
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Contrastive Linguistic Study of lexical and Cultural Constraints Met in Translating Qur'an-specific cultural Items into English Showing off (Riāa زَلْج) in the Sūrat Nisaa

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ABSTRACT

Even though the translation of the meanings of The Holy Qur'an into English has obtained great importance in the last few years, there is a dearth of studies conducted on the topic of lexical and cultural constraints in the translation of Qur'an-specific cultural items. Hence, the current study was carried out to probe lexical and cultural constraints met by the translators of the Holy Quran in translating the Qur'an-specific cultural items into English showing off- Sūrat Nisaa in زَلْج) Riāa. Also, the paper aimed to answer the main question of whether lexical and cultural constraints impede or not the perspicuous rendering of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an in English, in general, and Qur'an-specific cultural items in English, in particular. The results attained from the present study answer this question: The Holy Qur'an is an untranslatable text. It can never be reproduced appropriately and properly into English, and the cultural loss of meaning in its English- rendered versions is unavoidable.

KEYWORDS

Contrastive linguistic, cultural constraints, Qur'an-specific cultural items, Sūrat Nisaa, Riāa, translating.

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1. Introduction

Translating the Holy Qur'an as a prominent example of sacred texts needs to be more precise and of responding to the needs of both Arabic and English cultures; that is to say, the translator must come up with an interpretation this at least finds a precise equivalent to avoid confusion by the language receptor. However, the Holy Qur'an is written in the Arabic language, and it includes many specific cultural items and expressions that are unknown to the speakers of the English language. So, the translator of the Holy Qur'an must be at a great understanding of Arabic and English or bicultural to attain the complete translation and not fall into misconception.

Of special interest in the current study is the translation of Quranic culture-specific words into English: Showing off (Riya) as a model, which does seem to raise certain particular issues, owing to the frequent fact that the Holy Qur'an characteristics of various linguistic, stylistic, lexical and cultural qualities. Such assets and/or intricacies impact paramount and effective style that makes the Holy Qur'an a specific and idiosyncratic Book that is tricky to be translated into English accurately. The Qur'anic language is also filled with such items. The Holy Qur'an, which is in the Arabic language, was brought down to introduce Islam. (Al-Sowaidi, 2011; Mollanazar, H., & Mohaqeq, 2005)

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It supposed that the translators of the meanings of the Holy Quran into English met lexical and Cultural constraints in rendering Quranic culture-bound words. Those lexical and Cultural constraints are embedded in the mode of translating the Quranic text to the degree that at a certain phase, translators of the Holy Quran presumed that Qur'an-specific cultural items have made the Holy Quranic text untranslatable. (Charef, 2019).

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1.2 Objective of the Study

This contrastive linguistic study intends to explore lexical and cultural constraints met in translating Qur'an-specific cultural items into English: showing off (رِيَاءِ Riāa) as a model

1.3 Research Question

This study purports to answer the following research question:

QR 1: Do lexical and cultural constraints impede the perspicuous rendering of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an in English?

2. Review of related literature

2.1 Culture and Translation

Newmark (1988, p.222) defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its mean of expression". For certain, that culture has a great impact on all languages. Certainly, they rely on each other. A language is a tool for conveying culture. (Gao,2006). If a translator wants to comprehend a language, he/she should have an awareness of its culture and reciprocally. (Akbari,& Darani, 2017; Wang, 2014) .Hence, learning a language involves learning its culture. The effect of culture on language causes impediments for translators in general and the Holy Quran in particular.

2.2 Translating Qur'an-specific cultural items into English: Critical Background

Translation of Quranic culture-specific words into English is a difficult and baffling task because the form and content of such culture-bound expressions are greatly impacted by Islamic culture. The Quranic culture-specific words are unique to certain communities and environments and non-existent in others, for example, in English culture. (Alhaj, 2015; Qarai, 2021). This entangles rendering those expressions. Accordingly, translators of the Holy Quran should employ certain translation methods that can consider a guesstimate of those Quranic culture-specific Words. The Quranic culture-specific words under study are culture-bound and thus create lexical and cultural constraints as well as shown in the study. (Alhaj, & Alwadai, 2019 ; Sadiq, 2008; Halimah, 2014).

