

A Critical Reading of Arberry's Translation of the Qur'an

(Synopsis)

This research paper entitled "A Critical Reading of Arberry's Translation of the Qur'an" presents a critical reading or a "re-reading" of A.J. Arberry's translation of the Qur'an entitled *The Koran Interpreted* and published in 1955. However, it is important to point out that "critical" here is used in the neutral sense of the word, that is, shedding light on the positive and negative aspects of Arberry's translation. This is logical because in his translation, he reveals a high level of honesty, integrity and objectivity. In the introduction to his translation, he writes that translating the Qur'an is similar to measuring "the ocean of prophetic eloquence with the thimble of pedestrian analysis" (Introduction: XI). Also, he tries to "compose clear and unmannered English, avoiding the Biblical style favoured by some of my predecessors" (ibid: XII).

This research paper will shed light on the problematic and quicksand areas associated with translating the Qur'an into foreign languages such as rendering figures of speech, culture-specific terms, abstract nouns ... etc. this undoubtedly results in judging the accuracy, communicativeness and informativeness of the translation choices opted for by Arberry. To achieve this aim, I will adopt the comparative approach to Arabic and English which represent the source language (SL) and the target language (TL).

A Critical Reading of Arberry's

- ٣- تفضيل الترجمة الحرفية في بعض المواطن التي تتطلب ترجمتها تبقى مدخل الترجمة التفسيرية.
- ٤- فشل آربري في نقل بعض الصور البلاغية القرآنية وخاصة تلك التي تتعلق بالثقافة العربية.
- ٥- تجنب اللجوء إلى Transliteration (كتابة بعض الكلمات العربية بالحروف الإنجليزية) مع أهميتها القصوى في بعض الأحيان.
- ٦- الاقتناع بترجمة واحدة لكل كلمة وعدم تغيير هذه الترجمة حتى ولو تغير المعنى السياقي للكلمة.

ملخص مقالقراءة نقدية لترجمة آربري للقرآن الكريم

يقدم هذا البحث قراءة نقدية موضوعية لترجمة آرثر آربري للقرآن الكريم والتي نشرت عام ١٩٥٥ تحت عنوان **The Koran Interpreted** وهذه الترجمة منذ نشرها لأول مرة - وحتى الآن - من أكثر الترجمات شيوعاً في العالم الإسلامي لأسلوبها اللغوي الراقى، وموضوعيتها الواضحة. ويجب أن أشير هنا أن تعبير القراءة النقدية **Critical Reading** لا يعنى فقط انتقاد الترجمة والتركيز على الجوانب السلبية فيها، ولكنه يعنى تقديم قراءة نقدية علمية تهدف لإبراز مواطن القوة والإيجابية في الترجمة، وإلقاء الضوء على الجوانب السلبية فيها.

وتتضمن الجوانب الإيجابية في ترجمة آربري النقاط الآتية :

- ١- احترام آربري للقرآن الكريم ككتاب تشريع لا نظير له، واحتوائه على كثير من القيم والمبادئ الإنسانية التي تخاطب الإنسان في كل زمان ومكان.
- ٢- اتباع آربري في ترجمته للترتيب المعروف لسور القرآن الكريم، وعدم محاولته ترتيب سور القرآن تاريخياً، كما فعل بعض المترجمين الآخرين.
- ٣- الموضوعية الواضحة التي تتسم بها الترجمة وخلوها من التشويه المتعمد.
- ٤- أسلوب آربري المتميز والراقى والذي يعكس ثقافته وإلمامه باللغة.
- ٥- تقدير آربري الواضح للقرآن الكريم ليس فقط ككتاب مقدس، ولكن كعمل أدبي من الطراز الأول.
- ٦- حرص آربري الشديد - بقدر استطاعته - على نقل البلاغة القرآنية والإعجاز الأسلوبى في القرآن للقارئ الغربى.

أما النقاط السلبية في ترجمة آربري فتتضمن النقاط التالية :

- ١- تجنب استخدام الحواشى أو مسرد في آخر الترجمة لشرح الكلمات الصعبة، أو التعبيرات القرآنية الإسلامية.
- ٢- عدم انتباهه للفروق الدلالية لبعض الكلمات.

