

Translation and transliteration of Islamic terms

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Abstract

This paper attempts to shed light on the problem of translation and transliteration of Islamic terms. It aims at discussing problems that face translators to accomplish their goals, and the strategies they use to overcome them. The purpose of this paper also is to investigate the efforts of translators in the field of translating and transliterating of Islamic terminology. Moreover, the researcher summarizes the process and procedures of transforming the Islamic terms from the source language into target language.

Keywords: translation, transliteration, Islamic terms, terminology, procedures

Traducción Y Transliteración De Términos Islámicos

Resumen

Este artículo intenta arrojar luz sobre el problema de la traducción y la transcripción de los términos islámicos. Su objetivo es discutir los problemas que enfrentan los traductores para lograr sus objetivos, y las estrategias que utilizan para superarlos. El propósito de este documento también es investigar los esfuerzos de los traductores en el campo de la traducción y transcripción de la terminología islámica. Además, el investigador resume el proceso y los procedimientos para transformar los términos islámicos del idioma de origen en el idioma de destino.

Palabras Clave: traducción, transliteración, términos islámicos, terminología, procedimientos

1-Introduction,

Language is a vital tool for communication. It is the mirror that reflects thoughts and clarifies social and ideological relationship. It is also the primary means of discourse that people use to communicate, to express their feelings, to write, to play, and to work. The history of humankind shows the power of language as a tool of creativity and civilization. Martin Heidegger says; “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home “(83).

The Arabs paid attention to the study of terminologies because they were fully aware of their significance. They recognized that terminologies are the cornerstone of any science. Arab translators are usually the guardians of their mother language. Arabic language is stressed and it unlike any languages. So the holy Qur’an has sent as an Arabic Qur’an (تَلْصُفُ بَاتِك) (3تلصف) (نَوْمَلْ عِي جُوقَلْ أَيْبَرَ عَ أَنْ أَرْقُ هُنْتَايَا) as, “A Book, whereof the verses are explained in detail; a Qur’an in Arabic, for people who understand” (Ha Mim 3).

Therefore, Islamic terms represent the highest and most sublime degree of the cognitive awareness, as they have absorbed all other fields of knowledge.

Most researchers attribute the emergence of the science of terminology to the Western world at the end of the 18th century, due to the growing interest in the issue of the emerging terms that resulted from the scientific progress in western countries. Moreover, the German thinker, Eugen-Wuster, is seen as a prominent contributor to the theoretical and scientific developments of terminology; he establishes the bases of the general theory of terminology (Karawy 280).

Translation and Transliteration are activity of vital importance in the educational, political, economic and cultural life of Arab nations. Both of them play an active, pivotal role in the establishment of our culture. But in fact, coinage of new terms has led to chaos in the terminologies of Islamic terms. Any Scholar can easily notice the wide divergence between the various translations of the same term. In addition, it is worth noting that some translations are innovative and understandable, while others are dissatisfying. One of the reasons is that term has not been studied in its cultural context.

Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss the problem of translation and transliteration of Islamic terms. Also focuses on the strategies that used to convey Islamic terms.

2. On Terminology

From the starting point, the word “terminology” creates a kind of confusion; as it refers at least to three different concepts: terminology as a science, methodology of generating terms, and a term. Although scholars agree that the word “terminology” has three interpretations, they don’t mention these three in detail.

The Spanish professor of terminology and linguistics, Maria Teresa Cabre argues that the word “terminology” refers to the following concepts: (a) The principles and conceptual bases that govern the study of terms, (b) The guidelines used in terminographic work, and (c) The set of terms of a particular special subject (32).

In a similar way, Helmut Felber (1984) argues that the term “terminology” covers three concepts: (a) terminology science, which is an inter- and trans-disciplinary field of knowledge dealing with concepts and their representation, (b) an aggregate of terms representing the system of concepts of a given subject, and (c) a publication in which terms represent a system of concepts (Qtd in Dadaoui 1). It is obvious from the previous two explanations that the two scholars do not use the word “terminology” limited to terms.

The explanation that the scholar Juan Sager gives is far more precise. Sager gives three definitions of the word “terminology”:

- (1) The set of practices and methods used for the collection, description and presentation of terms.
- (2) A theory, i.e. the set of premises, arguments and conclusions required for explaining the relationships between concepts and terms which are fundamental for a coherent activity under (1).
- (3) A vocabulary of a special subject field (3).

