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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Miraculous Nature of the Qura'n Defies Imitability and hence Translatability

**Dr. Fuzi El Mallah**

Lecturer, Derna University, Derna, Libya

**Corresponding Author:** Dr. Fuzi El Mallah, **E-mail:** [felm55@yahoo.com](mailto:felm55@yahoo.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

The Quran in Arabic is unmatched and irreplaceable due to cross-cultural gaps as well as linguistic differences between the Arabic language, in which the original Quranic text is expressed, and some European languages into which the Quran is translated. It is expected, for these reasons, that there will be a considerable loss and hence possible misunderstanding of the main message of the Quran. Nevertheless, translation of the Quran into languages other than Arabic is consensually appreciated by the majority of Muslim scholars as translations are indispensable for those who want to know about the basic rules of Islam, whether they are Muslims or not. This paper will therefore discuss issues related to some aspects of Qur'an translations by analysing selective translated Qur'anic verses that render the miraculous aspects of Quranic text, particularly those of linguistic and scientific nature. It will review some Quranic verses and compare their different English translations, showing, where possible, the general factors governing the systematic mechanism that helps to understand the miraculous nature of the original Quran. The polysemous nature of Quranic terms, the comprehensiveness, and the constantly used techniques of generalization make Qura'nic text resistant to any deficiency that might be caused by the passage of time. The generality of wording is one of the key elements for being time-resistant, so any new sense that occurs in the future should be included in the translation rather than excluded.

**KEYWORDS**

Translation, The Quran, Culture, Miraculous aspects, and text typology

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**1. Introduction**

There is a big difference between the Arabic language of a human being and the Arabic language of Allah. Hassan Mustapha (2001: 200-201 cited in Baker's *encyclopedia of translation studies*) states that 'there is Arabic and there is Quranic Arabic. So much so that the book has 'senses' that are exclusive to Quranic-Arabic'. Saheeh (1997:vi) stresses a similar view though it is peculiar to the names and attributes of Allah, yet it is true to the Quranic text in general, 'their translation is surely a logical impossibility, for even in Arabic they cannot represent more than an approximation limited by human understanding'.

Human work will never be perfect, and there is always the possibility of improvement as long as there is someone who is interested in doing so. The translation is no exception. Besides their human imperfections, translation works also need to be improved and updated as a result of the progress of time. This is very true for the rendering of the Quran into other languages since temporal evolution should supposedly lead to better rendering due to the development of scientific discoveries as well as cultural convenience, particularly when dealing with a very sensitive and authoritative text such as the Quran. Lefevere (1992:50) considers the texts that society is founded on to be of a sophisticated nature that acquires a cultural prestige. He states:

The greater that prestige, the more "grammatical and logical" the translation is likely to be, especially in the case of texts regarded as the "foundation texts" of a certain type of society: the Bible, the Quran, and *The Communist Manifesto*.

It is in the essence of the prophets' mission that they have to be supported by miracles so that they can convince their people and prove truly that they are sent by God. These miracles usually match the nature of those people in the fields that were popular with

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the people of that period of time. Qadhi (1999: 267) aptly argues that the miracles that were given to the prophets were chosen so that they would have the greatest impact on that particular nation as a miracle must involve something in which people excel yet is beyond their abilities. Thus, since the people of the time of the Prophet Moses excelled in the art of sorcery and magic, the miracles that were given to Moses were, in turn, of a similar type, except being genuine, and his miracles defeated their magic. Likewise, the people at the time of the Prophet Jesus excelled all other nations in the art of healing and medicine, but their knowledge could not raise the dead. By a word or a mere touch, the Prophet Jesus could raise the dead. His miracles defeated everything they knew and experienced about medicine. (see also Robinson 1996: 28). All these miracles which previous prophets performed were with Allah's permission. For instance, the Qur'an narrates how Moses' staff turns into a serpent (07:107) and how Jesus created birds from clay, healed the blind, and raised the dead (03:49). It seems to imply, however, that although Muhammad's contemporaries were clamoring for signs of this sort, they were not forthcoming. Therefore, the prophet's response to all these appeals is that these sorts of signs are only sent down with the permission of Allah. See, for example, the Quranic verse (13:38).

Still, these miracles can be witnessed only by the people of that era. The prophet Muhammad performed similar numerous concrete miracles. Some of them are even mentioned in the Qur'an, like the splitting of the moon and his mysterious journey to Jerusalem and back in the space of a single night (Robinson ibid:28). There also exist detailed narrations concerning some of His other miracles, such as the increase of an inadequate amount of food to a very large quantity; the speaking of the stones, animals, and trees to him and the sprouting of water from his hands when his companions were short of it. However, none of these miracles were permanent- they occurred in front of specific people at specific times and specific places (Qadhi 1999: 267).

These miracles could only be understood by the eyewitness and only accepted and acknowledged by the people who belonged to that era. Therefore, in this regard, the nature of the prophet Muhammad's miracle does not differ from those of the previous prophets. No matter how impressive the miracles of the previous prophets were as well as Prophet Muhammad's, the fact remains that these miracles had a greater impact on those who actually witnessed them. They were still time-specific and were limited to the age of their time. Later generations who merely read or hear about them need more concrete evidence to believe them.