Arabic Works Cited

- ابن كثير. تفسير القرآن العظيم (٤ أجزاء). القاهرة ، دار الحديث ، ١٩٩٠.
- ابن منظور. لسان العرب (١٨ جزءاً). القاهرة ، المكتبة التوفيقية ، ١٩٩٧.
- الراغب الأصفهاني. المفردات في غريب القرآن. تحقيق محمد سيد كيلاني. القاهرة ، مطبعة مصطفى البابي وأولاده ، ١٩٦١.
- الزمخشري. الكشاف عن حقائق التنزيل وعيون الأقاويل في وجوه التأويل (٤ أجزاء). ويليه الكافي الشافي في تخريج أحاديث الكشاف للإمام الحافظ أحمد بن حنبل العسقلاني. بيروت ، دار المعرفة ، بدون تاريخ.
- الصابوني. صفوة التفاسير (٣ أجزاء). القاهرة ، دار الصابوني للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع ، بدون تاريخ.
- القرطبي. الجامع لأحكام القرآن (١١ جزءاً). بيروت ، دار الفكر للطباعة والنشر ، ١٩٩٩.
- القشيري. لطائف الإشارات. تفسير صوفي كامل للقرآن الكريم (٣ أجزاء). القاهرة ، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، ٢٠٠٠.
- سيد قطب. في ظلال القرآن (٦ أجزاء). بيروت ، دار الشروق ، ١٩٨٧.
- شوقي ضيف. الوجيز في تفسير القرآن الكريم. القاهرة ، دار المعارف ، ١٩٩٤.

- Quine, W. V. "Afterthoughts on Metaphor: A Postscript on Metaphor".
Critical Inquiry Vol. V (Autumn 1978): 161-162.
- Rushdy, Naglaa: "Methods of Rendering the Story of Moses in the Holy Qur'an: An Analysis of Three Translations". Unpublished PH.D Thesis. Cairo: Cairo University, 1997.
- Schuon, Firthjof. "Understanding the Qur'an". *Islamic Quarterly*. Vol. III, (1964) : 12-20.
- Shamaa, Najah. "A Linguistic Analysis of Some Problems of Arabic to English Translation". Unpublished PH.D Thesis. Oxford: Linacre College, 1978.
- Tawfik, Khaled M. "The Rendering of a Selected Sample of Abstract Nouns and Their Root-Cognates in Three Major Translations of the Qur'an: A Semantic Study". Unpublished M.A Thesis. Cairo: Cairo University, 1999.
- — — , "A Study of the Translation of Figurative Language in the Qur'an with Reference to Arberry, Dawood, Ghali and Yusuf Ali". Unpublished PH.D Thesis. Cairo: Cairo University, 2003.
- Tracy, David. "Metaphor and Religion: The Test Case of Christian Texts".
Critical Inquiry Vol. V (Autumn 1978) : 91-106

-
- Cruse, D. A. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- El Shiekh, Ahmad. "A Study of Two Major Translations of the Holy Koran (The Last Section): A Linguistic Approach". Unpublished PH.D Thesis. Alexandria: Alexandria University, 1990.
- El-Tayeb, Kadijja Karrar. "Principles and Problems of Translation of Scriptures: The Case of the Qur'an". Michigan: Temple University, 1985.
- Hatim, B. and I. Mason. *Discourse and the Translator*. Singapore: Longman, 1993.
- Hatim, B. *English-Arabic/Arabic-English Translation: A Practical Guide*. London: Saqi Books, 1997.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Semantics and the Koran*. U.S.A: AYER Company Publishers Inc, 1987.
- Mish, Frederick C, ed. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster INC., Publishers, 1991.
- Newmark, Peter. *Approaches to Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International, 1988.
- Nord, Christiane. *Translating As a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997.

English Works Cited

- Abdul-Raof, Hussein. *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*. Leeds: Curzon Press, 2001.
- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Beirut: Dar Al Arabia, Undated.
- Arberry, Arthur J. *The Koran Interpreted*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Baker, Mona. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Booth, Wayne C. "Metaphor As Rhetoric: The Problem of Evaluation". *Critical Inquiry* Vol. V (Autumn 1978): 49-72.
- Boullata, Issa J. *The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'an: F'jaz and Related Topics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Brown, Lesley, ed. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Carter, Ronald and Michael McCarthy. *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London and New York: Longman, 1991.
- Cragg, Kenneth. *Readings in the Qur'an*. London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1988.

A Critical Reading of Arberry's

behaviour" (*The New Shorter Oxford*, Vol. I: 1380). Thus "insolence" has nothing to do with exceeding limits or bounds in wrong-doing.

Comparing Arberry's translation with another like Abdullah Yusuf Ali's, who does not adopt the strategy of consistency like Arberry, will drive the whole idea home:

Ali's Translation:

"God will throw back their mockery on them and give them rope in their trespasses so they will wander like blind ones (to and for)".

