

***Semantic Explanations of Metaphoric Verses
of Soorat-ul-Baqarah in English Translations
among Selected Muslim Scholars, A Meta-Study***

*Imran Khan

**Dr. Muhammad Yousuf Sharjeel

Hamdard Institute of Education & Social Sciences
Hamdard University, Karachi

Abstract

Translation loses the essence of the Semantic meaning of the text. Metaphor which is itself complex to comprehend as compare to colloquial speech might not be translated with its significant meanings. English translators of Quranic text translated the Metaphoric Language used in Soorat-ul-Baqara into English and used their own wording to elucidate the hidden meaning of Metaphoric Quranic Language which is celestial and divine. This study was done to figure out the approximate chances of its exact translation and helped the reader to select the one out of many on the authentic set standards settled by linguists of both the languages. In case of untranslatability of it, alternatives were discussed with appropriate recommendations. Purposive sampling was used to achieve the finest results and all the translations were scrutinized on the basis of linguistic eloquences of Arabic and English with theological understanding.

Keywords: *Translation, Metaphor, Quran, Divine Text, Untranslatability.*

1.0 Introduction

Holy Quran is the most well-known and read book of the World as depicted from its name which means the book which is recited the most (Naeemi, A. Y., 2000). This is a historical fact that the Quran is

the only revealed/ divine book which is still found in its original form as it was revealed about 1385 years ago as per solar calendar and 1438 years ago as per lunar calendar approximately (Ghazi, D. M., 2009).

Like many other famous books of different creeds and literature, Quran also has its translations in more than 200 hundred languages of the world and English is one of them. English which is the Lingua Franca of the age (Jenkins, 2009) has diversity of genres and most of the modern literature is produced in it. English Translations of the Holy Quran is also a specific area of English literature which carries more than 150 translations of this divine book.

This study was done to analyze 11 of the major English Translations of Holy Quran and to figure out whether they are meeting the eloquence of this divine text which is unparalleled according to its own claim or there is some lacking in them linguistically which is a serious offence. To protect the real meanings of Holy Quran which were explained by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his life time to his companions through his Ahadith and actions, was the ultimate purpose of it.

2.0 Research Methodology

2.1 Research Strategy

Qualitative research methodology was used in this research that involved comparison, description and analysis. Purposive sampling was used to get the prompt and appropriate results from the study. 11 specific translations of different great scholars of their time, sects and countries were taken for analysis to clarify the picture and to coin the best possible results of the research.

2.2 Research Instrumentation

This was a Library based research which consisted of document analysis. All the translations were put together and they were analyzed in the light of Original Quranic Text and eloquence of Arabic and English Languages. Different books, including published translations of the mentioned scholars, English to Arabic and Arabic to English Dictionaries and general literature of both the languages including poetry and prose was used to scrutinize the material.

2.3 Data Collection

Data was collected from specific parts of selected English Translations of Soorat-ul-Baqara and all the commonly accepted

metaphorical verses with some additions were selected for analysis according to the examples of Jalal Uddin Sayyuti and Bahadur Bin Abdullah Al-Zarkashi which could thoroughly clarify the picture and the theme of the study because their work in the field of *Uloom-ul-Quran* (different branches of knowledge of Quran) was accepted in majority of the Muslim sects because of their detailed comprehensive discussions and expertise on the topic.

2.4 Data Analysis

Translations of relevant parts of one, two, three or more translators were chosen for the metaphorical verses of Soorat-ul-Baqara which were analyzed by applying the rules of the eloquence of English and Arabic. In case of any weakness in the translation, the weakness was mentioned in the light of general Muslims beliefs and specific rules of Arabic and English linguistics.

