output/style of each translator and his stated aims, personal background and the context in which he or they undertook the translation.

Chapter seven summarises the main findings of the study and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

CORE ISSUES RELATING TO THE TRANSLATION OF THE QURĀN

Introduction

Muslims believe that the message of Islam is universal, being the last revelation[1] from God, and that the Prophet Muhammad was sent to all mankind (e.g. Qurān 34: 28, 7: 158, 21: 107). As such, it is their duty to convey the message of Islam to all humanity.[2] This is where translation comes in. However, since Muslims also believe that the Qurān is the literal word of God, and since God chose Arabic as the medium of revelation, any translation of the Qurān can only be a translation of an interpretation of its meanings; it cannot be a substitute for the Qurān or be considered equal to it. This is why translations often explicitly state that they are not translations of the Qurān. To signal this, translations use words like "message," as in Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'ān* (1980),

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[1] Muslims believe that the only religion God has revealed to mankind via His Prophets throughout the ages is Islam, literally "submission to God's will." The basic message of all Prophets was to call on the people they were sent to, to worship one God and obey His commands, but their respective *shari'a*s (laws) were different from each other in order to suit the time, place and people in question. As such, Muslims believe in all Prophets without exception and in the Scriptures revealed to all of them, i.e. the Psalms, the Bible and the Qurān. In other words, they believe that Islam is the last version of the same religion revealed to earlier Prophets and that the Qurān encapsulates the message of the earlier scriptures and Prophetic messages (see Naik's introduction to Ahamed's translation).

[2] Sheikh Abd al-Azīz ibn Bāz, the late *Muftī* (grand scholar) of Saudi Arabia, maintained that there was an urgent need to translate the Qurān. Similarly, the late Sheikh Muhammad al-'uthaimīn was of the opinion that the translation of the meanings of the Qurān is obligatory, being one way of conveying the message of the Qurān and Islam to non-Arabic speakers, and adds that what is necessary for carrying out an obligation becomes an obligation in itself (my translation). www.qurancomplex.com/tree.asp?section=8&TabID=4&SubItemID=3arb&trans=1

"meaning," as in A.Y. Ali's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (1934-7), or both"meaning" and "interpretation," as in Hilālī and Khān's *Interpretation of the Meaning of The Noble Quran* (1977).

The Qurān sits at the heart of the Muslim faith. It is an Islamic tradition to memorise parts or all of the Qurān to recite in daily prayers or as an act of worship outside of prayers. In the house of Islam, there is also a body of literature known as *tafsīr* (commentary or exegesis of the Qurān), which emerged as Islam spread beyond the boundaries of Arabia, and new converts, who did not speak Arabic, could not read or understand the Qurān. A *tafsīr* is an explanation of the context in which an *āyah* was revealed, any difficult words it contains and any relevant *ḥadīth* (saying) by the Prophet Muhammad. *Tafsīr*s are relevant in the context of translating the Qurān since translators are not Qurānic scholars but rather linguists who refer to the available *tafsīr*s for meanings of the *āyah*s and attempt to put these meanings across in the translation. For example, A.Y. Ali (1996: xvii-xviii) names more than eleven *tafsīr*s of the Qurān that he drew on and adds: "I only adopt the general sense of accepted Commentaries." Similarly, Pickthall (1997: vii) acknowledges that his translation was scrutinised and revised thoroughly by scholars in Egypt who have studied the Qurān and who knew English (see also chapter two).

Ever since it appeared, some fourteen hundred years ago, the Qurān has been a topic of heated debate by many parties, including Muslims, non-Muslims and Orientalists. Oliver Leaman writes that

> [debate] has been carried out by Muslims and some by those hostile or indifferent to Islam, producing a very wide range of views …There is a public debate going on in which things are said about the Qur'an without much knowledge or understanding of the book (in Farrukh, 1977).

This chapter does not offer a comprehensive account of this debate but focuses instead on a number of issues relevant to the topic of the study. I start with a brief review of the history of the translation of the Qurān in order to contextualise the issues in question.