Ali's choice seems to be closer to the original because its connotations correspond to the meaning of طغيان. *The New Shorter Oxford* defines "trespass" as "a violation of moral or social ethics; transgression; esp: sin" (Vol. II: 3385). That is to say, the definition refers to transgression, exceeding or transgressing bounds, in sinning or violating morals or ethics and consequently corresponds to the dictionary meaning of طغيان.

Arberry use “insolent” (in other verses) to render طفسى and “insolence” to render طفيان.

The following verse reveals how consistency may lead him to mistranslation:

(البقرة : 15) "الله يستهزئ بهم ويمدهم في طغيانهم يعمهون"

Arberry's Translation:

“God shall mock them, and shall lead them on blindly wandering in their insolence”

The verse talks about the hypocrites who mock believers. Here, Allah tells them in a tone of warning and reproach that they (the hypocrites) are the object of mockery. In addition to this, what is so noticeable about طفيانهم is that whenever this word occurs in the Qur'an (five times), it is to be followed by the verb يعمهون literally “to get confused” (see Ibn Manzour). What can be inferred from this collocation is that طفيانهم which means “exceeding limits in wrong-doing” causes confusion and consequently loss of the right path: the path that leads to God and truth. In the above verse, طفيان carries its dictionary meaning (see Dief, Ibn Kathir and Az-Zamakhshari). “Insolence”, Arberry's choice, as mentioned before, is not an appropriate rendering of طفيان because it refers to “arrogant or overbearing conduct or disposition” and “impertinently insulting

Arberry in many Qur'anic verses makes the mistake of choosing one equivalent of a lexical item and uses it all the time regardless of the contextual meaning of the word. The following table of the translation of طغيان reveals the above fact:

Translation	Sura / Verse
Insolence	"وليزيدن كثيراً منهم ما أنزل إليك طغياناً وكفراً" (المائدة : 64)
Insolence	"وليزيدن كثيراً منهم ما أنزل إليك من ربك طغياناً وكفراً" (المائدة : 68)
Insolence	"ونخوفهم فما يزيدهم إلا طغياناً كبيراً" (الإسراء : 60)
Insolence	"فخشينا أن يرهقهما طغياناً وكفراً" (الكهف : 80)
Insolence	"الله يستهزئ بهم ويمدهم في طغيانهم يعمهون" (البقرة : 15)
Insolence	"ونذرهم في طغيانهم يعمهون" (الأنعام : 110)
Insolence	"من يضل الله فلا هادى له ويذرهم في طغيانهم يعمهون" (الأعراف : 186)
Insolence	"فئذ الذين لا يرجون لقاءنا في طغيانهم يعمهون" (يونس : 11)
Insolence	"ولو رحمتناهم وكشفنا ما بهم من ضر للجوا في طغيانهم يعمهون" (المؤمنون : 75)

the above table indicates the two following facts:

- 1- Arberry adopts consistency all the time: he opts for the noun "insolence" as a translation of طغيان to keep the word-class of the original.
- 2- Arberry opts for equivalent root-cognate (i.e. words belong to the same stem or root) to keep the spirit of the original. For clarity,

question and its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations with the other words within the same context. The translator, therefore, should realize that there are many factors determining the meaning of the word: depending on the literal, dictionary meaning of the word as the only factor to opt for a translation is a wrong strategy, usually resulting in inappropriate and inaccurate translation choices. This, in turn, will result in unnecessary simplification, limitation of meaning and translation loss. Baker has the same point of view:

The choice of a suitable equivalent in a given context depends on a wide variety of factors. Some of these factors may be strictly linguistic ... other factors may be extra-linguistic. It is virtually impossible to offer absolute guidelines for dealing with the various types of non-equivalence which exist among languages. (17)

In his analysis of the semantics of the Qur'an, Toshihiko Izutsu (1987) uses different terminology to refer to the same concepts: he differentiates between two types of meaning: 'basic' and 'relational'. Basic meaning refers to "the conceptual content of the word even if we take the word out of its Koranic context" (19). This means that the basic meaning of a word "is something inherent in the word itself which it carries with it whenever it goes" (ibid: 20). On the other hand, relational meaning indicates the new connotations that a word acquires due to its relations with the other words and in the case of figurative use. In other words, the word, "once introduced into a particular system and given a certain definite position in it, acquires a lot of semantic elements arising out of this particular situation, and also out of the various relations it is made to bear to other major concepts of that system" (ibid: 19)

