



Literal translation of the Holy Qur'an: Bridging the gap between its prohibition and predominant presence in endorsed translations

الترجمة الحرفية للقرآن الكريم: ردم الفجوة بين تحريمها وحضورها البارز في الترجمات المعتمدة

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الملخص:

تثير مسألة الترجمة الحرفية، خاصة في سياق النص القرآني، جدلاً واسعاً بين الباحثين والمترجمين. يختلف العلماء المسلمون التقليديون بشكل جوهري حول جواز الترجمة الحرفية لمعاني القرآن الكريم، حيث يرفضها الأغلبية. ومع ذلك، فقد أقرت ترجمات اعتمدت بشكل كبير على الترجمة الحرفية واعتبروها موثوقة ومعتمدة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف آراء العلماء المسلمين حول الترجمة الحرفية لمعاني القرآن الكريم، مع محاولة التوفيق بين المواقف النظرية حول الترجمة الحرفية والمواقف العملية تجاه الترجمات الموثوقة المعتمدة على الترجمة الحرفية في أغلبها. من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات المتعلقة بحكم الترجمة الحرفية وتحليلها من منظور علم الترجمة، ويكشف البحث عن وجود خلط لدى العلماء المسلمين بين مفهومي الترجمة الحرفية والترجمة كلمة بكلمة. على الرغم من أن الغالبية العظمى من العلماء المسلمين كانت لديهم تحفظات، فإن بعضهم قد عرّف الترجمة الحرفية بدقة وأيد استخدامها، معتبرين أنها الأنسب لترجمة معاني القرآن الكريم عند الإمكان. يدعو البحث إلى تقييم دقيق لهذا النوع من الترجمة في ضوء الترجمات الموثوقة. ومن خلال معالجة اللبس المتعلق بمفهوم الترجمة الحرفية، حاول البحث أن يقدم فهم أكثر دقة لحقيقة مفهوم الترجمة الحرفية عند العلماء المسلمين، مما سيسهم في تصحيح مفهومها وتعزيز الأسس النظرية للأبحاث والدراسات العملية والنظرية في الترجمة مستقبلاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة الحرفية، الترجمة كلمة بكلمة، لُبس، حكم الترجمة الحرفية، العلماء المسلمون التقليديون، ترجمة معاني القرآن الكريم.

Abstract:

The issue of literal translation, especially in the context of the Qur'anic text, raises polarized arguments among translation scholars and practitioners. Orthodox Muslim scholars have fundamentally different views on the permissibility of literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān meanings, with the majority rejecting it. However, they approved translations that heavily relied on literal translation and deemed them reliable. This study aims to explore the various opinions of Muslim scholars regarding the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān meanings, and provide a reconciliation of theoretical stances on literal translation with practical attitudes towards endorsed translations. A literature review of the debates surrounding literal translation, along with a critical reading of texts from a translation science perspective, reveals a potential misconception among Muslim scholars regarding the concepts of literal translation and word-for-word translation. While the vast majority of Muslim scholars maintained reservations, some accurately defined literal translation, supporting its use over other translation methods when possible. The research advocates for a dire assessment of literal translation, drawing from authenticated translations. By addressing the misconceptions of literal translation, it aims at a nuanced understanding of literal translation, which will help improve scholarly understanding and fortify the theoretical underpinnings for practical and theoretical translation initiatives.

Keywords: Literal translation, word-for-word translation, ambiguity, literal translation ruling, traditional Muslim scholars, translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran.

Introduction

Translation plays a significant role in the transfer of knowledge throughout centuries among different civilizations and cultures. As per Yuan (2020, p. 193), "it is a philosophy as one special thinking of transference between different things, not limited to that between two different languages". Nida and Taber (1982) state that translation aims to provide the nearest natural equivalent of the source message in the receptor language, considering meaning and style. At the same time, they emphasize that "this relatively simple statement requires careful evaluation of several seemingly contradictory elements" (p. 12). The translation process is marked by an insistent argument over the degree of resemblance between the target text and source text. This argument started with the writings of Cicero and St. Jerome, who for the first time distinguished between the two opposite methods of literal and free translation. Over the years, this tension between the two translation tendencies survived and informed arguments over translation methods (Munday 2016, p. 30–32). Literalism in translation has evoked diverse perspectives, from the position of vehement advocacy to the call for its total eradication. According to some scholars, e.g., Dryden (1680) and Octavio (1990), literal translation is synonymous with inadequacy and low quality. On the other hand, there are other scholars, e.g., Newmark (1988), who regard literalism as a positive factor. Some even regard it as an approach that enriches the target language by borrowing from the source language, e.g. Nemark's (1988). The various stands on literalism outline the impossibility of a consensus on literalism appropriateness (Chironova, 2014, p. 28). Regardless of individual sentiments though, literalism has demonstrated quite resilient through the ages, and its position as a trend in translation may be understood by the shifts in popularity it has experienced over several centuries (Chironova, 2014, p. 36). The notion of a default translation method is the foundation of the more recent approaches to literal translation (Olalla-Soler, 2023, p. 66).