1. Translations of the Qurān: A Brief History

During his lifetime, the Prophet Muhammad sent letters to the rulers of neighbouring countries calling on them to embrace Islam. Each of his messengers therefore mastered the language of the respective country to which he was sent. The Prophet also encouraged his companions to learn foreign languages in order to communicate the message of Islam to non-Arabs. These letters were interpreted and explained either by the

messenger delivering them or by a member of the ruler's court. For example, it is reported that during the Prophet's lifetime, Salmān al-Fārisī translated *sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, the first *sūrah* of the Qurān, into Persian, and 'Amr ibn Ummayyah translated some *āyah*s about Jesus Christ and his mother Mary to the Negus, the king of Abyssinia (Yahaghi, 2002; Abou Sheishaa, 2001; İhsanoğlu, 1986: xxi-xxii).

As Islam spread beyond the boundaries of Arabia after the Prophet's death, the need for translating the Qurān grew. In the beginning, only a few *āyah*s were translated at a time, and only orally when Muslim scholars gave talks about Islam to non-Arabic-speaking audiences. Oral periphrastic translation by clerics was a common practice. Soon after this, written translations began to be available. İhsanoğlu (1986: xxviii) mentions that "there are Syriac translations made by non-Muslims, in the second part of the first century AH [7th AD]." He also adds that there is a translation of the Qurān into Berber which dates back to 127 AH. The Qurān used to be translated orally into Persian until the first written Persian translation appeared in the period 348-364 AH/961-976 AD. A translation into an Indian language (perhaps Sindhi) was done before 270 AH/883 AD. The Qurān was also translated into Chinese from 713 AD onwards (Abou Sheishaa, 2001; İhsanoğlu, 1986: xxviii).

The translation of the Qurān as an organised endeavour in the Western world is said to have started with a translation into Latin in 1143[3] by Robertus Ktenensis (also known as Robert of Ketton, see Burman, 1998: 704), which was not published until 1543 AD.[4] Early translations of the Qurān into European languages were carried out on the basis of this translation. These early translations satisfied the interest of some priests in studying Islam for polemical and missionary reasons.[5] In 1547 an Italian

[3] According to al-Lāwindī (2001: 19-20) the first Latin translation of the Qurān was carried out in 1143 by Robert of Kent. The translation was kept for the exclusive use of the clergy and was not circulated publicly because it was considered "blasphemous" from a Christian point of view since the Qurān views Jesus Christ as a Prophet, not God or the son of God. It was not until 1543 that the translation was first published by Theodor Bibliander. The translation was later republished in 1594 by Henkelman and in 1598 by Mariachi (spelt as "Marracci" in Burman 1998: 706, see also al-Rabadāwī, 2005).

[4] Just how important is the influence of early translations of the Qurān on potential readers is pointed out by Franco Cardini in *Europe and Islam* (2001). He argues that the first Latin translation of the Qurān by Roberto Di Keton was very important in building up a negative image about Islam and Muslims, because it was full of mistakes and omissions.

[5] According to Burman (1998: 704), the Qurān was translated twice into Latin: "in 1142 Peter the Venerable … persuaded Robert …to join a team of translators that

translation, described by İhsanoğlu (1986) as a paraphrase of the Latin, was carried out by Andrea Arrivabene. In 1616 the first German translation appeared and in 1647, a French version was produced by Andre du Ryer. This German version was followed by a Dutch translation in the same year, which was, in turn, based on it (Abou Sheishaa, 2001; İhsanoğlu, 1986: xxxiv-xxxv; Edward D. Ross's introduction to Sale's *The Koran*, 1921: v).

The first full translation of the Qurān into English dates back to 1648, when Alexander Ross produced an English translation on the basis of du Ryer's French version. In 1734, George Sale published the first "direct" English translation from Arabic. In the 19th and 20th centuries, orientalists such as Henry Palmer (1880), Richard Bell (1937), and A. J. Arberry (1955) translated the Qurān into English. Muslims, on the other hand, are said to have felt the need to produce faithful[6] translations into English and other European languages by the early 1900s (see Kidwai, 2007: x; Mohammed, 2005; M. Ali, 2002: I-10). Translations were carried out by Mohammad Khan (1905), Abul Fadl (1912), M. M. Pickthall (1930), A. Y. Ali (1934-37), and recently by M. S. A. Abdel Haleem (2004), to name but a few (see Kidwai, 2007: x; İhsanoğlu, 1986).