Since the prophet Muhammad is the last of all the prophets who have been sent to all mankind, then his message is for all generations at all times, and consequently, his miracle has, therefore, to be endless and everlasting. So, the only miracle which was vouchsafed was the Qur'an itself. The beauty and the linguistic power of the Quran are that it removes the constraints of time and place upon the miracle- the Quran is considered to be an eternal miracle for all new generations to see and appreciate, no matter where they live or when they were born. One aspect that makes the Qura'nic miracles timeless is that they are renewable. At the time of Muhammad, the people were mastering the Arabic language, as the Arabs, during that time, had reached the peak of eloquence, and this was their most prized art; poetry was what they valued the most. Due to this pride in the spoken word that was prevalent among the Arabs of that time, the miracle that was given to the prophet Muhammad was of a similar nature. Thus his miracle came as a masterpiece of Arabic style and included a phenomenally high level of *linguistic miracles*. Allah revealed the Quran in the Arabic language that was so emotive and produced in such an elegant linguistic style that the Arabs would appreciate its inhuman eloquence and would clearly see it as a miracle from their creator. For that reason, It goes without saying that the Qura'n itself is the clearest and most powerful miracle for being self-evident. It is not in need of any external miracle to prove it since it combines the claim and the proof together. It is, therefore, the inspiration and the miracle in one. Thus, the Qura'n cannot be rivalled as it is inimitable even though its utterances do not go beyond the familiar, standard, normal, and ordinary use of the Arabic Language. Its inimitable quality sets it apart from all other books. Therefore, the unbelievers are challenged to imitate it.

The disbelievers of Mecca claimed they could imitate the Quran (Q 08: 31). Allah, therefore, challenged them to fulfil their claim on five different occasions: (Q 02: 23-24), (Q 10: 38), (Q 11: 13), (Q 17: 88) and (Q 52: 33-34). These five verses mention different quantities to bring forth. Yet, what matters more is the quality of the Quran that must be imitated if the challenge is to be met, rather than the quantity. A prediction is given beforehand regarding the result of this challenge, saying that such attempts would be futile *ولن تفعلوا* and *you will never be able to*. This leads to the question of whether this challenge was meant only for the disbelievers during the Prophet's life-time or whether it is still in operation. The short answer to this is that the challenge is indeed still valid to all succeeding generations, particularly the ancient Arabs who were self-proud of their mastering of language on a poetic and metaphorical level. It must be said that, although Allah issued this challenge to Arabs during the time of the Prophet because of their pride in their skill of poetry and their eloquence, this does not necessarily mean that the challenge was meant for them alone since the Quran is meant to be a perpetual miracle. This challenge is open to all mankind, particularly since verse (Q 17: 88) challenged both mankind and jinn to produce the like of the Quran, even if they have to seek help from one another. The challenge will therefore continue to stand until the day of the resurrection. (For more details about the verses that include this challenge and the implications of their canonical vs. chronological order, see Qadhi, 1999: 261-3). The failure to respond to this challenge and incapability of producing anything similar to it by the disbelievers during the Prophet's time and afterward- despite the challenge proves that the Quran is considered, in the strict sense of the word, inimitable. This fact has important implications

for both the legitimacy and the authorized method of translating it (See Hassan Mustapha's essay cited in Baker's *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 2001: 200).

However, besides its linguistic marvels, the Qura'n also contains some scientific hints, among many other aspects. With the progress of time, science has become the language of this age, and those scientific hints have turned out to be scientific facts and hence *scientific miracles*. The Quran, in terms of its miraculous nature, has many aspects such as linguistic, scientific, the combination of its eloquence, laws, beliefs, predictions, and the effect on its readers, among many others. This miraculous quality of the Quran is due to all of the previous aspects occurring simultaneously, and not by one of them on its own, since all of this is not possible for a human to bring forth unless he was inspired by Allah. In reality, the correct opinion is that all of these aspects, and more, form an integral part of the miraculous nature of the Quran. However, for the immediate purpose of this study, only two are relevant and, therefore, will be focused on, namely, the linguistic and scientific natures of the Quran. These two aspects will be discussed in more detail as they have their own valid impact on verifying the following hypothesis.

### **1.1 The Hypothesis:**

The Quran is one of the most difficult texts to translate due to the complicated nature of its discourse. Analysis of this unique text may produce sub-implications of semantic, morphological, synonymical, and, more importantly, contextual aspects, particularly its strong coherent order, a feature specific to the Quran known in Arabic as *النظم* (literally, order, arrangement, organization, composition) within the same Surah or with other Surahs that characterize the harmony of the whole Qura'nic text of being miraculous in nature. Looking into this can lead to an interesting analytical discussion, and the conclusions can also hold useful generalizations about translation studies in general. Owing to the miraculous nature of the Qura'nic text, this paper will investigate whether or not the miraculous aspects of the Qura'n have been properly conveyed to the targeted reader both on a linguistic and scientific level.

### **2. Literature Review:**

Translation, in the real sense of the word, is neither a mere transfer of the syntactic structure of one language into another nor a rendering of the basic meaning of the words between the two said languages. There are other aspects of language that should be considered in any operation of this kind, such as the specific nature of a given text; concentration on linguistic form, and total or partial neglect of the constructive aspects of the text, in addition to a relative ignorance of textual structures of different text types, may be seen as one of the major causes of translation errors. For the sake of conciseness, the literature review will be viewed thematically. The main theme relevant to this study is text-typology, and therefore, this will be the focus of the literature review.

Newmark (1991: 99) discusses the matter of translating authoritative text such as religious texts and recommends that the translator should follow the original text exactly even in 'pauses between the words' because each word and each pause has its special meaning, which should be kept in translation. He says:

Further, the more authoritative the text, the more form-bound the text, the greater the semantic importance and the richness of each word, the more significant the word order, the syntax, the pause between the words  
...

Furthermore, it is hard to classify the Quran under any text typology as it covers several different types of texts. Besides being religious, it is also a factual text, but one with a highly literal nature and unique linguistic style. It also includes scientific and philosophical facts. As far as text type focus is concerned, Quranic text could also be labelled as authoritative, informative, expressive, argumentative, instructive, or expository. One finds that Quranic text is 'not merely a sacred text of devotion and prayer but is also a virtually reliable guide and a multi-functional text with highly emotional inputs and therefore is hard to classify under one categorised typology, as it can be any of the following:

- An expressive text (of the creative literary type that tends to communicate inner thoughts through narrating a series of events in a creative way).
- An informative text (of the factual variety, but primarily intended to convey information).
- An operative text (with an instructional tone that is fused with persuasion as the text's primary purpose is to seek to persuade).
- A text with Central-rhetorical purpose, situational-focus, and contextual-focus.