Translation of religious texts has always been one of the hot topics among translators and theorists. The main question that has always been posed in this respect is how far literalness is to be pursued (Nida, 1994, p. 203). As Borges (2000) points out, theology-based motives lie behind the emergence of literal translation. He emphasizes that changes in religious texts need to be handled with care not to hurt religious beliefs. That means every word found in a religious text should be carefully considered (pp. 72, 73).

Historical and modern scholarly views are against the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān, often using the terms 'literal translation' and 'word-for-word translation' interchangeably. Scholars such as Makhlūf (1925), Šabrī (1932), and Al-Zarqānī (1995) criticize the use of literal methods for Qur'ānic translation. However, it is remarkable that most established and authorized translations, such as Pickthall's (1930), which have received recognition for their proficiency in conveying the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān, rely on literal translation. In the foreword to his work, Pickthall (1930) declares his intention of keeping close to a literal translation, emphasizing the special care of choosing the language that might best express the meaning of the original with the least loss.

This research aims to investigate the underlying reasons for what seems to be a contradiction between orthodox Muslim scholars' refusal and prohibition of literal translation, on the one hand, and their endorsement and acceptance of translations that are largely based on literalism, on the other. Studies that focus on literalism in Qur'ānic translations are scarce, with only a few cautionary examples being considered within the extensive body of research. The current topic has received very little scholarly attention, and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, only one previous research has addressed it. However, it has numerous limitations, particularly in terms of accuracy. Thus, investigating the diverse perspectives of Muslim scholars is necessary.

This research carries significant importance in that it tries to provide an in-depth research and explanation of the different aspects associated with the general impression of Muslim scholars

and their argumentation about literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān. In this regard, the research elucidates the understanding of Muslim scholars on this issue, outlines their stance, and provides justifications for their opposition to literal translation while simultaneously allow several translations that heavily rely on a literal translation.

This research is divided into three main parts. The first part is the theoretical background, which explores literal translation, focusing on arguments for and against it, efforts to correct its understanding, and literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān, including its permissibility. The second part reviews previous research investigations, and the third part discusses prior studies in the light of the perspective of the current research. This third part is followed by the research's conclusion.

Literature review

Theoretical Background Literal translation There has always been a debate over prioritizing literal versus free translation methods, with some huge milestone contributions to the field by Cicero (106-43 BCE) and St. Jerome (c. 347-c. 420 CE). Whereas Cicero emphasized the importance of retaining the style and effect of language over literal translation, St. Jerome relied on a literal approach in the translation of the Bible, which he defined as presenting the original words and syntax (St. Jerome, 395/1997, p. 25).

Some Arab translators, such as Yūḥannā Ibn al-Biṭrīq and Ibn Na'īmah al-Ḥimṣī, utilized word-for-word translation. Others, like Ibn Ishāq and Al-Jawharī, used a sense-for-sense approach (Baker & Hanna, 2009, p. 330). This dichotomy reflects the ongoing debate and lack of consensus on the appropriateness and effectiveness of literal translation (Chironova, 2014, p. 29).

To understand the meaning of literal translation, it is crucial to examine how translators define it. Ordudari (2007) defines literal translation as context-free lexical translation, which is a syntactical and grammatical faithful translation (p. 783). Chen (2009) suggests using literal translation to preserve the rhetorical features of the source language when the original closely resembles the target language in terms of vocabulary, syntax, and rhetoric (p. 164).

Chironova (2014, p. 36) defines literal translation as transferring semantic and structural elements from the source to the target language with adherence to the target language norms unless communication necessitates otherwise. She supports its use for accuracy, stylistic intentions, and scholarly-specific purposes (2014, p. 35).

Lomaka (2017) presented four categories of literalism (pp. 239-241): etymological literalism, semantic literalism, lexical literalism, and grammatical literalism. Beekman and Callow (1974) propose a continuum of translation styles within the range of literal and idiomatic approaches. These styles encompass unacceptable highly literal translation, acceptable modified literal translation, acceptable idiomatic translation, and unacceptable excessively free translation. The translation, which is unacceptable and highly literal, according to Beekman and Callow, retains the original word order and consistently reproduces its linguistic features. They argue that the acceptable modified literal translation maintains the original grammatical forms but may still appear confusing and artificial, even with deviations from the source to address possible inaccuracies (pp. 21-25).