2. Reasons and Motivations for Translating the Qurān

The subject of translating the Qurān is crucial for those who are interested in Islam, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Several scholars have agreed that almost all of the early translations of the Qurān conducted by non-Muslims were aimed at tarnishing the image of Islam (see Kidwai, 2007: x, 1987; Mohammed, 2005; al-Lāwindī, 2001: 19-20). This can be seen, for example, in the title given by Alexander Ross to his 1648

Peter was forming to produce Latin versions of the Qur'ān and other Arabic works that might be useful to Latin Christians attempting to convert Muslims". Burman (*ibid*: 706) also adds that "the archbishop of Toledo (1208-47) …persuaded Mark [of Toledo] to translate the Qur'ān as part of the mobilization of arms and opinion preceding the campaign of Las Navas de Tolosa that would see the Christians of Spain destroy the Almohad [Muslim] army."

[6] "Faithful translations" refer to translations which remain close to the original in terms of meaning and, in the case of the Qurān, the order of *āyah*s in *sūrah*s and order of *sūrah*s in the Qurān. For example, Muslim scholars disapprove of Asad's translation because he imparted some of his knowledge of the Torah and the Bible, which are not in line with a Muslim's understanding of the respective *āyah*s, in his rendering of the Qurān. Muslims also disapprove of Bell's translation since he changed the order of *āyah*s, which they view as divine, in his work.

translation of the Qurān: *The Alcoran of Mahomet …newly Englished for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities*.

Muslims did not wish the missionary effort to distort the image and authenticity of the text with hostile translations going unopposed. Translations by Muslims thus aimed, first of all, to offer what Muslims consider a faithful rendering of the Qurān and its *tafsīr*s into different languages. Kidwai (1987) explains that "the early English translations of the Quran by Muslims stemmed mainly from the pious enthusiasm on their part to refute the allegations levelled by the Christian missionaries against Islam in general and the Quran in particular." And as A. Y. Ali remarks, millions of non-Muslims who access the Qurān in translation misjudge the religion of their fellow Muslims because of the material available to them in English. This is why, he argues, "it is good that qualified Muslims should make the attempt to present the picture [of the Qurān] which their own mental and spiritual vision presents to themselves" (1996: xx). The second motivation for Muslims was the need "to broadcast the message of the Quran" (Abdul-Raof, 2001: 182, in Madigan 2002: 339) and to explicate for Muslims, particularly non-Arabic speaking converts[7] new rules regulating a new life under the Islamic code of life (Madigan, 2002: 339). The third purpose of translations by Muslims was to cater for the needs of non-Arabic-speaking Muslims who could only access the Qurān through translation, particularly into English. This is a very important motivation considering that less than one fifth of the world's Muslims are Arabs.

Translation of the Qurān has also been encouraged for nationalistic purposes at different historical junctures. For example, Rashīd Riḍā[8]

[7] Note that Islamic literature uses *revert* rather than *convert* to refer to new Muslims since, scholars argue, each and every human being is born Muslim, i.e. recognises the existence of God, but some adopt other faiths and religions and consequently deny His existence or associate with Him by believing in other gods. "Revert" implies that new Muslims are coming back to what they were before.

[8] Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935): a Syrian-Egyptian Islamic thinker who was influential in the revival movement of the 19th and early 20th century. Riḍā was born in Ottoman Syria. He studied the Islamic sciences and the Arabic language at the National Islamic School in Tripoli. Riḍā rejected the un-Islamic practices of *Sufi*s in Syria. He emphasised the simplicity of Islam, and criticised both the elaborate rituals of the aristocrats and the ecstatic excesses of peasants and urban labourers. Riḍā studied with the Islamic thinker Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and later moved to Cairo where he studied with Muhamad Abduh, a religious scholar, jurist, and liberal reformer, who led the late 19th-century movement in Egypt and other Muslim countries to revitalise Islamic teachings and institutions in the modern

argues that the translation of the Qurān into Turkish after the collapse of the caliphate aimed at providing a substitute for the Arabic Qurān, rather than assisting the Turks in understanding it: "Turkish nationalists were keen to eliminate all traces of Arabic from the minds, hearts, and tongues of the Turkish people" (in Abou Sheishaa, 2001). This, Riḍā argues, explains why some Muslim scholars opposed the translation of the Qurān since, in their view, it led to severing ties with the rest of the Islamic community.