that does not communicate the different facets of زكاة in Islam. This is why the English language, for example, has “almshouse” which is “a house founded by charity for the reception or support of the poor” (ibid: 58). The solution in such cases in my point of view is to resort to transliteration plus explaining the meaning of the transliterated term in a footnote and this undoubtedly emphasizes again the importance of footnotes in the translation of the Holy Qur'an. Adopting transliteration has two advantages in my point of view: firstly, it gives the translator the chance to elaborate the problematic term in question in the footnotes. Secondly, it helps to introduce many Islam-bound terms, concepts, values ... etc with their Arabic pronunciation to the English language. Kenneth Cragg (1988) supports the same point of view: “a few words that are rare or technical may also be left in their Arabic form ... consulting a glossary in these cases – and in general – will be more satisfactory than a paraphrase which breaks the flow of Qur'anic diction or logic” (56), otherwise the translation will be “a de-Arabicing of the Qur'an. The result will be a poor substitute for the original” (ibid: 47). Based on the above facts, one can conclude that “transliteration with the necessary explanation in footnotes might seem an attractive alternative” (El-Tayeb: 300).

VI- Consistency As a Wrong Strategy:

Consistency in translation studies refers to some translators' tendency to opt for one translation choice all the time, regardless of the new meanings and connotations the lexical item in question may acquire. The translator in such cases ignores the contextual meaning of the word in

who adopt such strategies, resort to the technique of footnotes to explain the problematic term or image in question. In the case of the Qur'an, the text "definitely commits the translator, whose only outlet for commentary is then either the footnote or the translator's introduction" (Hatim and Mason: 2). This highlights the importance of footnotes, in case of adopting transliteration as a strategy, to bridge or fill in the semantic gap created by such a strategy. Arberry avoids adopting transliteration even when urgently needed e.g. in the case of translating Islam-bound terms, culture-specific concepts ... etc. Verse No. 43 in sura *Al Baqara*, The Cow, is a good example:

"وأقيموا الصلاة وآتوا الزكاة واركعوا مع الراكعين"

Arberry's Translation:

"And perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and bow with those that bow"

It is clear that Arberry prefers to translate زكاة as "alms". *The New Shorter Oxford* defines alms as "charitable relief of the poor orig. and esp. as a religious duty ... a charitable donation, pl. things given in charity" (Vol. I: 58). This dictionary definition emphasizes that "alms", although a good and commendable concept, does not reveal the meaning of زكاة with its different connotations and implications. "Alms" as a concept is so close to the meaning of صدقة. In other words, "alms" is rather a Christian concept

custom of the Arabian Peninsula. The translators have to be careful in rendering it so that they keep the cultural flavour of the text.

A single word which consists of a single morpheme can sometimes express a more complex set of meanings than a whole sentence. Languages automatically develop very concise forms for referring to complex concepts ... we do not usually realize how semantically complex a word is until we have to translate it into a language which does not have an equivalent for it. (Baker: 22)

Arberry's literal translation of the above culture-specific image seems weird and odd. In other words, Arberrry's choices are literal and semantic: he renders the image literally "be as my mother's back" in two places in sura *Al Mujadalah* while in sura *Al Ahzab* he mingles a communicative choice divorce (which would have been adequate and appropriate per se) with a semantic one "divorce saying 'Be as my mother's back' ". In spite of his literal semantic translation, he does not provide the reader with a footnote to clarify the culture-bound expression "be as my mother's back". It can be said that his choices neither achieve the skopos (purpose) of his translation, nor fulfil the requirement of intertextual coherence. He fails to convey or communicate this cultureme (a cultural phenomenon or concept peculiar to a certain society), '*Zihar*'.

V- Ignoring Transliteration Even When Necessary:

Some of the translators resort to transliteration to overcome the problem of having no equivalent in the target language especially in the case of culture-specific or language-bound images or terms. The translators,

"الظهار" Az-Zihar, is a pre-Islamic divorce and continued till the early days of Islam. The noun "Zihar" is derived from an utterance used by men at that time to divorce their wives, that is, "you are to me like the back of my mother", an image (combining a simile and a synecdoche) indicating divorce. Only the verb is used in the Qur'an (يظاهرون - تظاهرون) in three contexts, two of them is sura *Al Mujadalah*, The Dispute, and the third in sura *Al Ahzab*, The Confederates. This sura narrates the story of Zihar and how it is forbidden by God. Ibn Manzour's definition of Zihar reveals its origin:

والظهار من النساء ، وظاهر الرجل امرأته ، ومنها ، مظاهرة وظهاراً إذا قال : هي علي كظهر ذي رحم ، وقد تظاهر منها وتظاهر ، وظهر من امرأته تظهيراً كله بمعنى. وقوله عز وجل: (والذين يظاهرون من نسائهم) ؛ قرىء: يظاهرون ، وقرىء: يظهرون ، والأصل يتظاهرون ، والمعنى واحد ، وهو أن يقول الرجل لامرأته: أنت علي كظهر أمي. وكانت العرب تطلق نساءها في الجاهلية بهذه الكلمة ، وكان الظهار في الجاهلية طلاقاً فلما جاء الإسلام فهو عنه وأوجب الكفارة على من ظاهر امرأته. (Vo. VIII: 280)