2.3: The Concept of Showing off(رِيَاءِ Riāa) in Islamic Culture

"رِيَاءِ Riāa" means showing off by performing deeds to achieve recognition or attention from others. The deeds may be considered to be acts of obedience, but due to the distorted intention of the individual, they will not be accepted by Allah (SWT). "رِيَاءِ Riāa involves a level of hypocrisy and is considered to be a minor form of shirk. Allah (3) says: (So woe to those who pray, [but] who are heedless of their prayer — those who make show [of their deeds] and withhold [simple] assistance.) (Qur'an 107:4-7)(Utz, 2011; Ivry, 2008; Al-Karam, 2018)

The Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H) warned people of this minor shirk. He said: The thing I fear most for you is the lesser shirk. They (Companions) asked: O Messenger of Allah! What is the lesser shirk? He said: Showing off. On the Day of Judgment, when rewarding people for their deeds, Allah the Exalted and Glorious will say to the hypocrites: Go to those for the sake of whom you are. (as cited in Utz, 2011)

The signs of (Riāa) include the following:

- Expanding acts of submissiveness when praised or cherished for them, and reducing or them leaving the following censure.
- Being zealous about carrying out activities of worship when in the attendance of other people but being lazy remains vague and unmindful

2.4 Previous Studies

Ayyad & Mahadi (2019) studied the use of some translation strategies employed by the translators of the Holy Qur'an in rendering cultural terms. The study showed that some of the translators under the study selected to utilize the foreignization strategy more often than the domestication one because they could not determine an analogous term in the target language. Dweik & Suleiman (2013) carried out a study to probe the problems that Jordanian graduate students majoring in the English language encountered when rendering culture-bound expressions from Arabic into English. The findings of the study manifested that graduate students encounter several types of problems when rendering cultural expressions into English. Khammyseh (2015) conducted a study to explore the problems that face students of translation in rendering Islamic expressions of religious events into the English language. The study came out with important results among them: M.A. students of translation met some cultural problems in translating expressions used by them in Islamic events because of the insufficient experience in the culture of the target language receptors users and the insufficient knowledge of both Arabic and English languages' structures. Alhaj (2022) investigated to study the phenomenon of (un)translatability dilemma of translating the Qur'anic heart words into English in Sūrat Al-tawbah. The study indicated that consistent, current difficulties and untranslatability predicaments, and renderings loss were discovered. The study also reported that translation of untranslatable Qur'anic heart words into English might create rendering losses which is a common phenomenon and frequent in the English translation of the Holy Quran predominantly and Sūrat Al-tawbah mostly.

3. Methods

In the current investigation, the two researchers used the qualitative method research, which aims at studying the contrastive analysis of lexical and cultural constraints met by the translators of the Holy Quran in translating Qur'an-specific cultural items into English: Riāa as A model: that is, in the three selected English translations by Mohammed. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Mohammed. M Pickthall and Mohammed Khan and Mohammed Taj Al-Din Al-Hilali.

3.1 Research Tools

The tool of research is a crucial instrument in collecting, gauging, and data analyzing the study; the two researchers are the main instrument of the present study. Furthermore, the two researchers spent a considerable amount of time studying the contrastive analysis of lexical and cultural constraints met by the translators of the Holy Quran in translating Qur'an-specific cultural items into English: Riāa as a model.

3.2 Analysis

The data of the current research paper consists of three Quranic verses embracing lexical and cultural constraints met by the translators in translating Qur'an-specific cultural items into English Riāa as a model.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Example One

Source Surrah: النساء , An-Nisaa, verse: 38,

ST وَالَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ رِيَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَمَنْ يَكُنِ الشَّيْطَانُ (النساء:38)

Transliteration: Wallazeena yunfiqoona amwaalahum ri'aaa'an naasi wa laa yu'minoona billaahi wa laa bil Yawmil Aakhir;(An-Nisaa, verse:38)

4.1.1 Target Text:

- (1) **Abdelhaleem:** We have prepared a humiliating torment for such ungrateful people. 38[Nor does He like those] who spend their wealth to show off, who do not believe in Him or the Last Day (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p.54)
- (2) **Khan and Al-Hilali:** And (also) those who spend their substance to be seen by men, and believe not in Allah and the Last Day (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1996, p. 113).
- (3) **Pickthall:** And (also) those who spend their wealth to be seen of men, and believe not in Allah nor the Last Day. (Pickthall, 2001, p.83).

In this verse, " to be seen of men," i.e., they do not seek the Face of Allah with what they give, but it is to show off to gain reputation and praise that they give free-handedly(Ibn Kathir . Vol 1,p.,333).

4.2 Lexical and Cultural constraints met in Translating Qur'an-specific cultural items ri'aaa'an naasi رِيَاءَ النَّاسِ into English:

Abdelhaleem 's rendering seems to be clear to the target language receptor because he rendered Qur'an-specific cultural items ri'aaa'an naasi رِيَاءَ النَّاسِ based on his knowledge and understanding of the exegeses of the Qur'anic text, as well as his awareness of to the differences between Arabic and English languages and cultures. Hence, he translated Qur'anic expressions ri'aaa'an naasi رِيَاءَ النَّاسِ into to show off. Unlike that, it is occasionally arduous for even the SL reader to comprehend some of the Qur'anic expressions in the Arabic language. Therefore, the predicament for the target language receptor is to know those expressions in their English language. This occurred in Khan and Al-Hilali and Pickthall, who translated Qur'an-specific cultural items ri'aaa'an naasi رِيَاءَ النَّاسِ literally into " to be seen of men"," to be seen of men" receptively. It can be seen here rendering Qur'an-specific cultural items ri'aaa'an naasi رِيَاءَ النَّاسِ impeded the three translators due to lexical and cultural constraints encountered.