The multi-functional nature of the Quranic text is unique in that it involves all of the above. To reiterate, it is generally accepted that, in all cases, such a categorization is necessarily idealized; the various categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., they overlap), and hence all texts are, in a sense, hybrid also, as Hatim and Munday (2004: 185). Also suggest such hybridisation, where a particular text can and often does consist of different 'types', or the fact that texts are essentially multifunctional. However, in a Quranic

context, translation becomes a matter of interpretation, and one who is uninitiated in the ideas, values, and spirit of this culture cannot, through the mere words of a translation, reach and grasp the spirit and the meaning of the text, no matter how good they are. As far as translation strategy is concerned, Hatim and Munday (2004: 73-4) state that a set of constraints emerges, and text types are seen as 'guidelines', which text users instinctively refer to in adopting a given translation strategy with an eye on both sides of the translation divide - the SL and the TL.

One of the *constraints* stated by Lefevere (1992), and also taken later on as a *norm* by Chesterman (2000), that govern the process of translation is to do with the different nature of the source and target languages themselves. Viewing text typology requires, on balance, a differentiation between the nature of the languages of the two texts under scrutiny. One of the differences between them is that English is different from Arabic with regard to its chronological development, as there are stylistic variations between different versions of English. One of the reasons behind such departures between the two texts might be that the language of the target text (i.e., English) is a living language, i.e., it is subject to continual modification. Nida (1964:161) states that live languages are constantly changing. Thus, a translation that is acceptable at a particular point in time is often quite unacceptable at a later time. This is particularly true about cultural modifications as culture is not only of a changeable nature with the passing of time but also rapidly varies from one period to another. The original Arabic text, on the other hand, belongs to a language that has relatively more permanence in this respect. Arabic, regardless of being modern or classical, and by extension, the classical language of the Qur'an, is still enjoyed by modern readers of different linguistic levels. Although the Quran is written in a classic language of highly formal register, it is still understandable by a wide range of different audiences with varying degrees of educational background, from the highly educated to the general lay public.

Translationally speaking, apart from the general conventional aspects of translation, the Quran has its own specific characteristics. The unique nature of Quranic textual discourse makes it also one of the most difficult texts to translate; thus, its discourse-complicated nature should be taken into account in the translation process. Consider also that the original text is written in a certain language, i.e., Arabic, but its readership is the whole of mankind, including non-Arabic readers, and this is evident from some of the Quran's verses, such as (Q 07: 158),

قل يا ايها الناس اني رسول الله اليكم جميعا

Say, [O Muhammad], "O mankind, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you all, (Saheeh)

Newmark (1991: 99) states that the readership is the most persistent contextual factor in writing and in translation, though even more so in speaking. For the translator, the readership is often problematic. The original text is revealed to serve the needs of a large and diversified audience, as it will reach the less-learned reader as well as the highly knowledgeable one, and the Quran has left the door open to everyone to benefit from it as much as s/he comprehends regardless of their educational level. As it is directed to all mankind of a general readership, it employs a combination of stylistic levels that suit every reader. For example, at the time of the Prophet, it addresses both the Bedouins and the townspeople. Thus the form of the Quran is endowed in the right measure with the sedentary softness and sweetness of the townspeople as well as the nomadic roughness and vigour of the Bedouins (Consider the register of the Madani vs. the Makki Surahs).

The Arabic language, and more specifically the Arabic language of the Quran, has its own nature and its own individual characteristics. Therefore, the features that distinguish it from other languages have to be accounted for in any translational process. The motivation for that is to be found in the prevailing interpretation of translation norms and also in the state of poetics and literary development at the time of the translation. The Quran, however, is not intended to be interpreted literally and needs to evolve with time to fit with each new generation's expectations. The Tafsirs (exegetical interpretations) are therefore required to help gain deeper insights into the Quran's message. Nevertheless, the language of the Original Quran has been understood throughout the centuries without difficulty.

The target text, on the other hand, is written in English and is directed at native English speakers within their respective *discourse communities*, though they will be mainly Muslim. It is therefore written to satisfy cultural requirements and to meet the linguistic norms and expectations of that community, i.e., TL audiences, without distancing itself from the SL text that forms the basis for translation. Yet, English-translated versions need to be renewed now and again to meet each generation's requirements of expectations and acceptances. English translation of the Quran should, therefore, be regularly updated to encompass new scientific senses due to modern discoveries.

It is important to mention that the passage of time has its own impact on languages and, therefore, on translation. The re-translation of any work hypothetically can produce a better rendition; as such, re-translation of the same text in several different ways within the same language can lead to richness and open up new meaning shades, but above all, these re-translations need

to comprehend all the intended possible meanings. However, this improvement can be looked at from two different angles. On the one hand, the closer the gap between the dates of publication of both the *original* and its *translation*, the more likely the comprehension of the source text will be (Source-text orientation). On the other hand, the more modern the translation is, the more likely it is to provide a comprehensible version for the contemporary reader (Target-reader orientation). For further discussion regarding the re-translation issue, see (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006: 136-7).

As far as the text under scrutiny, i.e., the Quran, is concerned, Muslims believe that this Holy book is the literal word of God and a final revelation for all humankind, irrespective of race and time, and therefore it is accurately suitable for all eras and within different places. This belief is based on the grounds that the Quran was revealed over fourteen hundred years ago, in a specific place, at a specific time, and amongst specific people. Yet, its rules and laws, when applied in totality, prove to be for the betterment of all mankind, individuals, and society as a whole- irrelevant of the time, place, or people. This is different from man-made laws that will never remain constant but rather change with the passage of time. No matter what aspect of these Qur'anic verses is taken, they can cope with the nature of this age, and the analytical part of this study will illustrate how the Arabic terms of the Quranic text manage to survive the progression of time. Therefore, being the word of God for Muslims, the Quran, like most divine scriptures, permeates the frames of time and place due to the fact that these Holy Scriptures include timelessness and placelessness of traditional knowledge, as exemplified in such books of revelations.