Critics of literal translation

The accuracy of literal translation in expressing meaning has historically been questioned by critics, who have provided evidence to back up their claims. It is nevertheless appealing to use Dryden's comparison, which depicts literal translation as an approach that produces mechanical and uninspired outcomes. According to him, literal translation is like trying to dance on ropes with restrained legs; the one who tries that can still tumble, but they cannot expect to move elegantly (1680/2012, p. 39). Low (2003) is in agreement with Dryden about why literal translation is undesirable. According to Low (p. 100), literal translation is a poor method that is akin to the attempts of novices who rely on subpar dictionaries and false beliefs to attain complete correctness. According to Blake (2003), words cannot always be translated literally from one language to another because there are inherent differences in vocabulary across languages (p. 22). Octavio Paz concurs that literal translation

is not a valid method in the field of translation. Although literal translation is not always impossible, he contends that it cannot produce an accurate translation (Octavio, 1990, p. 13, as cited in Bellos, 2011, p. 60). Supporting Paz's perspective, Bellos (2011) asserts that literal translation is a myth (p. 63).

Since translation is fundamentally interpretive, modern translation studies question the idea of literal translation. Since any kind of rewriting involves an interpretive process by definition, Perteghella (2004, p. 15, as cited in Millán & Bartrina, 2013, p. 323) contends that neutrality and lack of originality in literal translation present issues. Steiner (1998) dismisses the ongoing debate between literal and free translation as being pointless. Even after studying the history of translation in extensive detail, he concludes that the debate mostly consists of recurring arguments. Steiner bemoans the same ideas, theses, arguments, and denials about the nature of translation that have persisted over almost two millennia (p. 251).

Advocates of literal translation

As a well-known literal translation advocate, Peter Newmark is known for emphasizing the differences between literal and word-for-word translation. According to Newmark (1988), literal translation closely follows the structure and meaning of the original text while also maintaining the syntax and word order of the target language. This is in contrast to word-for-word translation, which maintains the syntax, word order, and essential vocabulary meanings of the source language. Newmark (1988) attempts to prove that accuracy can only be attained via literal translation. He claims that if a literal translation maintains pragmatic and referential equivalence to the source, it should not be avoided (p. 68). Moreover, he asserts that literal translation is the first and most important step in the translation process (1988, p. 76). Departure from literal translation, according to Newmark, is warranted only when the literal rendition is evidently inaccurate. That occurs in cases of poor writing in vocative or informative texts or when there are no satisfactory one-to-one equivalents for general words in the target language (1988, p. 76). Contrary to the notion of abandoning literal translation, Newmark argues that it holds a

rightful place as a procedural element in all good translations (1988, p. 80).

Proponents of literal translation contend that any alteration of the original text, such as the insertion of words to conform to the grammatical structure of the target language, undermines the very essence of translation itself (Lomaka, 2017, p. 237). Shen (1989) asserts that literalism is “word translation plus syntax transplantation, imposing SL peculiar syntax on TL words, treating TL as a syntactically UNPATTERNED system,” which underscores the need for literal translation survival (p. 220).

Nord (1997) supports Newmark's assertions. She (1997) notes that “there are many cases where relative literalism is precisely what the receiver (or the client or the user) needs” (p. 29). In the same way, Reiss (1977), as per Nord (1997, p. 46), affirms that every translation style, including literal translation, learned translation, and word-for-word translation, can be justified based on predetermined objectives within specific contextual circumstances. However, she maintains a steadfast belief in the superiority of the ‘communicative translation’ approach and emphasizes its merits as the most effective method of translation. Nabokov also declares that “the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase” (1955/2004, p. 71). Additionally, Nabokov describes his method in translation by saying, “In fact, to my ideal of literalism, I have sacrificed everything (elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage, and even grammar) that the dainty mimic prizes higher than truth” (1964/1990, p. x). Nabokov's practical application of translation reveals his commitment to extreme literalness. Nonetheless, he admits the inadequacy of a strictly literal translation. He recognizes its inherent worthlessness as it merely substitutes the source language components without illuminating their underlying metaphorical framework (Lomaka, 2017, p. 237). Nabokov postulates that literal translation involves reproducing the precise contextual meaning of the original text within the associative and syntactical capacities of the target language. Thus, it constitutes the essence of genuine translation (1964/1990, p. viii). In contrast,

Benjamin perceives literal translation, as opposed to word-for-word translation, as an approach that illuminates the original by faithfully rendering even its syntactical structure (1992, p. 79). This perspective aligns with the notion of extreme adherence to the literal rendition of the source text.