Sager’s definitions cover the three important equivalents of the word “terminology” in Arabic; each referring to one concept respectively: “حل طص لم” and “حل طص لم ا مل ع/ ةي حل طص ال ا, حل طص ال ا”.

Moreover, Islamic terminology is an expression or new concept go beyond the Quran and Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad. It includes new terms such as; Zakat, Pilgrimage, Jihad, lawful, forbidden, prophet, messenger, Holy Quran and terms of Paradise and Hell-fire etc.

3- Translation of Terms

Since the dawn of history, human communication has depended on translation; it builds bridges between different communities as it facilitates communication and interaction between them. Bassnett argues that translation is “the portal through which the past can be accessed” (Culture and Trans-

lation 16). Translation has enabled people to discover other civilization as well as the lives of other people from the past. Through translation, Arabs have accessed the Greek literature, philosophy and thought. Also, in the words of Kelly, “Western Europe owes its civilization to translators;” during the renaissance, the Western people knew all kinds of knowledge through translation of the Arab thinkers’ works, especially IbnRushd (Averroes). The continuous movements of translation have led the world to become a global village.

Translation refers to the process of transforming the term from the source language into target language. It helps in making a cultural, social and economical renaissance for any nation. This is obvious in the history of Arab and Islamic renaissance during Abbasid Era. The Greek philosophy, Indian Sciences, and Persian literature are translated into Arabic. This makes Baghdad the Capital of all nations for two centuries (Al-Kasimi 15). During that period, translators began to differentiate between different approaches and to recognize the problematic issue of “equivalence” between source language and target language. Those translators who adopt literal translation of the Greek texts such as Yuhannaibn Al-Batriq and Ibn-Naima, proved the failure of that method as they found out that there are many Greek words that have no equivalent meanings in Arabic. On the other hand, the prominent translators of that period, HunaynibnIshaq and Al-Jawhari, adopted the sense-for-sense approach to translation to convey the meaning without addition or subtraction from the original (Baker and Hanna 330-332).

4-Problems of Translation Islamic terms

The process of translation is not an easy task. The translator carries on his shoulder many responsibilities. As a result, a number of skills should be acquired by the good translator: a) he should be knowledgeable of the two languages to be able to get the meaning and transfer it, b) he should be honest in transferring the source text, c) he should be familiar with both cultures. However, any translator encounter a number of obstacles that he has to overcome.

Taking a decision of how to translate is the first problem that the translator faces during the process of translation:

A translator often finds it difficult to decide whether he should (i) transcribe, (ii) translate, (iii) substitute with something similar from TL, (iv) naturalize, by making minor modifications (be they grammatical or phonological), (v) by loan translating, or (vi) by paraphrasing. If source

language (SL) and TL differ lexically, grammatically and phonetically at both langue and parole levels there is bound to be a loss, especially of the lexical kind. (Singh 12-13).

The second serious problem of translation is that of non-equivalence. Since in translation meaning is the starting point to be rendered from SL into TL, a translator should take into consideration creating the closest natural equivalent to meaning. At the word level, the problem of non-equivalence emerges from the words that have no equivalents in the source and target languages. The cultural differences between two languages are obvious in the translating of the term “داهج” to “war or Islamic Colonization”, in fact; the appropriate translation of Jihad is conquests. Also, the absence of phonetic equivalences is another problem between SL and TL (for example, using letter A to represent the Arabic letterayn(ع). The Moroccan scholar Mehrach claims that equivalence as an impossible aim in translation (16). Naude agrees on that idea, emphasizing that “in-avoidably owing to linguistic and cultural differences between languages, translations always fall short of the equivalence ideal. It is impossible to produce a translation, to be the mirror image of its original in accordance with the equivalence-based prescriptive/normative theories” (47).

An additional problem of translation is the problem of untranslatability. This problem is related to the differences between cultures. Today, the translator becomes a mediator between cultures. Nida argues that “differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure” (Qtd in Venuti 130). The word Zakat refers to cultural differences, the English dictionaries translate it into “tax”, whereas; it means in Islam obligatory charity. Also, absence of Islamic terms in the target language. The mentioned term “ةالكز” is a good example.