As mentioned earlier, the Qura'n amply challenges all mankind to produce something similar to it. However, the attempt to imitate Qura'nic text fails to bring up something like it due to the unique nature of the Qura'nic style, which has its own exceptional structure and distinctive layout in comparison to other texts. What makes the inimitability of the Quran an enduring challenge? In what sense is the Quran inimitable? What are the aspects of the Quran that make it so miraculous? The answers to these questions will be looked at in the following section, as it will discuss in further detail the delicate and sophisticated nature of the Quran that proves its miraculous inimitable quality. Qadhi (1999: 265-267) mentions the several unique qualities of the Quran as proof of its divine source and unique nature, from which the following points are the most relevant to this study in terms of its linguistic and scientific miraculous nature:

- Despite the prophet's illiteracy, as he was not known for any literary activity, all of a sudden, he started to inform his people of the accurate narration of the stories and the accounts of the previous nations and the prophets of old, despite the fact that the Prophet had no reliable resources for such information - the key point here, however, is that the prophet had lived amongst Quraysh for forty years, and during this time had never studied under any priest or monk, nor had he read any history, such an accurate narration was a very powerful factor that proved that his revelation was not from himself, but from Allah.

- Deep meanings are presented in the Quran as well as consistency and lack of contradiction despite it having been revealed over a period of twenty-three years, in different circumstances, and catering to different problems, yet the language used in the original text is consistent remains on the same level. All this is a clear indication of its divine origin.

- The knowledge of the 'unknown' it contains as well as the predictions it gives that later came true, including the Quran's statements about scientific facts that were unknown at the time of the Prophet. The Holy Quran refers to many matters relating to the nature of the universe, which were unknown to man before, but which subsequently, through evolution and discoveries of science, have been fully confirmed- a field where an untutored mind would have most certainly been lost in wild and contradictory speculations.

Translating a text of a very sensitive nature like the Quran with its multi-text-typology as it is a multi-functional text with highly emotional inputs, it is also good to use for examining different stylistic registers and therefore is hard to be specifically classified under one categorised typology. That might be the reason why the translation of religious texts necessitates the use of all the techniques and methods of the profession. Being made up of outstanding values, religious texts require more attention on the part of the translator, and of course, more than one translational method and the use of an extraordinary variety of translational strategies need to be employed. It is precisely these specific characteristics of the Quranic text, which involve encyclopaedic knowledge, that make the Quran have wider implications, be it translational, cultural, linguistic, or otherwise. The considerable theoretical development in translation studies during the last few decades has supposedly had a comparable impact on practical translation, and it will be interesting to discover whether the such impact has a chronological parallel in different translated versions of the Quran. With all the above skeletal accounts of the specific aspects and the miraculous characteristics of the Quranic text in mind, more emphasis will be given to the most relevant ones, which will be fleshed out through the course of the analytical discussion, in order to highlight the various translational options identified and applied in the targeted English version in approaching the miraculous nature of the Quran.

## 2.1 Data:

The data of this paper contains some selective verses from the Holy Quran that are believed to contain linguistic as well as scientific miracles together with their counterparts collected from different translated versions of the Qura'n, namely those of Sale's, Rodwell's, Asad's, Pickthall's Yusuf Ali's, Saheeh's, Hilali's, Dawood's, Abdulhaqq and Abdul Haleem's.

## 3. Model and Research Methodology:

This study is based on a comparative model contrasting one original text with different translations. However, the methodology that will be applied to the examples given in the analytical parts of this study will have a broad focus, as every single example will be approached both inductively and deductively. That is, where possible, each example will have an introductory explanation based on exegetical work. This introductory explanation of the general meaning of the verse(s) under scrutiny will be followed by:

- The Source Language Text (the original Quran).
- The Target Language Texts (the selected Quran translation) at the *textual level* together with the relevant translator's footnotes at the *para-textual level* about the component verse(s). Here the word(s) under scrutiny at the *lexical level* will usually be highlighted. This will give the reader an excellent chance to see what differences in effect can be discerned when comparing the different translations with the original Arabic concerning both the linguistic and scientific issues.
- A commentary regarding the translators' techniques and translational strategies will be inserted where appropriate during the course of the analytical process.

## 4. Analysis:

Being the eternal miracle of Muhammad, the Qur'an aims for positive communication between Muslims and members of other faiths as it is sent to all mankind. Although Muhammad was an illiterate person, he produced a masterpiece of highly linguistic text that is miraculous in nature. However, the linguistic creativity of the Quran is not the only miracle that was given to the Prophet Muhammad, as the same text includes several other types, scientific and otherwise. The focus of this analytical part will be on both the linguistic as well as the scientific miracles of the Quran and to what extent those miraculous aspects have been conveyed in the translated texts of the Quran. This will be explored thoroughly next.

### 1. The Linguistic (Stylistic) Miraculous Aspects:

The Arabs, by the time of the Prophet Muhammed, had already perfected their language; mastering the Arabic Language was of great importance to the Arabic people and therefore was a very dominant feature of everyday life. They reached an unprecedented level of maturity in the Arabic language, and it was the most eloquent of all nations. The literature they have left provides ample evidence of this. Yet the Qura'n was revealed, defeating their *fasa:hah* (eloquence) and challenging their *balaghah* (rhetoric). As the Quran is the prophet's linguistic miracle, among many others, he was given this miracle as the ultimate proof of his prophethood, challenging the ancient Arabs who were self-proud of their mastering of language on a poetic and metaphorical level. The challenge was formidable because it was of the same nature as what they believed they excelled in all nations at, and all their attempts to produce something like it were doomed to failure. Linguistically, Hassan Mustapha (cited in Baker's *Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* 2001: 200) states that the Quran is the masterpiece of the Arabic language. It is this miraculous character of the linguistic composition of the Quran which Muslims cite as the strongest argument in favour of the genuineness of their faith, and therefore the triumph of Islam was, to a certain extent, the triumph of a language, more particularly of a book.