Berman (1985/2004) advocates for foreignization over naturalization and upholds the ethical objective of literal translation as the genuine aim of the translation process. He further emphasizes the reception of the foreign as foreign (p. 285-286). Pym (2012) explains that Berman's notion of 'receiving the Other as an Other' involves employing literal translation to explicitly convey to the reader that the source text originates from a foreign culture (p. 10). In a similar vein, Benjamin (1923/2004) argues that a true translation attains transparency by letting the source text shine through the pure language that is endorsed by its medium. He contends that taking the syntax literally prioritizes words above sentences. In this case, literalness functions as an arcade to make sentences easier to navigate and acts as a barrier between the source language and the translated text (p. 21).

Literal translation, according to Catford (1965), falls in an intermediate position between word-for-word translation and free translation.; "it may start, as it were, from a word-for-word translation, but make changes in conformity with TL grammar" (p. 25). According to Lu and Fang (2012),

Both literal translation and free translation should be an exact rendition of the intended meaning of the source text; therefore, a plainly inexact version is caused by neither literal translation nor free translation but by either mechanical translation or random translation. (p. 743)

Endeavors to correct the understanding of literal translation

Based on the ongoing debate between the critics and advocates of literal translation, it can be said that either there is no clear or exact meaning for the term 'literal translation' or that the definitions that already exist need to be refined. According to Mounce (2018), although the term 'literal' precise meaning may not be fully understood, it has been often used in

conversations on translation. Consequently, confusion arises regarding the precise meaning of 'literal' and its association with the notion of accuracy in translation (p. 1). In light of this, Mounce suggests that in order to reduce misunderstandings and promote a clearer understanding of the complex dynamics involved in the translation process, the term 'literal' should be avoided in discussions regarding translation (2018, p. 1).

Mounce noted that the primary definition of 'literal' in all English dictionaries is meaning 'without embellishment' (2018, p. 2). He questions if words have literal meanings, stating that "even a word does not have a 'literal' meaning, but rather what we call a 'semantic range'" (2018, p. 7). Mounce asserts that the term 'literal' should be entirely avoided in all discussions related to translation unless used accurately because it is often misinterpreted. Consequently, meaning rather than form is connected with the fundamental meaning of the term 'literal' (2018, p. 2), and literal translation can be defined as the act of faithfully transferring the meaning of the source text into the target text without embellishment (2018, p. 11).

In this research, it would be contended that the concept of 'literal translation' is mainly a relative rather than an absolute concept. The principle of literal translation would therefore be to stay relatively close to the original meaning and form. This therefore means that literal translation is used as a way of eliciting the closest and most acceptable representation of both the form and meaning of the source text. Bassnett's (2005) notion of equivalence is in harmony with this view. She maintains that, Equivalence in Translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, for sameness cannot even exist between two target language versions of the same text, let alone between the source language and the target language versions. (pp. 37,38)

The Holy Qur'ān and its translation.

According to Al-Mubārakfūrī (1990, p. 113), the initial translation of the Holy Qur'ān can be traced back to the era of Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him. Notably, Muslims in Abyssinia translated the opening verses of Maryam Chapter and presented them to Negus

prior to the Prophet's migration to Medina. Subsequently, approximately six years after his migration, the Prophet dispatched letters to the emperors of Persia, Rome, Egypt, and Bahrain, inviting them to embrace Islām. The letters included certain Qur'ānic verses. Those verses had to be translated alongside the letters (Al-Mubārakfūrī, 1990, pp. 114–123). Furthermore, Salman al-Farsi was asked to translate several passages from the Holy Qur'an for Persian converts who did not understand Arabic (Al-Jarmī, 2001, p. 90).

Ibn Shuqrūn (2002, p. 40) affirms that Western libraries preserve numerous translations of the Qur'an, including ancient works such as the Greek translation by the philosopher Naktis, which dates back to the 1200s BC. Notably, the World Bibliography offers comprehensive publishing details about Qur'ānic translations in 65 different languages (Nassimi, 2008, p. 46). Faqeer (2017, pp. 7–11) has compiled a bibliography comprising 72 English translations from various digital sources and e-books spanning the period between 1649 and 2014.

There are 2,668 published translations of the Holy Qur'an in 70 different languages, according to Catherine Moir, who cites the 'World Bibliography of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an (1986)' ⁽¹⁾. This is the essential conundrum that, in her opinion, underlies the Holy Qur'an intrinsic untranslatable nature (2009, p. 36). Guillaume maintains that even though the Holy Qur'an has been translated into many other languages, the original text of the Quran is still regarded as one of the world's classics that is significantly lost in translation (1990, p. 73).