The custom in question is unique to the Arabian Peninsula: it is a form of divorce, but different in articulation. The translators' problem consists not only in translating the image in question, but showing how this form of divorce is different from the common form of divorce. That is to say, the translators have to understand that "since situations are embedded in cultures, any evaluation of a particular situation, of its verbalized and non-verbalized elements, depends on the status it has in a particular culture system" (Nord: 11). Thus, a single word like Zihar expresses a whole

the neck and stretching it are two idiomatic expressions indicating niggardliness and spendthriftiness, but the target reader who may belong to a different culture may be baffled or confused by such a literal translation. Thus, Arberry, realizing the conflict between form (figure of speech) and content (the meaning of the image), should give content the upper hand and thus opt for a communicative choice conveying the meaning of the image in question. In other words, "the issue here is not one of substituting Arabic lexical items with Arabic or foreign equivalents, but one of producing an equivalently efficacious, effective and dynamic effect" (El-Tayeb: 32).

The problem becomes harder when Arberry faces a culture-specific image, that is, a figure of speech whose natural habitat is Arabic. That is to say, the Qur'an "abounds with concepts and images which are peculiar to that (Arab) society. Such concepts are often expressed in single words, which as may be expected have no English equivalents" (Shamaa: 260). Such concepts and images represent a quicksand area to all the translators of the Qur'an including Arberry. Verses No. 2 and 3 in Sura *Al-Mujadalah*, The Disputer, reveals this problematic area:

"الذين يظاهرون منكم من نسائهم ما هن أمهاتهم ... والذين يظاهرون من نسائهم ثم يعودون لما قالوا ..."

Arberry's Translation:

"Those of you who say, regarding their wives, 'Be as my mother's back', they are not truly their mothers ... And those who say, regarding their wives, 'Be as my mother's back', and then retract what they have said ..."

The Qur'anic style imparts vividness, immediacy, and dynamism to its images so that abstract ideas take on shape or movement; psychological states become perceptible tableaux or spectacles; events and scenes, and stories turn into actual and dramatic appearances; human types are fleshed out as present and living beings; and human nature becomes embodied and visible. (15)

Sometimes Arberry fails to convey the meaning of Qur'anic metaphor due to his insistence on adopting the literal, semantic approach. That is to say, Arberry prefers to translate metaphor, in most cases, literally out of faithfulness to the original at the expense of the degree of interaction and communication between the Qur'an and its target reader who might not understand the literal translation provided, and this therefore negatively affects the text-reader relationship. Verse No. 29 in Sura *Al Isra'*, Night Journey:

"ولا تجعل يدك مغلولة إلى عنقك ولا تبسطها كل البسط فتقعد ملوماً محسوراً"

Arberry's Translation:

“And keep not thy hand chained to thy neck, nor outspread it widespread altogether, or thou wilt sit reproached and denuded”

The upshot of this metonymy is simply a piece of advice given by Allah to believers, through Prophet Mohammad, to avoid being niggards or spendthrifts. It is clear that Arberry renders the whole image literally, although the target reader might not understand the significance of tying the hand to the neck or stretching. In the Arabian Peninsula, tying the hand to

and promise of the human situation and prescribe certain remedies for that situation. (Tracy: 91)

This means that figures of speech are not simply ornamental substitutes for literal expressions: they are usually used when they express more than the literal meaning of words can do, or to express an abstraction in a comprehensible way. In other words, figurative language is not purely a decorative substitution or rhetorical models for literal and ideational meaning. It (figurative language) is productive of meaning within a metaphorical framework that addresses both the heart and mind of the readers as metaphor creates a being-in-the-world atmosphere that increases the emotional response of the reader and increases the effect of the illocutionary force.

As for the Qur'an, the language of the Qur'an has always been considered the ideal example of classical Arabic: its rhetorical perfection and stylistic beauty make Qur'anic Arabic the example that poets, writers, authors – only – aspire to imitate. Not only that, anyone who aspires to master Arabic, whether written or spoken, has to memorize verses and suras of the Qur'an. Such memorization polishes his/her language and increases his/her tact and eloquence. Part of the beauty of Qur'an consists in its figurative language which the reader must master to fully understand the Qur'an and enjoy its rhetorical excellence.