This linguistic superiority of the original text can also be seen through the technique of the superb use of a particular word over its synonyms. The connotations given by the chosen word are better than those that would have been given by its synonyms. Therefore a random replacement of any term will lead to the text being of lesser quality. This linguistic superiority can also be experienced and judged by the ploysemous nature of the Quranic words. Sometimes the same expression can be interpreted both literarily as well as scientifically. Consider, for example, the Quranic verses (Q 80: 19-20):

من نطفة خلقه فقدره ، ثم السيل يسره

Either literarily:

From a sperm-drop, He created him and destined for him. Then he eased the way for him. (Saheeh)

Footnote: *into this world* (i.e., his birth) may also refer to life itself, which has been made easier by Allah's guidance.

- Out of a drop of sperm, He creates him, and thereupon determines his nature, and then makes it easy for him to go through life (Asad).

Footnote: This is an allusion to man's being endowed with the intellectual equipment enabling him to discern between good and evil and to make fruitful use of the opportunities offered to him by this earthly environment.

Or scientifically: Qadhi (1999: 280) states the scientific fact that during the delivery process, the passage of the baby from the mother's womb to the outside world occurs through the birth canal. Normally, this canal is extremely narrow and tight. However, shortly before birth, certain changes occur, including the release of certain hormones, the contractions of the uterus, and the breakage of the 'bag of water' surrounding the baby, all of which contribute to making the canal loose. "Then we made the passage (through the birth canal) easy". This interpretation fits with Rodwell's rendition.

- Out of moist germs, He created him and fashioned him, then made him an easy passage from the womb.

Translationally speaking, whenever an uncommon or new word suddenly appears in the source language, and it is a key element in a powerful and major international source text, which is always the case with the Quran, there are several available translational options for translators to choose from. The above example shows that perhaps the safest strategy, peculiar to translating the Quran, is to include the main possible interpretations of the same verse. This difference in selecting strategies when dealing with the same verse clearly shows the powerful and superior nature of Quranic terms due to the fact that most of them imply the literal sense as well as the metaphorical sense and, therefore, can be taken both literally and figuratively. Some Quranic terms often utilize two distinctly different meanings or at least meanings with a wider range of variation. Thus, prevalent strategies of a multifunctional nature should be applied to terms of a polysemous nature in order to include every possible sense, i.e., the literary as well as the scientific shades of meaning. Consequently, any translation in compliance with standard conventions has to enclose in brackets words that are not taken from those in the Arabic text but added for the purpose of clarification or completion. This technique of highlighting, in a different way, whatever has not been mentioned in the original text is on the grounds of the requirement or *faithfulness*.

In order to refute the Arabic disbelievers of that time, the literary aspect of the Qura'n's linguistic miraculous quality was, therefore, the most appealing aspect for those people. To them, its melodic nature; the sounds of the letters, the occurrence of the words, and the structure of the verses are the strongest and most apparent aspects. This is particularly extraordinary and wondrous since, before the revelation, Muhammad was not known to have composed any poem or given any speech. It is quite difficult to discuss these linguistic aspects in a non-Arabic work. The Quran comes in '[...] clear Arabic' (Q 26: 195), and in order to understand the linguistic miraculous nature of the Quran, a thorough and deep understanding of the Arabic language is essential. However, the importance of the linguistic miracle is mainly time-specific, as it was far more powerful during the period of the revelation. So instead of detailing and giving examples of various Quranic verses of literary character- a task which is well-nigh impossible to do in any language other than Arabic- it would be perhaps more prudent in this limited study to summarize another aspect of the miraculous nature of the Quran, i.e., its scientific aspects. The following section will therefore discuss in further detail the scientific nature of the Quran and explore some of the scientific facts expressed in the Quran.

## **2. The Scientific Miraculous Aspects:**

Whilst the concrete miracles of the prophet Muhammed, as with the other prophets, are time-specific because they were only acknowledged by the people who witnessed them and therefore only had a valid impact on these people, the scientific miracles mentioned in the Qura'n are timeless in nature as they provide ample evidence for the people of the present time and the future. The view was held that the strongly effective wording of the Quran was mainly to challenge the Arabs of the time of revelation in their mastery of eloquence. However, in addition to its linguistic miracles, the Quran also includes several scientific references. The inclusion of these scientific references has a twofold significance. Firstly, non-Arabic speaking Muslims will not be able to enjoy the linguistic creativity of the Quran and hence will not appreciate its linguistic Divine quality. Thus the need for the inclusion of such scientific references, for the sake of those people, is quite crucial. Secondly, according to Muslim belief, the Quran addresses all generations at all periods of time, from the time of the revelation to the Judgement Day of Resurrection. It follows that the modern age should carry on presenting other miraculous aspects that suit the present time more. Nowadays, in this age of science, the miraculous nature of the Quran can still provide help through its scientific aspects, and this should be given particular attention. This feature of the flexibility of time makes the Qur'an valid for all times and places as its targeted readership is all generations. For that reason, the translated versions of the Qur'an have to be re-edited now and then to update them for generation after generation in order to include new interpretations that may appear due to the progression over time.

Islam has always encouraged science, and its significance is emphasized from the very beginning. Suffice it to know that according to Islamic tradition, the first part of the Quran to be revealed was the beginning of Surah 96, the very first word of which is اقرأ 'Read', the imperative form of the verb اقرأ (to read/ to learn/ to study) which is a derived form of the Arabic word قرآن Quran itself, the Quran also occasionally calls itself كتاب a 'Written Book'. Within the first two lines of this Surah, the concepts of 'reading', 'learning/knowing', and 'the pen' are mentioned six times (See Abdel Haleem, 2005: xiv-xv). It, therefore, comes as no surprise to learn that the Quran has always been looked to as a twin brother to science. Apart from the fact that the Quran advocates knowledge of all sciences, it also contains certain statements of a scientific nature. In many parts of the book, the Quran leads, in simple words (though sometimes of a literary nature), to this kind of general scientific reflection.

