

### العوائق الثقافية لترجمة الكلمات ذات المعاني المتعددة في نصوص قرآنية مختارة

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### Cultural Barriers of Translating Multi- Meaning Words in some Selected Quranic Texts

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### **Abstract**

Possessing more than one meaning like, اَ أَذُ and أَتُ and أَبُ which are samples of the Multi-Meaning Words that necessitate radical alterations in translation. To keep pace with the fluency of the original text and close voids between the English and Arabic languages, translating these particular words require mastering the two languages and having



profound knowledge of the various meaning of the present words especially in Arabic. The current study focuses on the importance of the cultural knowledge in order not to deprive the aesthetic function of the translated texts. It also sheds light on the style of translating the words: مُن مُنطُ and أَبُ culturally.

#### الخلاصة

تمتك الكلمات ذات المعاني المتعددة المعنى دلالات مختلفة. حيث تعد (وَسَطَّ، أَخْذُ و أَبُ) نماذج للكلمات ذات المعاني المتعددة. إذ تستلزم هذه الكلمات إدخال تعديلات جذرية في الترجمة. و كمحاولة للحفاظ على انسيابية النص الأصلي ولتضييق الفجوة بين اللغتين الإنكليزية و العربية، يتطلب ترجمة هذه الكلمات إتقان اللغتين الإنكليزية و العربية، ومعرفة متعمقة للمعاني المختلفة للكلمات الحالية و خاصة في اللغة العربية. إن الدراسة الحالية تركز على أهمية المعرفة الثقافية كي لا تجرد النصوص المترجمة من الوظيفة الجمالية. كما أنها تسلط الضوء على أسلوب ترجمة الكلمات ( وَسَطَ، أَخْذُ و أَبُ ) ثقافياً.

### 1.1 Translation and Multi- Meaning Words: A Cultural View Point

Samovar and Porter (1997:12-3) define culture in the sense of meaning. They point out that there is a tight bond between culture and meaning. Culturally speaking, translation, as Nord asserts, is "an intercultural communication process in which two parts are involved: on the one hand, the production of the source text in a source communicative situation and, on the other, the production of the target text in a target communicative situation" (cited in Martínez-Sierra, 2009:12).

Exerting all the possible efforts, Newmark (1988:94-5) adds that translators should focus on meaning and style as well. For him, translation is not merely a matter of transferring isolated words from one language to another. On the contrary, translation demands capturing the cultural implications meant by the source texts. To put it another way, translators should be culturally-oriented.

Linguistically, a word that has a cluster of meaning is described as "Multiple- Meaning Words". Such words are challenging because they require understanding their contexts in which they occur before rendering them.









### 1.2 Assessing the Translation of Multi- Meaning Words in some Selected Quranic Texts

#### Text -1-

﴿ وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُواْ شُهَدَاء عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا وَ الْقَبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلاَّ لِنَعْلَمَ مَن يَتَبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّن يَنقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقِبَيْهِ وَإِن كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلاَّ عَلَى الْقَبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلاَّ لِنَعْلَمَ مَن يَتَبِعُ إِمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴾ ( البقرة :٣٤ ( ١٤٣ ) اللّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴾ ( البقرة :٣٤ ( البقرة :٣٤ اللهُ إِللَّهُ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴾ ( البقرة :٣٤ ( البقرة :٣٤ اللهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِلللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِلللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِلللهُ إِللهُ إِلللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِلللهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِللهُ إِلهُ إِللهُ

[Yusufali 2:143] Thus, have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qibla to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (A change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful.

[Pickthal 2:143] Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you. And We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels. In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom Allah guided. But it was not Allah's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is Full of Pity, Merciful toward mankind.

Occupying the most exalted position, Arab nation as الأحمدي (1979:430) asserts, is the one and the only one nation that has been elevated. The present selected nation is depicted as being the best among all previous nations. To be translated differently, Ali and Pickthal render the word as: balanced and middle, respectively. Neither Ali nor Pickthal endevour to demonstrate the meaning of priority of Arab nation. Promoting Arab nation in thinking, feeling, and worship is absent in their translations. Disastrously, Shakir translates the word وَسَطًا as medium. Inserting the word medium deliberately is something odd. Skipping over the common sense and the humanistic features of the people, he indulges





himself in the process of translation. In this particular verse, the priority of Arab nation has been absorbed.