The quality of available translations provides another motivation for new translations of the Qurān. For example, F. Nīkīyīn, translator of the Qurān into English, explains that his motivation to carry out another translation was "the lack of firmness, eloquence, lustre, and vividness in the present English translation" (in Karīmī-Nīyā, 2002: 197). As with other types of re-translation, change in the target language itself over time may provide a further motivation to embark on new versions. Thus, Irving states in his introduction that "there is a necessity, almost an urgency for an American version in contemporary English" (2001: xix). Bewley and Bewley (2005: iii) stress "the constantly evolving nature of the English language" as a motivation for their translation. Many of these motivations may be present simultaneously. For example, Irving also points out that his intention was to enable readers "to understand the sacred document itself, even though they do not understand Arabic" (2001: xix), as well as to "spread greater understanding of Islamic religion and to present the English speaking world with a clear rendition of the original Arabic into intelligible modern English" (*ibid*: xxii). Finally, Harun (1996a: 74) suggests that some translators undertake the work "for pure monetary benefits," especially now that interest in Islam has spread worldwide.

3. Approaches to Qurān Translation

The literature on various approaches to translating the Qurān is largely atheoretical. Nevertheless, it is useful to offer a brief overview of the main themes in order to contextualise the analysis offered in subsequent chapters.

Men and women of letters such as Taha Hussain and Aisha Abd al-Rahman (see 4.1.2) divide Arabic speech into poetry, prose and Qurān. For although the Qurān is written in Arabic, it uses the language and its devices in sophisticated ways that are considered unique. Similarly, the

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world (see http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9062731/Rashid-Rida and http://www.cis-ca.org/voices/r/rida.htm).

translation of the Qurān may be said to constitute a genre[9] in its own right. This is because the Qurān is considered to be the literal word of God, and the translation is only a periphrastic copy of it. The implication is that readers of the translation do not assume they are reading the Qurān, but rather that they are reading an account of the meanings of the Qurān. At the same time, translators of the Qurān cannot hope to produce a translation that substitutes the Qurān, nor do they attempt to. For example, in the introduction to his translation of the Qurān, Quli writes that he does not hope that his translation can reproduce the stylistic qualities of the Qurān and confirms that the Qurān is

> a work of inimitable literary beauty and excellence. But unlike other literary works produced by inspired human genius, such as the literary masterpieces in prose and poetry in various languages of the world whose charm and appeal are limited to particular cultures and periods beyond which they have little general relevance or appeal, the language and discourse of the Qur'an and their relevance are universal and everlasting (2002: xii).

Similarly, Pickthall (1997: vii) is of the view that "[t]he Koran cannot be translated." He thus only attempts to present the meanings of the Qurān in English. Pickthall emphasises that his translation "can never take the place of the Koran in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so" (*ibid*). F. Nīkīyīn mentions that it is "impossible to recreate" the Qurān, but maintains it is possible to produce a good translation of its meanings (in Karīmī-Nīyā, 2002: 198).

According to the literature, translators of the Qurān generally attempt to remain as close as possible to the text in order to reflect some features of the Qurānic style in their work. Thus, Stewart writes that "[t]ranslators of sacred texts tend to stick more closely to the original than translators of other types of composition" (2000: 33 in al-Khawalda 2004: 217). Similarly, Burman (1998: 713) writes that literalism conveys "more of the feel and shape of the Qur'ān." Some translators of the Qurān specify the translation approach they follow, while others do not. For example, A. Y. Ali writes that he attempts to convey the meanings of the Qurānic words, but he does not define the approach he follows. Abdel Haleem similarly writes that he avoids "unnecessarily close adherence to the original Arabic structures and idioms…[because] [l]iteral translations of Arabic idioms

[9] Khaṭṭāb argues that one difference between the translation of the Qurān and other types of literary translation is that the translator cannot put himself/herself in the position of the author, i.e. God in the case of the Qurān (2000: 178).

often result in meaningless English" (2005: xxxi), but he too does not specify the overall translation approach he adopts. On the other hand, Pickthall (1997: vii) writes that he attempted to render the Qurān almost literally. By "literally," Pickthall seems to mean a very close rendering of the basic meaning, because reproducing all the meanings of the Qurān, which is considered the most eloquent and perfect of Arabic texts, is impossible (al-Lāwindī, 2001: 37-38, see also Fatani, 2002).