Figurative language adds to the stylistic beauty of the Qur'an and increases the degree of interaction and communication between the Qur'an and its readers or listeners due to its vividness and subtlety. Issa . J. Boullata (1988) comments on the role of figurative language in the Qur'an:

'evildoing', (Arberry's choices). Naglaa Rushdy (1997) sums up this problem:

The Translator might, in good faith, produce an unnatural, incomprehensible, and hence ineffective rendering thinking he is being faithful to the original order of the verse. This might seriously damage the acceptability of the target text in its receiving culture and cause loss of interaction with the target reader. (26)

IV- Failing to Communicate Some Figures of Speech:

As mentioned before, the Holy Qur'an, apart from being the Sacred Book of Muslims, is a literary work of universal significance. This simply means that the Qur'an abounds in literary aspects that address the soul and mind of the reader regardless of his/her cultural, linguistic or ideological background.

Figurative language forms an integral part of religious messages from the logos theologies of Philo and Origen to Islam, the last and final religion (see Tracy: 91). This means that "every theology entails a metaphor for man's relation to God" (Booth: 68). This highlights the importance of figures of speech to function as a bridge between heavenly message and human beings. W.V. Quine (1978) believes that "religion, or much of it, is evidently involved in metaphor for good" (161).

That all major religions are grounded in certain root metaphors has become a commonplace in modern religious studies. In a particular religion root metaphors form a cluster or network in which certain sustained metaphors both organize subsidiary metaphors and diffuse new ones. These networks describe the enigma

Arberry's Translation:

“Those who believe, and have not confounded their belief with evildoing – to them belongs the true security; they are rightly guided”.

It is clear that Arberry is satisfied to translate ظلم as “evildoing”, he prefers, for fear of not being faithful to the original, to translate the word literally in spite of the inaccuracy and inappropriateness of his choice when compared with the interpretations offered by authorized exegeses. For clarity, Al-Qurtuby, Es-Sabony, Ibn Kathir, Qutub, Dief and Ez-Zamakhshary agree that "ظلم" here means شرك and prophet Mohammad himself, when asked by his Companions about the meaning of ظلم in the above verse, said that it means شرك and he recited another verse from the Qur'an that confirms his interpretation, namely, verse No. 13 in sura *Luqman*:

"يا بني لا تشرك بالله إن الشرك لظلم عظيم"

It is also important to mention that the Prophet's Companions, when this verse was revealed, thought that the word ظلم here is literally used, but the Prophet's interpretation cleared the meaning of the verse. As a shorthand, it can be said that Arberry's faithfulness to the original text may in some cases lead him to the option of literal translation which usually produces inappropriate translation that does not match the over-all meaning of the verse, not does it win the target reader's approval. For example, in the above verse, the target reader, after reading the translation, may ask about the relationship between faith or belief (the subject matter of the verse) with

The above translation shows that Arberry prefers to literally translate قلب as heart, although his choice does not correspond to the interpretations offered by authorized exegeses: Al-Qurtuby and Es-Sabony interpret it as "عقل يتدبر به", Ibn Kathir as "لب يعى به" and Deif and El-Qushiri as "عقل". In contrast to him, a translator like Abullah Yusuf Ali realizes the contextual meaning of قلب in the above verse and therefore opts for a communicative translation:

Ali's Translation:

“Verily in this is a message for any that has a heart and understanding”.

This is why Basil Hatim (1997) points out the difference between both approaches:

Literal translation is a rendering which preserves surface aspects of the message, both semantically and syntactically, adhering closely to source-text mode of expression. Free translation, on the other hand, modifies surface expression and keeps intact only deeper levels of meaning. The choice of method is determined by text properties related to text type, purpose of meaning ... etc. (230-231)

Another example that supports the some fact is verse No. 28 in Sura *Al An'am*, The Cattle:

"الذين آمنوا ولم يلبسوا إيمانهم بظلم أولئك هم الأمن وهم مهتدون"

against an offender” (484). These two definitions seem to correspond to the meaning of اعف offered by Al-Asfahani and Ibn Manzour. This means that “forgive” is not an appropriate translation for اصفح because الصفح , as stated by Al-Asfahani, is more inclusive than العفو because الصفح includes all the connotations and the semantic components of العفو plus the fact that it is not accompanied by blame i.e. the absence of blame is the idiosyncratic sense of الصفح . In this respect, it can be said that “pardon” is an appropriate translation for اصفح. *The New Shorter Oxford* defines “pardon” as “refrain from exacting the due penalty for an offender, pass over (an offence or offender) without punishment or blame” (Vol. II: 2100). Thus “blame” is the key word that distinguishes الصفح. This simply means that the subtle meaning conveyed by اصفح seems to be communicated by “pardon”. This obviously proves the inaccuracy of Arberry's choices.