3.0 Discussion and Conclusion

After analyzing the 20 metaphorical verses of Soorat-ul-Baqara the following results were found:

3.1 No Translation is Perfect

The first and most important thing which has come out after a detailed analysis of the metaphorical verses of Soorat-ul-Baqara is that no one's translation is perfect which can be considered as a perfect replica of the Holy Quran in English language. Every single translation has some positive and negative attributes which include some findings in them. Metaphorical verses have not been translated as they should have been done by different scholars at different places which could be due to their lack of understanding of the second language or because of disability of English to carry the burden of Quranic diction in its true sense.

3.2 Inclination of Translators is involved

It is one of the weakest areas of the translations that personal understanding of the translators is involved in the translations of the verses instead of the Revealer's view point. Therefore, the translations should be avoided because each translation has the view point of the translator which might misguide the reader/s from the true meaning.

Likewise there are multiple examples found in the translations of the Quran where personal understanding of the translators were involved which might derail the common reader who wish to

understand the Quran via these translations and translators will be ultimate responsible of their misunderstanding out of their all sincerity.

3.3 Reader will Remain Confused

Conflicts which emerge in the form of different meanings of the same verse normally distort the understanding of a believer. Sometimes connotation of the verse has been changed up to that extent that even if the original text is removed, the difference of opinion might lead the readers to the different directions. Some words have been added there which do not have any equivalent in the source text which is the first point to be considered for translation.

3.4 Reader will Read the Text from the Eyes of Translator

If it is said that a common reader should follow one translation to save him/herself from confusions, it ultimately means that s/ he will understand the Quran from the view point of the translators instead of the revelation of God. Therefore, the Quran, which is guidance for all is seen with the limited view point of that translator. No translator has ever claimed about the perfection of his/ her translation, it means that they knew their limitations and in the beginning of all the translation, all translators accept their weaknesses and chances of flaws in their work, so how can their work be selected as a guidance for all?

Logically it should be kept in mind that the translator of Quran is exactly of the same status in following the commandments of God as a common reader and believer. His status is not significant at all as a respondent because s/ he is also responsible to follow Allah's command as a common believer. So how can be a respondent of the same status might illustrate the order of the authority to the other respondents of the same status? Whatever s/ he understands, it is for him/ her, not for others because there is a possibility of mistake at every level. If this view point is considered at any level, the status of translations might be assumed itself.

3.5 'Mutashabihat' will turn into 'Muhkamat'

Another serious issue which is quite easy to understand for the students of Quran is that due to translations, the verses which are called 'Mutashabihat' (Quran 3: 7) will turn inevitably into 'Muhkamat' because specific meanings have been decided for them. Logically, 'Mutashabihat' of Quran loses their status when they are translated

with specification of certain meanings by a translator. When all verses are translated, the purpose of Quran's 3: 7 is lost completely.

If any of the Mutashabihat's meanings are considered as being the correct one as it is consciously or unconsciously done by the followers of the respective scholars, that belief that the translation is the actual meaning of the Mutashabih verse will take the verse out of the category of Mutashabihat because Mutashabihat remain Mutashabihat until its meanings are not decided. If they are decided, it falls in the category of Muhkamat and loses its status of Mutashabih.

3.6 Status of Quran is interrogated

Another problem that Quran is not the prose or the poetry is questioned due to its translation. It has been decided that the World was familiar with prose and poetry before the revelation of Quran but after its arrival the third genre was introduced in the history of literature which was even surprising for the Arabs and was the real reason of their surrender opposite to the eloquence of the Quran.

If this Quran is translated, as it is being done by Muslims, it means there is no significance in the genre of Quran. If its meanings can be transformed in to any other language, then it does not remain distinctive. Additionally, the translation of Quran into prose or poetry effects its meaning rationally because it has been examined several times that the change of genre changes the effect of the text. So, to save the Quran from undue interrogation which is caused by the undue actions of Muslim scholars, translations should be avoided, otherwise its sanctity might be questioned on logical grounds because this undue action of translation by Muslim scholars was not demanded by God because *خيركم من تعلم القرآن و علمه* (Al-Bukhari, 1999) does not demand the translation of Quran but to spread its teachings which can be spread without its translation as was done in the early times of Islam.