Pickthall (1930, p. vii) asserts that "the Koran cannot be translated." Irving (1985) claims that one of the reasons the Qur'an is untranslatable is because of its immense expressive power, which never ceases to produce a spectrum of interpretations for the reader. Because of this, the translator is constantly thinking of fresh and inventive methods to translate (p. xli). Abdul-Raof (2001) emphasizes that translating the Holy Qur'an is challenging for several reasons, the

main one being that most of its linguistic features are not present in the linguistic conventions of other languages. He adds that Qur'ānic discourse differs from other forms of Arabic talk due to its unique linguistic landscape, which includes a variety of syntactic, semantic, rhetorical, and cultural elements.

Translators usually emphasize that what they are doing is interpreting the meanings of the Holy Qur'an. Arberry, Pickthall, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Al-Hilali and Khan, and Muhammad Asad are some translators who refrain from calling their works 'translations of the Holy Qur'an'. They rather employ terms like 'interpreted,' 'meaning,' or 'message' in their works titles to signify their interpretative approach. Arberry's translation title, 'The Koran Interpreted' (1955), and Pickthall's translation title, 'The meaning of the glorious Koran' (1930), are two examples of signifying the interpretative approach (Elimam, 2017, p. 58).

Permissibility of translating the Holy Qur'an

The translation of the Holy Qur'an has long sparked debate among Muslims globally, intensified by desires to clarify Islamic messages for non-Muslims and spread Islam to non-Arab audiences. Scholarly views on Qur'an translation vary, especially regarding the method of translation. Some reject any translation of the Holy Qur'an, while the majority accept translating its meanings. Critics argue that literal translation is inherently unachievable and should be avoided. Yet, not all scholars agree; a minority, including modernists, supports various translation forms, including literal (Al-'Azab, 2006).

Historically, several eminent Islamic scholars, like Ibn Qutaybah and Al-Shāfi'ī, opposed Qur'an translation, declaring it impermissible. Al-Nawawī stated that reading the Qur'an in any language other than Arabic during prayers or recitations is forbidden (Al-Nawawī, 1277). However, many scholars endorse translations for explaining Islamic ideals to non-Arabs. Figures like Al-Ṣan'ānī and Al-Zamakhsharī viewed translation as permissible when

⁽¹⁾ To date, the World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an (1986) is the most ambitious and comprehensive bibliographic project of its kind. It was initially

published in 1986 and later updated in 2015. However, the updated version is only available in print within Istanbul libraries and is not accessible online.

presenting the Qur'ān meanings to the public (Al-Shātibī, 1388). Ibn Taymīyah mentioned that translation helps non-Arabic speakers understand the Qur'ān, though it shouldn't be used in prayer (Ibn Taymīyah, 1328).

Contemporary scholars argue for the necessity of translating the Qur'ān to facilitate the spread of Islam. While most advocate for translating its meanings or interpretations, figures like Muhammad Farīd Wajdī support all forms of its translation. Influential thinkers like Muṣṭafā Al-Marāghī have argued for accurate, non-misleading translations to oppose the potential distortions in the translations by non-Muslims (Al-Marāghī, 1936).

Al-Azhar University's 1936 verdict (*fatwa*) emphasized that translations are not substitutes for the original Arabic text. This verdict led to significant scholarly consensus on viewing translations as interpretations intended to convey meanings rather than literal replacements of the text (Nassimi, 2008).

The Holy Qur'ān and literal translation

Varied views have been presented by Muslim orthodox scholars. Each faction argues and produces evidence for the verification of their view and stance. This developed an interactive debate whereby scholars tried to defend and explain their stance regarding the issue at hand. Some scholars fully disagree with the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān. To them, the literal translation is:

The translation that attempts to replicate the original text structure and word order. . . . The translator only substitutes each word in the original text with its closest equivalent in the target language. The original word order of the source text will be preserved, despite the possibility of ambiguity due to the potential differences between the source language and the target language. (Al-Zarqānī, 1995, p. 92) [Translated by the researcher].

Scholars of this group argue that literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān is impossible due to specific prerequisites, such as lexical and semantic equivalents in the target language. Furthermore, literal translation necessitates a similar word order in the source and target languages (Al-Zarqānī, 1995, p. 92). Ṣabrī (1932, pp. 10, 11) disputes the arguments in favor of a literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān,

stating that literal translation is rigid and ignores language differences, requiring an interlinear approach.

This group of scholars rejects all forms of literal translation, despite some distinguishing between two forms of literal translation, equal literal translation (*al-harfīyah bilmithl*) and unequal literal translation (*al-Ḥarfīyah bi-ghayr al-mithl*), which are word-for-word and literal translation in Newmark's terms (1988). Makhlūf (1925) argues that equal literal translation seeks an unachievable replication of the original composition. Unequal literal translation damages the Qur'ānic text, altering its structure and meanings (pp. 9-29). Shaltūt (1936) presents a similar viewpoint, adding that conveying the essence of the Holy Qur'ān and its distinctive features requires more than an unequal literal translation.