### Text -2-

[Shakir 2:238] Attend constantly to prayers and to the middle prayer and stand up truly obedient to Allah.

[Yusufali 2:238] Guard strictly your (habit of) prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand before Allah in a devout (frame of mind).

[Pickthal 2:238] Be guardians of your prayers, and of the midmost prayer, and stand up with devotion to Allah.

According to Farid (2006: 824), the word الْوُسُطَى carries the meaning of being the most important prayer. The focus of faith lies in that prayer. There is a controversial discussion among interpreters of the Holy Quran for determining that prayer. All the renditions above fail to convey the sense concerned. Penetrating into the depth of the texts, translating the word involves more than mere change the surface meaning. Here, it can be emphasized that replacement distorts the origin which in turn leads to something that is never mentioned in the source language.

### Text -3-

[Shakir 68:28] The best of them said: Did I not say to you, Why do you not glorify (Allah)?

[Yusufali 68:28] Said one of them, more just (than the rest): "Did I not say to you, "Why not glorify (Allah)?""

[Pickthal 68:28] The best among them said: Said I not unto you: Why glorify ye not (Allah)?

Many commentaries, like: الكفوي (1998: 354) and الشافعي (2004/Vol.4: 354), agree that أُوْسَطُهُمْ denotes being the best person. Skillfully, Shakir and Pickthal display that meaning in their renditions. People have mental, social, religious, physical and psychological qualifications that make them different. Such diversity is obscure in the translations of both Shakir and Pickthal. It is favourable to mention "the best of them MENTALLY". Being so far of the actual sense of the text, Ali gives no attention of showing the variation in their thinking. For him, all the brothers are equal mentally, socially and psychologically, and this is nonsense because discrimination is instinctive feature (i.e. something natural).







### Text -4-

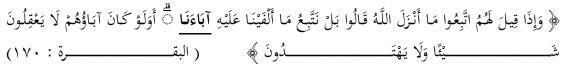


﴿ وَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا ﴾ (العاديات: 5)

[Shakir 100:5] Then rush thereby upon an assembly: [Yusufali 100:5] And penetrate forthwith into the midst (of the foe) en masse; [Pickthal 100:5] Cleaving, as one, the centre (of the foe),

The word omegains has been translated differently. Despite of such variation in their renditions, all the three translators render the word in an appropriate way. This is due to the fact that this word is widely used in daily life and it means being in the middle of something. Ali's translation seems neater and more efficient than Pickthall's and Shakir's (i.e., a better equivalent to the ST).

#### **Text -5-**



[Shakir 2:170] And when it is said to them, Follow what Allah has revealed, they say: Nay! we follow what we found our fathers upon. What! and though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way.

[Yusufali 2:170] When it is said to them: "Follow what Allah hath revealed:" They say: "Nay! we shall follow the ways of our fathers." What! even though their fathers Were void of wisdom and guidance?

[Pickthal 2:170] And when it is said unto them: Follow that which Allah hath revealed, they say: We follow that wherein we found our fathers. What! Even though their fathers were wholly unintelligent and had no guidance?

Following the traditions of the ancestors blindly is to abide the truth and live in seclusion from the outside. Here, isolation sounds unreasonable. One must seek for the best in his life.

All renditions above are imprecise owing to the absence of the lexical word *ancestors*. Using the word *fathers* insead of *ancestors* shows the sense of ignorance. The three translators fail in pitfalls. The biggest weakness is that the cultural and historical elements of the original have been lost in their translations.

### Text -6-





18:82] And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them, and their father was a righteous man; so your Lord desired that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure, a mercy from your Lord, and I did not do it of my own accord. This is the significance of that with which you could not have patience.