There are numerous examples of Quranic verses that include scientific hints, like the description of the formation of human life. Qadhi (1999: 279-80) explains that the sperm of a man is referred to as *نطفة أمشاج* 'a mixture of liquids' (76: 2); the word (*أمشاج*) comes in Arabic plural form since the sperm is composed of various secretions from the testicles, the seminal vesicles, and other glands. It also means a mixture of sexual discharge (semen) of a man and woman. From the millions of sperm produced and ejaculated, only one sperm is actually used in the fertilisation process - a very small quantity. This is referred to in a number of verses by the word *نطفة* (75: 37) in its singular form, which signifies a small quantity of mixed fluid. The sperm then joins the female egg and forms the zygote. This occurs in the mother's womb, *قرار مكين* (a safe lodging) (Q 23: 13). The embryo, during its development, is surrounded by three layers: the abdominal wall, the uterine wall, and the placenta, with its choriono-amniotic membranes. These three layers are referred to in the Qura'nic verse demonstrating the miraculous nature of the Quran with regard to science.

The following is also a good example as it combines both linguistic and scientific evidence alike concerning the Quranic verses (Q 23: 13-16), which describe the marvels of modern science embryology development in extreme detail and accuracy.

ولقد خلقنا الإنسان من سلالة من طين \* ثم جعلناه نطفة في قرار مكين \* ثم خلقنا النطفة علقة فخلقنا العلقة مضغة فخلقنا المضغة عظاما فكسونا العظام لحما ثم أنشأناه خلقا آخر فتبارك الله أحسن الخالقين \*

Now of fine clay have we created man: then we place him, a moist germ, in a safe abode; then made we the moist germ a clot of blood: then made the clotted blood into a piece of flesh; then made the of flesh into bones; and we clothed the bones with flesh: then brought forth man of yet another make - - Blessed therefore be God, excellent of makers \* (Rodwell)

These Quranic verses, in particular, are very important as the vivid, simple literary descriptions given to the scientific facts mentioned in these verses were unknown to the people of the Prophet's time. Qadhi (1999: 280) therefore recommends that perhaps the best way to appreciate the beauty (and the miraculous evidence) of the above verses is to see pictures of the human embryo as it goes through the various stages of development. This illustrious Qura'nic example is also significant in that it contains both linguistic and scientific miracles at the same time, as the Qur'an vividly displays embryo development by using both scientific and linguistic references. In addition to its scientific nature, it contains an excellent choice of terms that produces some linguistic reflections. For instance, the careful choice of the terms (*علقة*) literally means 'leech-like' as well as (*مضغة*) literally means a 'chewed lump of flesh', as will be clarified below. Yet these verses also contain other linguistic references, particularly the purposeful selection of terms even at a minor level, i.e., the employment of the distinctive use of the connecting particles (*الفاء* and *ثم*), which means, **then**, and **afterward**, respectively. The function of every connector reflects the duration of the stage in which the embryo is at, as it perfectly matches the period of time that stage requires.

In this Qura'nic example, the development of an embryo goes through three main stages, which vary in their durations. Thus, the Qur'an employs linguistic features to portray this very complicated scientific process. These linguistic features include a precise choice of terminology as well as the careful use of conjunctive. The three main stages are; the stage of **Nutfah** (the sperm settlement in a safe abode) as mentioned above. The second stage includes four sub-stages, namely; the '*Alagah* (leech-like), the *Mudgha* (chewed up substance), the *Izam* (skeleton bones); and *clothing with the Laham* (mussels and flesh) (see k. Moore 1982: 81). Unlike these previous sub-stages, the third and final stage of *Human Development* (النشأة) in Arabic connotes two meanings; a) to initiate and b) to cause to develop. Both of those meanings apply to the Foetal development period (K. Moore 1982:140).

In spite of the use of polysomic Arabic words such as '*alagah* in the sense of its appearance as the embryo at this stage corresponds accurately to this description and the senses as a suspended thing that is clinging to the womb wall as well as a thick clotted blood as it obtains nourishment from the blood of the mother, similar to the leech which feeds on the blood of others among many others with stunning precision. Also, the word **mudghah** in the sense of its resemblance to something that has been shewed (especially a piece of meat). Identically, the embryo at this stage acquires the appearance of a chewed-like substance marked by somites at the back of the embryo, resembling teeth prints on a substance that has been chewed. The embryo, at this stage, is partly out of proportion, for the head is disproportionately larger than the body, which is strikingly the best description that can be given to such an image due to the great similarity to the appearance of the embryo after the first month. These seemingly crude descriptions are quite accurate and cover all the meanings encompassed by the sense the terms denote regarding shape (bite-like), size (a small substance), and genre (meat-like). In fact, it is not only the perfect selection of the terms used for describing the embryo nor the order of these accurately different stages, but also the way conjunctives are used on a minor level is also purposeful, as the correct timing and sequencing of the embryonic and fetal developments are indicated in the deliberate uses of **fa** and **thumma**.



Looking at these Quranic verses from the rightful employment of the conjunctives perspective, one may easily notice that the indications in the Qur'anic passage for the period of time required for the slow transformation into 'Alagah comes from the purposeful use of the word 'thumma' (afterward/later/next), which is a conjunctive indicating in Arabic a time lag. The Quranic verse will, therefore, mean that after some time, we created the 'Nutfah' into 'Alaqah'. Thus, the conjunctive indicates a time delay between these two major stages (Moore ibid: 65a) accordingly. However, as the transformation of the four sub-stages is quite rapid, the use of the conjunctive (ف)'FA' (and/then), which means in Arabic; immediately with no delay) and indicates a quick sequence of events between this rapid transformation of the growth process, i.e., the four sub-stages develop after each other without a long delay (Moore, ibid: 80). Conversely, the final stage *النشأة* (*the growth or coming into being*) is referred to by the conjunctive (thumma) to denote that this stage comes gradually after the *laham* sub-stage.