4.2 Example two

Source Surrah: النساء , An-Nisaa, verse: 142,

ST إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالَى يُزَافُونَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (النساء:142)

Transliteration: Innal munaafiqeena yukhaadi'oonal laaha wa huwa khaadi'uhum wa izaa qaamooo ilas Salaati qaamoo kusaalaa yuraaa'oonan naasa wa laa yazkuroonal laaha illaa qaleelaa ;(An-Nisaa, verse:142)

4.2.1 Target Text:

- (4) **Abdelhaleem:** The hypocrites try to deceive God, but it is He who causes them to be deceived. When they stand up to pray, they do so sluggishly, showing off in front of people, and remember God only a little (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p.64)
- (5) **Khan and Al-Hilali:** Verily, the hypocrites seek to deceive Allah, but it is He Who deceives them. And when they stand up for As-Salat (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen as men, and they do not remember Allah but little. (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1996, p. 132).

- (6) **Pickthall:** Lo! the hypocrites seek to beguile Allah, but it is He Who beguileth them. When they stand up to worship, they perform it languidly to be seen as men and are mindful of Allah but little; (Pickthall, 2001, p.92).

In this verse " and to be seen of men," They have no sincerity when worshipping Allāh. Rather they show off to people, seeking safety and to say: and be close in friendship with them. This is why they do not perform the s when they cannot show off, such as the 'Isha prayer and the Dawn prayer. Had they known the reward for performing them (these prayers two prayers), they would have performed them (in the mosque), even crawling. It is narrated in the Hadith: "Whoever perfects his prayers when to be seen of people and to the opposite when he performs them alone, he has then degraded his Lord; Allāh, the Exalted, and Most Honored." And they do not remember Allāh but little, i.e., during the prayer, they have no feeling of submission, nor do they perceive what they say.(Ibn Kathir, Vol.p.391)

4.3 Lexical and Cultural constraints met in Translating Qur'an-specific cultural items *yuraaa'oonan naasa* رَبَّنَا نُرَأَوْنَ النَّاسَ into "When they stand up to pray, they do so sluggishly, showing off in front of people, and remember God only a little", according to the real semantic and lexical usage. Abdelhaleem 's rendering reflects his awareness of what we have mentioned about the translator's knowledge and understanding of the exegeses of the Qur'anic text, as well as his awareness of the differences between Arabic and English languages and cultures. In this context, Abdelhaleem 's rendering may be the most suitable adequate equivalent of *yuraaa'oonan naasa* رَبَّنَا نُرَأَوْنَ النَّاسَ. They accord with the general intention of The Holy Qur'an. So many of the exegetes have specified the fact that the Arabic lexical item indicates, in its context in the ayah, *yuraaa'oonan naasa* رَبَّنَا نُرَأَوْنَ النَّاسَ the meaning of showing off. Khan and Al-Hilali, and Pickthall's renderings of this Qur'an-specific cultural item *yuraaa'oonan naasa* رَبَّنَا نُرَأَوْنَ النَّاسَ are inadequate; Since their mistranslation is because they could not make a distinction among the contextual meanings of the Qur'an-specific cultural item *yuraaa'oonan naasa* رَبَّنَا نُرَأَوْنَ النَّاسَ in the Holy Quran. To conclude, the cultural problem with the English equivalent "to be seen of men" is that it does not transfer the accurate cultural meaning of the Arabic counterpart.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the differences between Arabic and English regarding their lexical and cultural systems put a lot of problematic issues. For example, lexical and cultural problems were met by the translators of the Holy Quran while rendering the Qur'an-specific cultural items into English. The Qur'an-specific cultural items analyzed in this study give evidence of the loss of meaning in translating those items such as *yuraaa'oonan naasa* رَبَّنَا نُرَأَوْنَ النَّاسَ and *ri'aaa'an naasi* رَبَاءِ النَّاسِ at both the lexical and cultural levels. The difficulty in translating these items stems from the lexical gaps resulting from the cultural differences between the Arabic and English language in general. The loss of meaning in translating Qur'an-specific cultural items is an unquestionable issue. Finally, this study hopes to have alerted translators of the Holy Quran, and translation analysts attached particular importance to the cultural gap as well as loss of meaning in the translation of The Holy Qur'an in general and the Qur'an-specific cultural items in particular.

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