[Yusufali 18:82] "As for the wall, it belonged to two youths, orphans, in the Town; there was, beneath it, a buried treasure, to which they were entitled: their father had been a righteous man: So thy Lord desired that they should attain their age of full strength and get out their treasure - a mercy (and favour) from thy Lord. I did it not of my own accord. Such is the interpretation of (those things) over which thou wast unable to hold patience."

[Pickthal 18:82] And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them, and their father had been righteous, and thy Lord intended that they should come to their full strength and should bring forth their treasure as a mercy from their Lord; and I did it not upon my own command. Such is the interpretation of that wherewith thou couldst not bear

Again, all the translations are inadequate in translating the word أَبُوهُمَا as fathers. According to الشافعي (2004/Vol.2: 457), the word is their grandfather. Regardless of the interpretation of the Holy Quran, it is obvious that the translators are in a hurry to the extent that they skip over the actual meaning and interpretation of the Holy Quran. What is more, they lack the subtle knowledge of the ST language (Arabic).

#### **Text -7-**

﴿ إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لا يَسْمَعُ وَلا يُبْصِرُ وَلا يُغْنِي عَنكَ شَيْئًا ﴾ (مريم: ٢٢)

[Shakir 19:42] When he said to his father; O my father! why do you worship what neither hears nor sees, nor does it avail you in the least:

[Yusufali 19:42] Behold, he said to his father: "O my father! why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing?

[Pickthal 19:42] When he said unto his father: O my father! Why worshippest thou that which heareth not nor seeth, nor can in aught avail thee?

One of the traditions of Arabs is that they may consider their uncles as their fathers. Ignoring such tradition, translators are accused of having no enough qualifications, expertise and keen knowledge of the original language. Besides, they do not take into consideration the cultural differences between the two languages. As a result of the frequent use of the word *father*, the delicacy of the word is lacked.







#### Text -8-



﴿ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَحْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنْزِغُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوْآتِهِمَا أَوْلِيَاءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾ الأعراف: إنَّهُ يَرَاكُمْ هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ أَلَّ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾ الأعراف: (٢٧)

[Shakir 7:27] O children of Adam! let not the Shaitan cause you to fall into affliction as he expelled your parents from the garden, pulling off from them both their clothing that he might show them their evil inclinations, he surely sees you, he as well as his host, from whence you cannot see them; surely We have made the Shaitans to be the guardians of those who do not believe.

[Yusufali 7:27] O ye Children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce you, in the same manner as He got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame: for he and his tribe watch you from a position where ye cannot see them: We made the evil ones friends (only) to those without faith.

[Pickthal 7:27] O Children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce you as he caused your (first) parents to go forth from the Garden and tore off from them their robe (of innocence) that he might manifest their shame to them. Lo! he seeth you, he and his tribe, from whence ye see him not. Lo! We have made the devils protecting friends for those who believe not.

Adam is the first man and the father of mankind. His role as the father of the human race necessitates being a model to be followed. Adam and Eve have been bestowed with God's bounties; however, they have been seduced by the devil (ابن کثیر), 1998/Vol.3:361). This verse looks like a hint to mankind to avoid the footsteps of the devil. From one hand the three translations are acceptable, since the translators catch sight of the meaning of the word أَبَوَيْكُمْ which includes the father and the mother. On the other hand, Shakir and Ali are not aware of the exact meaning of this word which refers to the original of humanity (i.e. Adam and Eve). Pickthal is the only one who can conceive the sense intended. He, intentionally, inserts the word *first* between two brackets. As such, he practically demonstrates his aptitude in translation.





﴿ وَكَذَلِكَ أَخْذُ رَبِّكَ إِذَا أَخَذَ الْقُرَى وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ إِنَّ أَخْذَهُ أَلِيمٌ شَدِيدٌ ﴾ (هود:١٠٢)

[Shakir 11:102] And such is the punishment of your Lord when He punishes the towns while they are unjust; surely His punishment is painful, severe. [Yusufali 11:102] Such is the chastisement of thy Lord when He chastises communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is His chastisement.