Although he does not propose the "best" approach to the translation of the Qurān, Abdul-Raof (2005: 172) disagrees with the literal translation of Qurānic cultural items, because this "leads to cultural interference that distorts the message underpinning the SL text, thus impairing the volume of both informativity and intentionality of the source text." He proposes, instead, "domestication of the SL expression and exegetical footnotes in order to bring the message home to the TL audience, increase the level of source text informativity, and maintain SL intentionality" (*ibid*). Abdul-Raof further argues that "[p]araphrase, through domestication, transposition or dynamic equivalence, may be the solution, but it robs the Qur'anic text of its distinctive religious character" (*ibid*).

Drawing on Nida and Taber (1982), some scholars have argued that rejecting literal translation indirectly implies following the dynamic equivalence technique in translating the Qurān.[10] Dynamic equivalence, it is argued, successfully safeguards the Qurān from the drawbacks of the literal translation technique. The literature seems to use the terms formal and literal interchangeably. Thus, for example, Quli (2002: xvi) maintains that formal equivalence translations

> attempt to reproduce the formal elements of the source text including grammatical units, seek consistency of word usage, and reproduce meanings in terms of the source context. That is, they do not normally attempt to make adjustments in idiom, but rather try to reproduce such expressions more or less literally, so that the reader may be able to perceive something of the way in which the original document employed local cultural elements to convey meanings.

Drawing on Nida, Quli defines dynamic equivalence translation as "the closest natural equivalent to the source language message" (*ibid*). He advocates the dynamic approach, arguing that it is better suited to communicating the message of the Qurān, assuming that a translator can

[10] Abdul-Raof (2001) identifies two types of Qurān translation into English: literal/semantic (Bell, Pickthal, Arberry, Asad, A. Y. Ali) and communicative (Akbar, Irving, Turner).

fully comprehend its meanings and that his/her only task is to produce the closest equivalent to that meaning. As he rightly points out, however, this is an oversimplification of the nature of discourse and meaning since, amongst other things, there are cases where more than one meaning of an *āyah* exists.

For readers interested in following the Arabic text of the Qurān, interlinear translations of the Qurān are available in different languages, including English. This format can be helpful for non-Arabic speaking readers who want to understand the meaning of the words of the Qurān. Serving as dictionaries, interlinear translations give the meaning of each Qurānic word and/or phrase on alternate lines (Quli, 2002: xvii). However, they are not very successful in making the Qurānic text intelligible. This is especially problematic in the case of languages as different as Arabic and English, given the different directions of writing and different word orders, amongst other things.

Another version of this linear approach is what Quli calls "phrase-by-phrase" or "mirror-paraphrasing." He argues that this approach brings some of the advantages of interlinear translations to English-speaking readers of the Qurān (*ibid*). Unlike linear translations which work on the word level, in this approach the translation of the Qurān develops phrase by phrase, with each phrase appearing opposite the corresponding Arabic phrase and attempting to mirror its "semantic import." Here, Quli argues that the complete meaning of each Arabic phrase has to be covered in the corresponding phrase of the target text (TT), and TT phrases have to interconnect to generate a smooth reading TT (*ibid*). He also adds that making the best use of a phrase-by-phrase translation requires some elemental knowledge of Arabic vocabulary and morphology, which clearly places those who have no knowledge of Arabic at a disadvantage.

Finally, Vickar Ahamed adopts an unusually target readers-oriented approach in his *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an for the Youth: A Simplified Translation of the Qur'an for Young People* (2003). He attempts to "keep the language of the translation on a par with the linguistic competence of 6-16 years old English-speaking youth" (in Fakhr-Rawḥānī, 2001: 199). Although very common in Bible translation, this is probably the first time this approach has been adopted in translating the Qurān. The success of this approach in the field of Qurān translation is arguable since Ahamed's translation does not enjoy as much currency as those of Abdel Haleem and Hilālī and Khān, for example.