There are many explanations for a term, the word “اروصح” in this verse (ارُوصِحْ وَ اذْيَسَوْ . هَلَّا نَمَّ هَمَّ لَكَيْبٍ اَقْتَصَمُ لِيْ حَيْبٍ كَفَرَشْبِيْ هَلَّا نَأْ) (39: نارمع لآ) (نبي اصل انم اي بنو) has many translations, Al-Hilali and Khan translated it into “keeping away from sexual relations with women”. While, Rodwell translated it as chaste (Al-Hilali and Khan 1999, Rodwell).

5-Translation Procedures of Islamic Terminology

It is unavoidable for a translator to encounter difficulties of translation between two culturally different languages. To solve these problems, different procedures are implemented to achieve a successful transfer. Ghazla and Tawfik point out many strategies:

1-Literal translation as direct method: means rendering a source language

text or term into the appropriate idiomatic or grammatical equivalent in the target language. It is the “word-for-word” translation. It is also the most common used strategy between languages such as *بانتكلا* translate as (the Book/Scripture).

2-Direct Synonym, as (*صلاة* prayer), (*عبد* worship) etc.

3-Literal Translation with adding, for instance, an explanatory note. The word *فاوطلا* needs to explain (circumambulation around the Ka’abah)

4-The Explanation, if there is not direct/indirect synonym for Islamic term; the translator should use “explanation”. Such as, “*رطفلا الكفر*”: (an obligatory charity to be delivered by every Muslim in Ramadan, the month of fasting).

5-Transliteration or transference with adding explanatory note, (e.g. *كعب عكلا* Ka’abh: the house of Allah and the direction of prayers).

However, Mona Baker (1992) classifies other strategies that professional translator can use in order to solve the problems of translation on the word level: (a) Translation by a more general word; (b) Translation by a more neutral /less expressive word; (c) Translation by cultural substitution; (d) Translation by illustration.

Transliteration of Islamic Terms

Another type of borrowing is what Newmark refers to as ‘transcription’ or ‘transference’/transliteration. It said to be the easiest method as it involves transferring a source language word or lexical unit into the target language text as they are pronounced in the source language. Newmark states that transcription is mandatory in all the following cases, unless there is already a generally accepted translation likely to be accessible and acceptable to the reader: a) proper nouns, particularly names of people and of geographical features; b) addresses; c) names of private firms; d) names of national public and private institutions, unless they are transparent; e) terms peculiar to the institutions, ecology and general culture of the source language countries; f) titles of newspapers, periodicals, books, plays, films, articles, papers, works of art, musical compositions (154).

Transliteration refers to the transformation of SL letters into the letters of the TL. In fact, this process concerns with terms that do not have equivalents in the TL. Such as: *Iman* *نامي*ال, *Ihsan* *ناسح*ال, *Sura* *فروس*, *Satan* *ناحيس*ال, *tasbih* *حيبست* *Al-hamdulillah* *دمحل*, *Subhana* *للال*, *ناطيشلا* *للال*. Actually, Muslims must be pronounced a lot of terms and phrases in Arabic such as (tahlil, tasbih, shahhuda, etc.)

Actually, many scholars consider transliteration as an approach to maintain the local meaning of the word. Whereas others discourage this operation because it depends on transcription instead of searching for semantic and cultural equivalent.

Conclusion

The present study has attempted to provide a critical examination of the problematic issue of translating Islamic terms. It also examined the different definition of “terminology”, and the problems the Arab translator faces in order to create new terms as accurately as possible. It has discussed the problem of translating Islamic terms as it is the most important obstacle that confronts any translator, in view of the fact that any term carries the implications of its culture. Also, the absence of unified mechanisms and strategies of creating new terms by transliteration has resulted in a confusion of understanding these terms correctly. This problem enhances the need to discuss this issue.

In order to achieve the desired purposes of this paper, the researcher has tried to answer a number of question:

- What is the Islamic term?
- What are the translation strategies the translator has used to convey Islamic terms?
- What are the suggestions and solutions to the contemporary chaotic situation of Islamic terms?

The research has proved that there are a number of problems of translation. The first one is taking the decision translate a specific text. The second problem is the problem of non-equivalence. To solve these problems, different procedures are implemented to achieve a successful transfer. It becomes evident that many scholars and translators stand in the side of translation, whereas researchers and readers prefers transliteration because they can reconvert back the transliterated terms into Arabic such as *ihsan*, *jihad*, *Abdullah*, *zakat*, etc.

Moreover, some translators prefer transliteration the Islamic words to create new terms but they adding explanatory note or footnote.

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