[Pickthal 11:102] Even thus is the grasp of thy Lord when He graspeth the



townships while they are doing wrong. Lo! His grasp is painful, very strong. The verb (أَخْذُ), as الاحمدى), as الأحمدى) remarks, is a word that has a cluster of meaning. One of the figurative uses of this verb is "Punishment". Penetrating in to the depth, Shakir is the only one who masters the contextually of this verb in present verse. Both Ali and Pickthal search aimlessly to employ the approximate synonyms. Yet, their translations of



### **Text -10-**

this verb lack accuracy.

[Shakir 7:31] O children of Adam! attend to your embellishments at every time of prayer, and eat and drink and be not extravagant; surely He does not love the extravagant.

[Yusufali 7:31] O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters.

[Pickthal 7:31] O Children of Adam! Look to your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Lo! He loveth not the prodigals.

Under the banner of Islam, one is free to have the earthly entertainment. It systemizes human's life via traditional authority. Islam does not hinder human's will as some people claim. On the contrary, it gives rise to the ultimate goal of democracy which, in return, abides living in chaos. الطباطبائي (1997/Vol.8:93) conceives this fact in his interpretation of the Holy Quran. To certain extent, Ali endeavours to embody the meaning required in his rendition. Other translators make use of additional information to cover the missing parts of the intended meaning but, unfortunately, have not succeeded in rendering all the aspects of the verb خُذُوا here.

### **Text -11-**

[Shakir 24:2] (As for) the fornicatress and the fornicator, flog each of them, (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them detain you in the matter of obedience to Allah, if you believe in Allah and the last day, and let a party of believers witness their chastisement.

[Yusufali 24:2] The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication,- flog each of them with a hundred stripes: Let not compassion move you in their case, in a







matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment.



[Pickthal 24:2] The adulterer and the adulteress, scourge ye each one of them (with) a hundred stripes. And let not pity for the twain withhold you from obedience to Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of believers witness their punishment.

There is no place for leniency in enforcing the law of Islam. Publicly, punishment must be carried out to both the adulterer and the adulteress with a hundred stripes is restricted to unmarried offenders. الأحمدي (1979:8) emphasizes that feeling pity which prevent people from applying the punishment must not play a part in such cases. Destroying the harmony and the very social fabric of the society, all the three renditions are acceptable. Shakir, Ali and Pickthal are aware that this act is strictly forbidden in every form.

#### **Text -12-**

﴿ وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا ﴾ (النساء:١٢٥)

[Shakir 4:125] And who has a better religion than he who submits himself entirely to Allah? And he is the doer of good (to others) and follows the faith of Ibrahim, the upright one, and Allah took Ibrahim as a friend.

[Yusufali 4:125] Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in Faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend.

[Pickthal 4:125] Who is better in religion than he who surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good (to men) and followeth the tradition of Abraham, the upright? Allah (Himself) chose Abraham for friend.

Devoting himself for the sake of God, Abraham (peace be upon him) possesses certain features which are not present in other people. He is the selective person among all the creatures. Here the verb "أَخُذُ", as Farid (2006:10) states, denotes the sense of being chosen. It is clear that readers may be at a loss to retrieve the exact meaning from the literal translations. Pickthal, in one way or another, is capable of moving from one style to another when translating different cultural items. His aims are to echo the style and to convey the meaning of the original as well. Striving for perfection, Pickthall is more proficient than others in maintaining the spirit of the Qur'an,



﴿ اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ﴾ (التوبة: ٣١)





[Shakir 9:31] They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah, and (also) the Messiah son of Marium and they were enjoined that they should serve one Allah only, there is no god but He; far from His glory be what they set up (with Him).

[Yusufali 9:31] They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One Allah: there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him). [Pickthal 9:31] They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One Allah. There is no Allah save Him. Be He Glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)!

In his commentary, القرطبي (2006/ Vol.8:120) figures out the state of being submitted to others in everything blindly. There are deliberate attempts to make use of literal translations by the three translators. Generally, their renditions fail to match the delicacy of underlying meanings which exist in the Qur'anic discourse. The biggest weakness, here, is that the metaphorical sense of the original is lost.