As we have seen, some translators, like Quli, seem to adopt Nida's or Newmark's dichotomy, namely, dynamic/communicative or formal/ semantic. Others, such as Abdel Haleem, A. Y Ali and Pickthall, do not

define the approach they adopt nor refer to Nida or Newmark. One reason Nida's categories of equivalence are not widely used is probably that scholars of the Qurān do not assume that its translation needs to be adapted to the target readers' context or culture. The argument is that potential readers approach a translation of the Qurān in order to access the meanings of the source text. While doing so, they do not consider themselves to be reading the literal word of God and do not expect the Qurān to be adapted to suit their cultures. In that respect, Bible translations are different because Christians mostly consider an English translation to be almost as authoritative as the Greek or the Hebrew manuscripts. Although Fatani argues against dynamic equivalence, she also points out various problems with translations described as literal. She attempts to demonstrate in her study of the translation of *sūrah*s 113 and 114 (see under linguistic issues below) that even the literal meanings of the words in question are not conveyed correctly, and only one of the meanings conveyed by a given word is reproduced in the translation.

4. Issues Relating to Translating the Quran into English

The translation of the Qurān raises many issues, divided here into two categories: religious and linguistic, though there is inevitably some overlap between the issues discussed under each heading. For example, lexical choices pose linguistic problems, but they also have religious implications since they convey certain shades of meaning.

4.1 Religious Issues

Religious considerations are important in the translation of the Qurān for obvious reasons (see the introduction). This subsection discusses views on the non-translatability of the Qurān (4.1.1), its *i'jāz* (inimitability or miraculous nature) (4.1.2), and issues relating to the religion/ideology of the translator (4.1.3).

4.1.1 Non-Translatability of the Quran

Both the reading of a translation of the Qurān by a Muslim who cannot access the Arabic text and periphrastic translation of some *āyah*s by Muslim scholars for non-Arabic-speaking audiences are considered acceptable, but reciting translations of the Qurān in prayer (ritual *salāh*) is not. This is so because the Qurān is the literal word of God while a translation is the word of man, and "the word of God cannot be reproduced

by the word of man" (Abdul-Raof in Riddel, 2002: 87). Scholars have thus argued that a translation is not a substitute for the Qurān and have provided many arguments to support their opinion. Abou Sheishaa reviews the arguments brought forward by Rashīd Riḍā against considering a translation a substitute for the Qurān (2001). These may be summarised as follows:

- The Qurān itself states that God has chosen Arabic for His medium of discourse: "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you [people] may understand" (Qurān, 12: 2, Abdel Haleem, 2005: 145). This, in effect, means that a translation into any other language cannot substitute the Qurān.
- The Qurān is stylistically inimitable (see 4.1.2)[11] and, therefore, untranslatable. It includes many words which have no exact equivalent in other languages, and a translator will therefore have to use semi-equivalent words which convey the meaning but with some variation (see linguistic issues below).[12]
- Some rulings are extracted from the Arabic words and the range of meanings they offer, but this is not possible on the basis of a translation. In other words, because of the difficulty of finding exact equivalents to Arabic words and the necessity of using partial/semi equivalents, a translation cannot be depended upon in drawing religious rulings.
- Exercising *ijtihād* (personal reasoning on new issues not discussed by earlier scholars) by means of *qiyās* (analogy between old and new issues) can only be based on the Arabic text.
- Since a literal translation of the Qurān is not possible due to linguistic problems, for example, non/semi/partial equivalence, polysemy, and synonymy, amongst other things, a translation of the meanings of the Qurān reflects the understanding and/or preference of the translator(s). This understanding, and consequently the translation, may be right or wrong. In effect, the religion of those

[11] Ayoub (1984: 2) argues that the Qurān's "eloquence and rhetorical beauty, and the precision, economy, and subtlety of its style… can be meaningfully discussed only in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an." He also adds that "the style of the Qur'an is held to be unique and inimitable. It certainly is characteristic and unmistakable, in spite of its variations from surah to surah and from section to section" (*ibid*: 81).

[12] Abu al-Wayī (1997: 17) notes that even direct translation, let alone indirect translation, loses a great deal of the ST stylistic features.

who depend on a translation of the Qurān will be based on the understanding of the translator rather than the Qurān itself.