Translationally speaking, merely rendering these two timely-different conjunctives equally into English (Then) would be considered an under-translation as it does not properly convey the miraculous significance of these two conjunctives to the targeted reader. This picture of embryology stages is also described in verse (Q 22: 05). Qadhi (ibid) goes on to state that the vivid yet simple literary descriptions given to the scientific facts mentioned in these verses were unknown to the people of the Prophet's time. Other such facts that are given in the Quran include the description of the formation of milk (16: 66), the notions of orbits for the planets (21:33 and 36: 40), and the description of the water cycle (15:22, 35: 09 and more). Every verse that discusses nature and creation falls into this category". This is perhaps what makes Dr. Maurice Bucaille, in his published lecture *The Quran and the Modern Science* has given at the Commonwealth Institute in London (2007: 03), claim that encyclopaedic knowledge is needed in order to understand the Quran. He states: "This means that to understand all such verses of the Quran one is today required to have an absolutely encyclopaedic knowledge, by which I mean, one which embraces very many disciplines".

Dr. Bucaille (ibid: 02) observes the existence in the Quran of certain statements concerning physiology, embryology, and reproduction and that our knowledge of these disciplines is such that it is impossible to explain how a text produced at the time of the Quran could have contained ideas that have only been discovered in modern times. There is indeed no human work prior to modern times that contains statements that are as advanced as those appearing in the Quran at that time. He goes on to say, 'What is more, in a century where, for many, scientific truth has dealt a deathblow to religious belief, it is precisely the discoveries of science that, in an objective examination of the Islamic Revelation, have highlighted the supernatural character of certain aspects of the Revelation'.

Besides the scientific facts that were not known at the time of the Prophet, the Quran includes other elements that prove its authenticity, such as knowledge of the unknown as well as predictions that later came true. Undoubtedly, the greatest prediction of the Quran in this regard concerns its own miraculous quality. In other words, the Quran predicted that it would remain unchanged, unrivalled, and unimitated for all of eternity. The futility of imitating the Quran was also predicted, in very certain and clear terms, without any doubt or fear that nothing would be able to match this Quran (Q 02: 23-24). There are also other predictions relating to worldly events that took place during the period of revelation.

Another key example in this regard has to do with the thirtieth Quranic Surah. In this Surah, the time theme and its mystery are linked with human history in the foreground and the evolution of the world in all its aspects in the background. The opening verses of this Surah (Q 30: 01-3) mention the defeat of the Byzantines 'in the nearest (part) of Land'.

ألم ، غلبت الروم في أدنى الارض وهم من بعد غلبهم سيغلبون ، في بضع سنين لله الأمر من قبل ومن بعد و يومئذ يفرح المؤمنون ، بنصر الله من يشاء وهو العزيز الرحيم.

Alif, Lam, Meem. The Byzantines have been defeated. In the nearest land, but they, after their defeat, will overcome within three to nine years. To Allah belongs the command [i.e., decree] before and after. And that day, the believers will rejoice in the victory of Allah. He gives victory to whom he wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful. (Saheeh).

In the above verse, the Quran predicted the outcome of a battle that would occur between the Romans and the Persians and that the Romans would soon be victorious again within *بضع سنين* (three to nine years). Exactly seven years after the revelation of this Quranic prediction, the Romans attacked the Persians again, and this time they were the victors and managed to regain their territory. From a translational viewpoint, the reason for citing this example has to do with the different interpretations of the term أدنى as it is rendered differently in some versions, though within the same sense of the word 'near'; *nearer land* (Pickthall) *nearby land* (Abdel Haleem) *a land hard by* (Rodwell) *the nearest land* (Saheeh) *the nearest land [Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine]* (Hilali) *lands close-by* (Asad/Yusuf Ali)/ *neighbouring land* (Dawood). This 'part of land' has been interpreted differently in more than one source regarding its location, two of which are cited by Robinson (1996: 58). Dr (Abdumajid Al Zanadani) is a scholar who takes a great interest in Quranic scientific miracles. After discussions with Palmer, the American Professor of Geology, Zanadani claims that modern geologists have recently discovered that 'this land' where the battle took place is the lowest part of the whole earth, a sense which comes across in the Quranic Arabic polysemous term ادنى (in the sense of 'the lowest'). Chronologically

speaking, the point here is that this new sense of the term may shed more light on the different views regarding the location of the battle and, therefore, could be helpful as a decisive factor in the favour of one argument over another; thus it should be taken into account as far as Quranic translation is concerned. Rendering one sense of this polysomic term but not the other would be considered once again as under-translation.

Another example of polysemous nature of Quranic terms relating to scientific development and creation of Heaven, Earth, and Mountains is found in verse Q 79: 29-30.

أأنتم أشد خلقا أم السماء بناها ، رفع سمكها فسواها ، وأغطش ليلها وأخرج ضحاها ، الأرض بعد ذلك دحاها ، أخرج منها مآءها ومرعاها ، والجبال أرساها

This verse includes the verb دحى which is rendered differently in some versions; into 'to spread' (Saheeh), 'to stretch out' (Sale), 'to smooth out' (Abdalhaqq), 'to spread out' (Abel Haleem), and into an adjective 'wide' by (Asad). The Arabic term has polysemous meanings, some of which are already included in the above translations but not in others:

الإستواء : stretching the surface into a smooth shape or levelling

التكوير : circular and round-shaped steamroller, roller

اللقاء: throwing out

المد : spreading out, expanding, unrolling, flattening

It also has the uncommonly-used sense of the kneading of the dough, a meaning that would only be grasped by a person who is well-grounded in the Arabic language. This meaning is referred to in a poetic verse by the Egyptian poet أحمد شوقي (Ahmad Shawqi), describing a baker who is kneading dough.