#### Conclusions

- 1- It is suggested for translators to take cultural dimension as their starting point.
- 2- Misunderstanding is not only the product of semantic incompatibilities but of cultural ones as well.
- 3- The essential challenge for translators lies in the process of changing positives to negatives and vice versa.
- 4- Translators should be aware of the fact that Qur'anic discourse is collectively characterized by linguistic, syntactic, semantic and cultural sceneries that make it difficult to be tackled through translation.
- 5- It can be confirmed that cultural discrepancy causes semantic gaps that cannot be easily plugged in translation.
- 6- As opposed to producing a mere accurate rendering of the words, the translator should have an intimate knowledge of the cultural differences between the two languages.
- 7- Stating what is obvious is the salient characteristics of the three translators for translating the words: أَبُ and أَخْذُ ,وَسَطَّ
- 8- In the light of the data selected, the words أَخُذُ ,وَسَطَّ and أَخُدُ and أَبُ have been translated haphazardly.
- 9- The sense of subjectivity is apparent in the translation of the words أَبُ and أَخْذُ ,وَسَطً











- 10- It is suggested that one of the reasons for translating the words وَسَطُ , and أَبُ differently is the formatively of these words in Arabic.
- 11- Another suggested justification for the weak translation of this particular word is neglecting the prominent rule of translation which stipulates having profound knowledge of the two languages.
- 12- The vague translation of the words أَذُ وَسَطَّ and أَذُ أَنُ and أَدُ can be ascribed to the rapid translation of this word.
- 13- It is preferable to have profound knowledge of the text under translation in order to abide of being accused as bias.
- 14- The frequent uses of the words *MIDDLE*, *FATHER* and *TAKE* show that the translators lack the proficiency required.
- 15- Without making some required adjustments, translators try to render the apparent meaning of the texts at the expense of their intended one.
- 16- The more unfamiliar the meaning of a word is, the more difficult the rendition will be.
- 17- The undertranslation becomes inescapable for translators to resort to in closing the gaps between both languages.
- 18- It is preferable for translators to take the benefit of the mechanism of addition, aiming at preserving the same sense of the original text.
- 19- The charm and flavour of the original text have been lost due to the excessive use of the word *middle*, *father* and *take*.
- 20- One of the obstacles that challenge translators of the Quranic texts is that many words have a number of different meanings (i.e. being Multi-Meaning Words).
- 21- Translating the words أَخْذُ , وَسَطُ are so problematic. This can be ascribed to the figurative language of Arabic texts. Actually, figurative use is made use of to create some panoramic scenes.
- 22- Translating Quranic texts does not rely on generalization and the translator fully takes into account all the cultural elements existing in the text whenever necessary.
- 23- The multiplicity of word meaning creates a problem especially in translation, because translators may know only the core meaning of a word and translate it by its equivalent in English. Added to that, direct translation, namely literal translation, is another constrain in the process of translation.
- 24- It can be confirmed that the context in which words occur is important in guessing the meaning of the word.
- 19- It is assumed that knowing the grammatical class of a word (i.e. parts of speech: noun, adjective, verb etc) helps translators to guess the word meaning.





- 25- Translation involves cultural adaptations. This means that the translators' mission is so complex. To enrich their translations, translators need to make a sort of compromise between the two languages.
- 26- In some texts, multi-meaning words have been loosely compensated for by the non-equivalent items.
- 27- Before embarking on his mission, the translator should bear in his mind that Multi-meaning words are favoured in Arabic and are not at the same level of preference in English. So, he should be aware of this phenomenon.
- 28- In some situations, translators refer partially to the intended meaning of Multi-meaning words but it absolutely does not convey all the aspects of these words.
- 29- From the cultural point of view, the translator should be bicultural.

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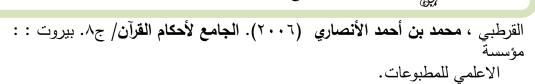
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