- The Qurān prohibits *taqlīd* (imitation) in religion. Deriving religious rulings from a translation of the Qurān - which reflects the translator's understanding - is an imitation of the translator, meaning that a Muslim reader would be imitating the translator by following his/her interpretation of the Qurān. This is problematic given that the translator is not a qualified exegete/commentator.
- Those who depend totally on the translation are deprived of the opportunity of reflecting directly on the Qurān and understanding what God has revealed in it.[13]
- The unique effect that the composition and style of the Qurān have on a listener/reader cannot be conveyed through translation (see linguistic problems below). This has serious implications given that many people are attracted to Islam because of the effect they experience on reciting or hearing a recitation of the Qurān.
- Differences are bound to exist between translations of the Qurān not only into different languages but even within the same language. This can be used as a basis for claiming that the Qurān features contradictory principles or teachings.
- Muslim scholars consider the Qurān as the only source of Islamic unity after the collapse of the Islamic caliphate; its translation into different languages undermines this unity.
- The Qurān is the most important proof of the status of Muhammad as a Prophet, since it constitutes an eternal miracle compared to any material miracle bestowed on other Prophets. The reality of this everlasting miracle can be seen only through the Arabic text of the Qurān, revealed directly to Prophet Muhammad. No translation can fulfil this function, i.e. as a proof of prophethood.
- Finally, the needs of non-Arabic speaking Muslims as well as those interested in Islam can be fulfilled by the translation of Qurānic commentaries, teaching Arabic in all Muslim schools, and reviving interest in Islamic knowledge.

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[13] One unnamed reviewer of a translation of the Qurān argues that no translation can ever be a substitute for the Arabic Qurān. The Qurān is an exclusive experience by itself and, therefore, anyone who wishes to acquire a first hand acquaintance with it must learn Arabic in order to enter the world of Qurānic experience. As such, any translation can be no more than a faint reflection and echo of the inimitable original (see Review of "A New Translation of the Quran: An introduction," *Tarjuman-e Wahy* (1998), 2(1): 49-50).

To conclude, the overwhelming religious argument on untranslatability is that the meanings of the Qurān need to be translated into other languages for the purposes of presenting Islam to non-Muslims or helping non-Arabic-speaking Muslims to understand Islam better. However, any such translation cannot be considered a substitute for the Qurān but only an exposition of some of its meanings.

4.1.2 I'jāz (Inimitability or the Miraculous Nature) of the Qurān

I'jāz (literally translated, "rendering incapable or powerless") refers to the impossibility of reproducing the Qurān or anything that matches it in the same language, Arabic, let alone any other language.[14] The theory of *i'jāz* maintains that the Qurān is a miracle bestowed on Prophet Muhammad and that it is unsurpassable not only in its style and composition but also in its meaning and content. Different arguments about what constitutes *i'jāz* [15] are not our concern here, but rather the literary merits of the Qurān for their relevant effect on its translation.

The idea of *i'jāz* goes back to the notion that the Qurān is a "miraculous" sign of the authenticity of Prophet Muhammad's message and that "according to traditional explanations it was the utter majesty of the Quranic text that rendered anyone who read it 'incapable'" (Smyth,

[14] The Qurān testifies to its own inimitability and challenges mankind and *jinn* to produce a *sūrah* like those found in it (e.g. Qurān 2:23), that is to write three lines which are neither prose, poetry nor normal speech and which, at the same time, do not follow existing Arabic patterns of speech.

[15] The well known *balāghah* scholar al-Bāqillānī of the 11th century confirms the "unsurpassable nature" of the Qurānic style from a *balāghah* point of view. However, he also stresses that the content of revelation is what makes Qurān inimitable (Saifullah, 1999a). Esach (1993: 118-141) writes that early Muslim scholars agree that the Qurān's *i'jāz* is located in both its message as well as its medium. On the other hand, Shahid (2004: 193) maintains that the *i'jāz* is literary and this makes "this miracle of the Quran unique among the miracles of the various prophets of the three Abrahamic religions." He explains that the miracle of "the Quran is considered internal, integral to the word of God itself, and is considered a permanent feature of the text of the Quran itself" (*ibid*). Abdul-Raof "finally reached an independent conclusion based on translation theory and linguistic analysis that Qur'anic discourse is inimitable and cannot be reproduced into a target language" (in Riddel, 2002: 87).