Other orthodox Muslim scholars also make a similar distinction between equal and unequal literal translations, which are word-for-word and literal translation (Al-Dhahabī, 1946/1976, p. 19). However, their main argument is that only certain verses of the Holy Qur'ān can be translated literally. For instance, Al-Marāghī (1936) defines unequal literal translation as the replacement of each word in the source text with a synonymous word in the target language, whenever feasible and compatible with the nature of the target language (p. 27). He further explicitly acknowledges that unequal literal translation cannot be applied to the entire Qur'ān, but it could be feasible for some of its verses (1995, p. 31).

A minority of scholars, on the other hand, supports literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān in all its forms. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī (1936) is the most eminent scholar in this group. Wajdī (1936, as cited in Al-Bundāq, 1983, p. 74) argues that the al-Ḥanbalī philosophy supports literal translation, which is the most contentious type. He suggests that the Holy Qur'ān limited acceptance in Western countries is attributed to the abandonment of literal translation, resulting in conflicts of interpretation. This has constrained the Holy Qur'ān reach primarily to Eastern nations.

Al-Mālik (1995, p. 46) reports that some scholars have attempted to achieve

'translations of the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān', as a compromise between literal and interpretive translations. However, the amount to which the essential meanings must be translated to distinguish it from a literal translation, has not been stated. Many translations of the Holy Qur'ān that are referred to as 'translations of the Holy Qur'ān meanings' are almost literal translations with only slight adjustments made (Al-Mālik, 1995, p. 46).

To sum up, every Muslim scholar emphasizes that the Holy Qur'ān is beyond compare, which makes its translation difficult to accomplish. Nonetheless, no eminent 19th- or 20th-century scholar ever disputed the viability of translating the text of the Holy Qur'ān. They assert that no translation of the meaning of the Qur'ānic text will ever be able to fully replace its original Arabic. Muḥammad Shākir (1925, p. 33) states that all Islamic legal experts and devout Imams (*religious leaders*) concur that it is permissible to translate or interpret the Qur'ān meanings into other languages.

Previous studies

Numerous studies have explored the application of literal translation in translating the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān, in one of their dimensions. These studies have provided evidence of the prevalence of literalism in translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Furthermore, some studies concluded that literal translation often takes precedence over other approaches in translating the Qur'ānic text.

Jabak (2020) investigated how the Holy Qur'ān could be translated. Using Nida's translation theory, his research examined the Saheeh International English translation of Sūrah Ash-Shams. Except for one point regarding word order in English translations of select verses, the researcher contrasted Nida's two basic dualisms, literal translation and dynamic translation, and concluded that both can be employed to interpret the Holy Qur'ān.

Aghajani and Adloo (2018), in contrast, sought to compare different translations and explore how often literal translation was employed among other different techniques. Their research gave a calculation for how often literal translation was employed to translate the Holy Qur'ān. It concluded that literal translation was

the most often utilized approach in the English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. The scholars carried out a comparative study of the last sixteen chapters of the Qur'ān in the English translations of the Qur'ān by Arberry and Pickthal, as well as the Persian translation by Saffarindeh. Their study looked at the translation model developed by Vinay and Darbelnet, whether it was applied by these English and Persian translators of the Holy Qur'ān, whatever kind of model they used, and how frequently they used particular processes. The analysis showed that the most prevalent method was literal translation, which represents roughly 74.6% of the English translation procedures employed.

Herrag (2012) came up with the same conclusion as Aghajani and Adloo (2018), namely that literal translation was primarily employed, particularly by non-Muslim translators. Herrag studied the English, Spanish, and Catalan translations of particular Qur'ānic issues, considering the impact of each translator's ideology on translation. The English translations selected were those by Al-Hilali and Khan (1983), Rodwell (1994), Arberry (1986), and Dawood (1994). Fifty ideological instances were analyzed descriptively and comparatively with regard to the translation of five Qur'ānic issues. The six main methods that the researcher reported were literal translation (43%), paraphrasing by expressing the meaning of the source (29%), paraphrasing by providing a different meaning (20%), cultural equivalence (5%), omission (2%), and transference by borrowing (1%). According to this study, translators who are not Muslims tend to translate literally.