III- Ignoring Communicative Translation

One of the defects in Arberry's translation is that he sometimes prefers literal to communicative (free) translation even if it is inappropriate and inaccurate. That is to say, Arberry prefers the semantic (i.e. literal) approach even if it may lead to misconceptions or misunderstanding. Verse No. 37 in Sura *Qaf* is a good example:

"إن في ذلك لذكرى لمن كان له قلب"

Arberry's Translation:

“Surely in that there is a reminder to him who has a heart”

Arberry's Translation:

“Yet pardon them, and forgive: surely God loves the good-doers”

Al-Asfahani defines *يعفو* as "التجالي عن الذنب" and Ibn Manzour as "التجاوز عن الذنب" and even adds "قد يعفو الإنسان ولا يصفح". Al-Asfahani defines *يصفح* as "ترك الترتيب وهو أبلغ من العفو". These definitions simply mean that the difference between *يعفو* and *يصفح* is that *يصفح* is superior to *يعفو* as it is not accompanied with blame or rebuke. This slight minute difference is stressed in more than one place in the Qur'an. For example, when Yusuf (Joseph), peace be upon him, pardons his brothers at the end of sura Yusuf, he says:

"قال لا تريب عليكم اليوم"
(يوسف: 92)

Yusuf as one of Allah's Prophets, refuses to even blame or scold his brothers and what Yusuf actually did is *صفح* and not *عفو*. The same semantic difference is clear in the following verse:

"وليعفوا وليصفحوا ألا تحبون أن يغفر الله لكم"
(النور: 22)

Allah starts with *يعفو* because it is a lower degree than *يصفح*, a more elevated and superior stage. Arberry's translation mentioned above reveals that Arberry is not aware of the difference between *يعفو* and *يصفح*: the verb “forgive” is offered as an appropriate translation for *اصفح* by Arberry. In *The New Shorter Oxford*, “forgive” is defined as “pardon an offence or an offender, give up resentment against a person” (Vol. I: 1055). In *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, it is defined as “to cease to feel resentment

A Critical Reading of Arberry's

Din Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan provide their translations with such vital tools.

II- Semi-synonymous Words As a Problematic Area:

Synonyms "are lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of 'central' semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as 'minor' or 'peripheral' traits" (Cruse: 265). Synonymy is regarded as one of the basic congruence relations in the Holy Qur'an. But synonymy is not as simple as it appears because if there is something like "a scale of synonymity" as Cruse suggests (268), there are to be many degrees between synonymy and non-synonymy. Synonymy as a semantic, problematic area made many linguists conclude that "true synonymy exists in theory only, but not in practice because each word is unique and special" (Tawfik, Abstract Nouns: 53). Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy (1991) believe that "most linguists agree ... that true synonymy (i.e. 100% interchangeability) is very rare" (28) and that "apparent synonyms do not always collocate identically" (ibid: 29).

The Qur'an abounds in hundreds of semi-synonymous words that seem on the surface to be identical, but there may be slight, minute differences that may be crucial in meaning. Arberry is sometimes unable to realize such minute differences and therefore produces inaccurate translation. A good example is the translation of *يعفو* and *يصفح* in verse No. 13 in sura *Al Ma'ida*, The Table:

"فاعف عنهم واصفح إن الله يحب المحسنين"

- 6- Arberry is so keen in his translation of most of the verses to choose lofty, literary style to match, as much as he can, the rhetorical perfection and stylistic grandeur of the Qur'an "I have striven to devise rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings in correspondence with what the Arabic presents, paragraphing the grouped sequences as they seem to form original units of revelation" (introduction: X).

Negative Aspects in Arberry's Translation:

I- Avoiding footnotes and glosses:

Footnotes, endnotes and glosses are indispensable translational tools in rendering a rhetorically-rich book like the Holy Qur'an. Such tools are important to bridge the gap between the Qur'an, with the culture, language and creed it represents, and the target reader who may belong to a totally different culture. Peter Newmark (1988) believes that "if the SL text is entirely bound up with the culture of the SL community ... the translator is entitled to, supplementary information and explanation" (21). The Qur'an abounds in culture-specific terms e.g. *ظهار* , problematic words e.g. *مضفة* , Islamic terms *زكاة* , ... etc that seem alien or weird to the target reader. Footnotes, endnotes and glosses are essential to lessen such alienness and weirdness. Therefore, "a Qur'anic translation without footnotes can lead to serious misconceptions and misunderstandings" (Abdul-Raof: 142). In spite of this, Arberry points out that "footnotes and glosses have been deliberately avoided" (introduction: XII). Unlike him, other translators like Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Mohammad Mahmud Ghali, Muhammad Taqui-ud-

not suit the Qur'an which, with all the legislations, rules and rituals it conveys, presents a totally different picture of the world. However, it should be pointed out that "the major merit of this translation lies in Arberry's ability to reproduce a stylistic effect on the readers of his translation equivalent to that produced by the original text" (El Shiekh: 251).