3.7 'Divine Language' and 'Human Language' is Mixed-up

There is an obvious difference in 'Divine Language' and 'Human Language' and both have totally different protocols. If they are mixed up, as it is consciously or unconsciously done in translations, both lose their specialty which is against their protocols.

Quran is not a piece of poetry as it is declared *وما هو بقول شاعر* and nor the soothsaying which is generally done in prose as it is mentioned *ولا*

بقول كاهن but rather it is revealed by the God of the creatures as categorically stated in Quran 69: 43. If this 'Divine Language/ Text' is translated by any of the human being without any distinction of his/ her religion, status, cast or nationality, it is transformed in to 'Human Language' and therefore, the divine language is lost. One important point, which should be clear, is that the issue is not only of the 'same status' because no one claims that his/ her translation is of the same status of the Quran but it is the issue of the readers of translations who read it as their primary source of information because of their unawareness of Arabic, they are misguided by considering it as the real message of God which it is not in reality. The translation is simply an understanding of God's message by a translator which might be wrong as well and cannot be given the status of *هدى* (the guidance for whole humanity) as is unconsciously done by the followers of the respected translators.

3.8 Phonetics, Rhythm and Rhyme of Quran has become Meaningless

Phonetics, rhythm and rhyme of Quran have their own importance in the Quranic Studies. Several great scholars of their times mentioned the importance of it in their respective books. In case of translations, phonetics, rhythm and rhyme of Quran are lost in such a way that they lose their essence and importance. No translator can carry this beauty of the text in his/ her translation which is one of the unique features of the Quranic text. Reader of translations can never understand this aesthetic beauty of the divine book which makes it different from the others.

3.9 Importance of Quranic Diction is Lost

The Quran dumbfounded the Arabs with its kind, language, register and genre. Arabs brought many different linguists and experts of different fields of linguistics and literature of that time to encounter the Quran and its verses but none of them could defeat its eloquence. This shows, the words which are used in Quran are the same which were common amongst the Arabs of that time because none of them claimed that they were unfamiliar with any of its words but the sequence, metaphorical use and arrangement of these words was something unique which was challengeable for them and made them stunned. In case of translations, the unique string of words which are organized like pearls in a necklace, is ignored completely and the

reader just tries to understand the message of the verses by ignoring the rest of the beauties of the divine text. Message and meaning of the divine text is important but according to the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, when a person reads one letter of the Arabic Quranic text, he is rewarded ten virtues which shows that the words and their arrangements is also important because ا, ل and م are 3 simple letters of Arabic but if they are recited with the intention of the recitation of Quran, they secure 30 virtues for the reader even though the reader does not understand the meaning of the verse.

4.0 Conclusion

In a nutshell, the detailed analysis of the translations of the metaphorical verses of Soorat-ul-Baqara show that all the translations fall short in providing the exact meaning of the Quranic text. Hence with the passage of time people continue to be misguided by simply reading the translations instead of the original Quranic text which should be avoided.

References

- Al-Bukhari, M. B.; 1999.Sahih Al-Bukhari. Darussalam.Riyadh, Saudia: 901.
- Al-Zarkashi, M. B.; 2011.Al-Burhan Fi Uloom-il-Quran.Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah. Beirut, Lebanon: 379-398.
- As-Sayyuti, J. U.; 2008.Al-Itqan Fi Uloom-il-Quran. Dar-ul-Isha'at.Karachi, Pakistan: 110-123.
- Ghazi, D. M.;2009. Muhadirat-e-Quran. Al-Faisal Nashiran.Lahore, Pakistan: 105.
- Holy Quran
- Jenkins, J.; 2009. English as a Lingua Franca: Interpretations and Attitudes. World Englishes, 28 (2), pp. 200-207.
- Naeemi, A. Y.; 2000.Tafseer-e-Naeemi. Zia-ul-Quran Publication.Lahore, Pakistan: 19.