Kadi (2020) conducted a bibliometric review and content analysis of the most referenced articles, authors, and journals in religious translation in order to identify the most important variables influencing the translation strategies for religious terms. All Google Scholar and Scopus-indexed databases with the keywords 'translation' and 'religion' in the title and 'Arabic' as a keyword (anywhere in the article) were covered by this biblio-systematic research. Seventeen papers relevant to the paper topic, *the factors affecting selection of religious translation strategies between Arabic*

and English languages, were found through searches on Scopus and Google Scholar. In a similar vein, Kadi (2020) concluded that the most common approach to translating religious texts is literal translation. He further concluded that the main factors influencing religious translation are ideology and religious conviction.

Sufficient scholarly attention has not been directed toward investigating the paradoxical coexistence of the prohibition of literal translation and its widespread occurrence in authorized translations that are sanctioned by esteemed religious authorities. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, only one previous research, conducted by Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof (2023), has explored certain aspects of this issue.

Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof's (2023) is a theoretical research that reviewed literature pertaining to the permissibility of translation of the Holy Qur'ān and explored the perspectives of both proponents and opponents of translation of the Holy Qur'ān. The research also delved into the historical context surrounding the debates on authorized translation of the Holy Qur'ān, and discussed the historical context influential factors. Furthermore, the research proposed a reconciliation approach aimed at facilitating consensus and agreement among conflicting or divergent viewpoints concerning the translation of the Holy Qur'ān in general and the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān in particular.

Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof (2023) concluded that the term 'interlinear translation' used by translation specialists aligns with the concept of literal translation as intended by Sharia scholars. This is accurate because the concept of literal translation as intended by some Sharia scholars concurs with Newmark's (1988) definition of word-for-word translation. As per Newmark (1988), word-for-word translation preserves the syntax, word order, and essential meanings of the source language. However, Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof's (2023) conclusion that "the literal translation commonly accepted among Sharia scholars" significantly differs from the widely recognized literal translation and raises concerns. It is important to note that not all

Muslim Sharia scholars accepted literal translation. Rather than that, the majority of Muslim scholars rejected and prohibited literal translation, while some of them considered its acceptability for translating certain verses of the Qur'ān rather than its entire text.

Furthermore, it is inaccurate to claim that the confusion between literal translation and word-for-word translation prevails among all Muslim orthodox scholars, as concluded by their research. While this observation may be true in certain instances, it does not apply to all. Actually, several Muslim scholars had already made distinctions between literal translation and word-for-word translation. They predated Newmark's (1988) recognition of the difference between literal translation and word-for-word translation by several years. For example, Mohammed Mahmoud Shākir's distinction in his (1925) book is one of the earliest contributions to this issue.

Furthermore, Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof (2023) concluded that literal translation of the Qur'ān can be considered permissible within the field of technical translation methods, provided that established guidelines are followed. It is noteworthy that literal translation, as defined by Newmark and certain Sharia scholars, not only aligns with technical standards but also prominently manifests as a prevailing approach in the Holy Qur'ān translations approved by Muslim Sharia scholars. This indicates that literal translation is not only theoretically feasible but also practically prevalent in the authorized translations of the Qur'ān.

Moreover, Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof's (2023) research did not offer a thorough analysis of Muslim scholars' stances and viewpoints regarding the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān. The main points of interest were their perspectives on the Qur'ānic translation as a whole, the viewpoints of those who favor and oppose the translation, and the intellectual milieu in which these debates originated.

In summary, there are certain inaccuracies in the findings of Khamis, Ramchahi, and Yusof's (2023). This highlights the need for further research on this topic. More studies are required to explore the varying perspectives

and approaches among Muslim scholars regarding literal translation and its applicability and permissibility. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding the gap between the permissibility of literal translation of the Qur'ān and its prevalence in the endorsed translations. Consequently, a comprehensive investigation is warranted to gain a deeper understanding of this issue and explore the diverse perspectives of Muslim scholars on this topic in detail.

Discussion

Muslim theologians engaged in a heated debate about the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān. The literature review shows that Muslim scholars can be divided into three groups according to how they define literal translation. The first group strongly opposes literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān on the ground that it will inevitably distort its meanings. Upon analyzing their definitions and descriptions of literal translation, it becomes evident that most of them, e.g., Al-Zarqānī (1995) and Ṣabrī (1932), confuse literal translation with word-for-word translation. They define literal translation as:

The translation that attempts to replicate the original text structure and word order. . . . The translator only substitutes each word in the original text with its closest equivalent in the target language. The original word order of the source text will be preserved, despite the possibility of ambiguity due to the potential differences between the source language and the target language. (Al-Zarqānī, 1995, p. 92) [Translated by the researcher].