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This meaning is mentioned in the Quran to describe the earth's shape - as being soft like dough when it is kneaded; it also conveys the sense of being pointed in the poles but stretched and expanded in the tropics. Once again, Dr (Abdumajid Al Zanadani)- this time based on a reference by Frank Press, a scientific consultant and president of the American Scientific Academy- states that the Arabic verb دحى covers all the scientific possibilities that have been discovered and recently mentioned in Press' book during the modern age. Over time, the accurate selection of this term means that the Quranic text will always conform to recent scientific discoveries, and this generally also applies to other Arabic polysomic terms mentioned in the Holy Quran. According to him, these verses deal with the creation of heaven and earth. He says that all the continents were attached to each other, then the internal content of the earth was *thrown out* and then *spread out* on the earth's surface, which *stretched* the earth *out*. All these three meanings are covered by the Arabic verb دحى. Zanadani mentions many other examples of this type. However, for the immediate purposes of this paper, the above examples will be enough to illustrate the point.

It is an undeniable fact that the Quran mentions some sciences that the Arabs had and that these scientific facts conform with modern sciences. Scientific facts are aptly described through literary characters and images in certain passages in the Holy Quran. It is still possible, however, according to Qadhi (1999: 281-2), for there to be an *apparent* conflict between a given verse and a scientific fact when no such conflict exists. This occurs when some scholars take only one of the possible linguistic meanings of a verse, which is not necessarily the only meaning that may be derived from it, particularly if the verse is presumptive *ظنية الدلالة* (one of two branches of Quranic sciences known as *assumptive* and *definitive*). This fact also stands very true for the translation process, as the equivalent that is chosen by a translator might cover only one aspect of the Qura'nic sense of a certain term but not the other(s). Unfortunately, this has also become an all too common trend among 'modernistic' Muslims who have specialized in science but are not familiar with the interpretation (tafsir) of the Quran. Such people feel that, in order to prove the validity and the veracity of the Quran, they should seek to prove that everything science talks about must have already been discussed in the Quran and that the Quran mentions every type of science and knowledge known to man. However, the miraculous nature of the Quran does not need such whimsical verification. Since the Quran has not placed much emphasis on such scientific facts by not mentioning them clearly within the text, this shows that they are not of great importance. It should be remembered, as Qadhi (1999: 279) puts it, that the Quran is not meant to be a book primarily devoted to a discussion of 'science' nor a mine of cryptic notes on scientific facts. Rather it is a book that is meant for the guidance of mankind. As such, any references to subjects of a scientific nature are typically brief and not abundantly descriptive. The scientific facts are free from retroactive ideas that have plagued humanity from the earliest times, such as the concept that the Earth is stationary and all the other planets and stars rotate around it.

## **5. Conclusion**

Taking account of all the above miraculous aspects of the Qura'n, it seems that the polysemous nature of Quranic terms, the comprehensiveness, and the constantly used techniques of generalization, make the Qura'nic text resistant to any deficiency that might be caused by the passage of time. The generality of wording is one of the key elements for being time-resistant so that any new sense that occurs in the future should be included in the translation rather than excluded. One method the Qura'n uses to achieve this generality is the use of expressions like 'those who' or 'whoever'; even when it argues with the Prophet regarding a particular issue or when dealing with his personal situation and feelings, it still uses those general expressions. Thus, the same general ruling will be applied at any time or place. This gives the message of universal application and is quite evident from the fact that the Quran is still coping with scientific development, as well as the belief that all the Quranic predictions will eventually come true. Chronologically speaking, linguistic problems can be solved in one way or another since they are not influenced as much by the development of time. However, the miraculous nature of the Quran appears evident in the fact that even in its limited scientific hints, the Quran conforms exactly to modern science and imparts knowledge that was unknown during the lifetime of the Prophet. Those scientific descriptions are discussed in the Quran, using a simple yet comprehensive language that is easily understandable at all times by all people. The inclusion of the scientific approach in Quranic translation has its own chronological impact in terms of whether scientific developments shed any new light on the facts that are occasionally mentioned in the Qura'n and whether the earliest and latest English translations differ in taking these scientific inputs into account or do some of the earlier translations become questionable as a result of the fragmentary pieces of evidence furnished by later scientific discoveries. Today, at a time when science has taken giant strides, such scientific predictions still continue to be linked, and furthermore, certain scientific data are used for a better understanding of specific Quranic verses.

It is unlikely that one person on their own could have all the qualities and aspects that are required to translate such a very delicate text. A compromise might be for the translation of the Quran to be undertaken as a collective work carried out by a team of translators from different backgrounds. The main intention is to produce easily readable, clear contemporary English while remaining true to the Arabic text of the original Quran. With this aim in mind, it is necessary to have the target text read by native English speakers. Recognizing this fact, the obvious solution is for Quran translation to be undertaken by persons working in close collaboration; persons whose academic and cultural backgrounds can both overlap and complement each other. Each translator should have his/her individual role and, at the same time, act as a checker on the other in order to avoid any individual translator's flaws or personal cultural influence being reflected in the work. One can, therefore, appreciate that for a competent translation of the Quran, *teamwork* is recommended. Ideally, it should be performed collectively by a cooperative team, e.g., a board or a committee of several members, in which one entire panel includes persons with special sensitivity to the original either to carry out the translation process itself or for revision and checking purposes.

### **5.1 Recommendations:**

1. To have regular re-edited translations of the original Quran, for example, every decade, for the sake of present expectations for each new generation as well as for the inclusion of the extended meanings based on new scientific discoveries.
2. Such re-translation should be done by a committee rather than an individual. This committee would ideally at least be composed of an Arabic native-speaker to understand the source text deeply; an English native speaker for an adequate grasp of English in restructuring and re-styling the target text; terminologists; a contemporary commentator مفسر, and a Jurist فقيه as a primary source of Islamic Jurisprudence.

By way of conclusion, it is the hope and ambition of this study to make a modest beginning toward providing the uninitiated reader with the opportunity to develop a familiarity with the spirit of the Quran in order to share its ideas and values and to begin to think about it differently. This modest effort is made in the humble spirit of developing better communication between human beings and between man today and the sources that have inspired men through the ages.

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