- 5- Arberry deeply appreciates the Holy Qur'an as a literary book as well. He points out that "I have been at pains to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms which- apart from the message itself – constitute the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind" (introduction: X). The beautiful, matchless style of the Qur'an makes him even confused to classify it: he believes that "the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both" (ibid: X). He means to say that Qur'anic language is "a stand-alone entity": it has its own realm which cannot be compared with any other style. Thus a translation of the Qur'an is simply an attempt "to measure the ocean of prophetic eloquence with the thimble of pedestrian analysis" (ibid: XI). This emphasizes the fact that a translation, a human work, can never be equated with the Holy Qur'an, the Word of Allah.

This magic (of the Qur'an) is closely bound up with the very language of the Revelation, namely, Arabic which accounts for the canonical illegitimacy and ritual ineffectiveness of translations. A language is sacred when God has spoken it, and for God to speak it, it must have certain characteristics which are not to be found in any degenerate language. (Schuon: 16)

Positive Aspects in Arberry's Translation:

Arberry's translation, since its first publication in 1955, has become one of the most common ones in the Muslim world due to the positive aspects it abounds with. These positive aspects include the following:

- 1- Arberry reveals great respect for the Qur'an as a Holy Book containing eternal human values, principles and ideals, plus being a matchless book of legislation. This is why, he concludes that his translation is simply an attempt "to produce something which might be accepted as echoing, however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran" (introduction: X).
- 2- Arberry, unlike a translator like Rodwell for example, follows the traditional (i.e. not chronological) order of suras and therefore not breaking one of the old established and accepted rules among Muslims.
- 3- Arberry displays a high level of objectivity throughout his translation although he is not a Muslim, a Christian. Unlike many of his predecessors, his translation is devoid of deliberate distortions or religious bias. All the mistakes or slips made by Arberry can be attributed to following the wrong translation strategy.
- 4- Arberry's elegant and distinctive style adds beauty to his translation. In his introduction, he points out that he has "tried to compose clear and unmannered English, avoiding the Biblical style favoured by some of my predecessors" (introduction: XII). This is an important point because the style used in the Bible, with all due respect, might

functional equivalents and cultural substitutes that would help to convey, maximally, the message of the source text and bridge the gap between the source text and the target reader, especially if they belong to two completely different cultural backgrounds (Tawfik, *Figurative Language*: 124, 125).

Arberry and his Translation:

In 1955, A. J. Arberry published his translation entitled *The Koran Interpreted*. Arberry was born on 12th of May 1905 at Trafton, Portsmouth, England. He graduated from Pembroke College in 1929. In 1932, he came to Cairo where he worked as the Head of the Department of Classics at Cairo University. During his stay in Cairo, he acquired first-hand information of Islam and Muslims. In 1936, he was awarded a D. Litt by Cambridge University. He also taught Persian at the University of London in 1944 and Arabic in 1946. In 1947, he joined Cambridge to fill Sir Thomas Adam's chair of Arabic. In 1969, he passed away at the age of 64. During his lifetime, he was known for his mastery of Arabic and deep interest in both Islamic and Qur'anic studies.

In the introduction to his translation, Arberry indicates Muslims' belief that the Qur'an is "untranslatable, a miracle of speech which it would be blasphemous to attempt to imitate" (IX). He also points out that the aim of his translation is "to improve on the performance of my predecessors and to produce something which might be accepted as echoing however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran" (ibid: X).

A Critical Reading of Arberry's Translation of the Qur'an

Dr. Khaled Mahmoud Tawfik
English Department, Faculty of Arts
Cairo University

Introduction:

Translating holy books in general and the Holy Qur'an in particular represent a hard task to the translator who, if committing mistakes whether intentional or not, will never be forgiven by those who believe in that holy book. In such a case, the translator plays a multi-dimensional role: s/he acts as a mediator, a communicator and a gap-bridger between the Holy Writ and the target reader. What intensifies the difficulty of his/her task is the discrepancy between the holy text and the target reader, especially if both of them (the Holy Writ and the target reader) belong to two different religions, cultures, ideologies, philosophical orientations ... etc. In this case,

The translator's job is not confined to the search for semantic equivalents, but s/he should try to find