They claim that it is not possible to translate the Holy Qur'ān literally because certain requirements must be met. They believe that the vocabulary and semantic particles in the target language need to be exactly equivalent to those in the source language. Furthermore, literal translation necessitates a similar word order in the source and target languages (Al-Zarqānī, 1995, p. 92). The fact that the description given above was used to define the term 'literal translation' clearly indicates that the term was being misused. This misunderstanding is evident from Ṣabrī's comments (1932, pp. 10, 11), where he

claimed that the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān requires an interlinear method in which every word is written and accompanied by its equivalent translation right below.

Word-for-word translation is not the same as literal translation. As explained by Newmark (1988, pp. 45, 46), the translation method that maintains the word order of the source text is referred to as word-for-word translation instead of literal translation.

Some scholars within this group, e.g., Makhlūf (1925) and Shaltūt (1936), distinguished between two distinct categories of literal translation, namely equal literal translation (*al-harfīyah bilmithl*) and unequal literal translation (*al-Ḥarfīyah bi-ghayr al-mithl*), which correspond to word-for-word translation and literal translation, respectively, as defined by Newmark (1988). However, they reject both forms or categories of literal translation, even though they make a distinction between the two types. They contend that the former is essentially impossible, and the latter is likely to misrepresent the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān. Alternatively, they suggest using interpretive translation of the Holy Qur'ān as a workable substitute.

In contrast, a minority of scholars, including Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, an Egyptian journalist and Islamic scholar, advocate for various forms of Holy Qur'ānic translation, with a focus on literal translation.

The third group of scholars classify literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān into equal and unequal literal translation. This classification comes in harmony with the classification of some scholars in the first group. By equal literal translation, they argue, an attempt is made to reconstruct the original text by replacing the words in the source text with their closest equivalents in the target language. Word order and style are kept the same as in the original text. They also claim that unequal literal translation substitutes words in the ST by their closest equivalents in the TL, considering the norms of the target language. They further claim that the equal literal translation is by its nature prohibited and impossible (Al-Dhahabī, 1946/1976, p. 19). However, the difference is that they consider this unequal literal translation to be apt and applicable, yet only for

explaining certain Holy Qur'ān verses or portions (Al-Marāghī, 1936, p. 31).

In summary, the vast majority of Muslim scholars categorically disapproved literal translation and called for its impermissibility; most of those who disapproved it confused it with word-for-word translation; very few distinguished between the two types; despite this, the majority of them did not think that literal translation is appropriate for communicating the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān. Only a small minority of Muslim scholars defined literal translation accurately and maintained that it is permissible and differs entirely from word-for-word translation. However, despite all this debate surrounding the permissibility and acceptability of literal translation and the degree to which it is appropriate to communicate the meanings of the Qur'ān., this did not affect literal translation predominant presence in the translations of the Holy Qur'ān that are approved and authenticated for their reliability. Thus, the gap between its prohibition and predominant presence in endorsed translations is mostly due to the lack of understanding of the concept of literal translation, confusing it with word-for-word translation by the majority of Muslim scholars. Although a minority of Muslim scholars have correctly identified literal translation, they nevertheless believe that it corrupts the Qur'ānic text, distorts its meaning, breaches its sacredness, and serves no purpose at all.

Overall, it could be maintained here that in the endeavor of translating the Holy Qur'ān, the paramount goal remains the facilitation of comprehension for its targeted audiences. The central focus revolves around effectively conveying the Qur'ānic message to the reader, prioritizing the accessibility of the text. This objective endures irrespective of the chosen method, whether it involves a literal translation, interpretive translation, or paraphrastic translation.

Conclusion

In light of the extensive disagreement observed among Muslim scholars regarding the prohibition of literal translation juxtaposed with their endorsement of translations based mostly on literal rendering as credible and

validated translations, a significant research problem emerges. In the pursuit of scholarly inquiry, this research delved into the debate surrounding literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān within the context of Muslim scholarly viewpoints. It is intended to contextualize and examine various stands of Muslim scholars on literal translation using a critical approach based on the principles, definitions, and criteria of Translation Science. The conclusion drawn from this research indicated a prevalent misunderstanding among Muslim scholars regarding the distinction between literal translation and word-for-word translation and quite often mixing between the two terms. More significantly, the majority of them demonstrated awareness of the thin line to be drawn between these translation methods, with some of them rejecting it on the grounds that it distorts the Qur'ānic text. However, within this minority, some scholars approved the use of literal translation. They contended that it precedes other translation methods, particularly when it coincides with the pursued communicative goals. Furthermore, they argued that literal translation is particularly appropriate for rendering specific verses of the Holy Qur'ān, though not applicable to all verses. This research enriches Translation Studies by analyzing nuanced stances taken by Muslim scholars on the literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān and thereby creates a base for future studies to determine its effectiveness. It inspires ongoing debate on the complexities of translating sacred texts, particularly on how faithfully a divine message should be translated.

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