Evaluation of English Translations of the Qur'an*

Muhammad Sadeq Sajjadi** and Salar Manafi Anari, *** Ph.D.

Abstract

It is important for many English speaking people of the world to understand the prophetic mission or message of the Qur'an. Therefore, we need some criteria to evaluate the English translations of the Qur'an. Although there have been some criteria recently developed for the evaluation of translations, they are not useful for the evaluation of English translations of the Qur'an. In order to convey the message of Allah precisely in English, the English translations of the Qur'an should be precise and reliable. In this article it was planned to study the English translations of some Material and Mental verbs of the Qur'an. For, Material and Mental verbs are the most frequently selected process types in most of the texts. Then, the expansions and reductions of Material and Mental verbs were distinguished.

Introduction

Religious texts have played the most significant role in the life of human beings throughout the history. The translation of religious texts also has played an important role in the process of conveying messages and ideas. Non-Arab Muslims look forward to know the Qur'an by its translation. Therefore, consistency and accuracy of the Qur'an translations are very important. Some maintain that the religious texts are untranslatable, but how can we convey the ideas of the Qur'an without translation? Of course some of the ideas are not translatable because we can not understand their meanings with our limited minds and they should be interpreted by the infallibles.

  Most of the scholars of Qur'an translations declare that they can not understand the real meaning of the original text. Therefore, some of them selected the paraphrasing method (free translation or phrase-to-phrase translation) such as Qaraei's translation. Some of them such as Muhammad Ahmed and his daughter Samira practiced literal translation in which they tried to give the equivalence of the Arabic text.

He argues:

This is just a short word to explain how we came to spend over five years in the process of preparing this literal translation and complete Koranic dictionary. We never fully intended to take such a task. As it began, we found our non-Arabic speaking friends questioning available translations, for there is a lack of a literal English translation. Every available translation, will unintentionally reflect the translator's thoughts or sect (we follow only Koran), and we are sure ours will fall victim to the same, although we took special care not to succumb. (Muhammad Ahmed, 1995:2)

Anyway, although it is a literal translation, they expanded the translation.

This paper sought to answer the following question: What are the most frequent strategies in translating Material and Mental verbs of the Qur'an?

Definition of evaluation

Goff-Kfouri (2004: 3) argues: *'Evaluation* is a process; it is the systematic process of determining the extent to which students reach the educational objectives set by the institution or standard-setting body that issues their diploma.'

Farahzad (2006:1) believes 'Translation evaluation starts with a prototext- metatext comparison and ends there.'

Evaluation in my opinion focuses on making a judgment about translator's work to be used in assigning transferring objectives. Evaluation is usually used in the process of educational objectives. Evaluation typically occurs during or after student learning is assumed to have taken place (e.g., homework, a midterm exam, a final exam, etc.).

Selected methods for evaluation of translations

The scholars of translation studies suggest different methods for evaluation of translations. The best ones among them are selected and explained in this paper. Some of these methods are useful for evaluation of translation classes and some of them are useful for evaluation of all translations.

Methods for evaluation of translation classes

One of them is portfolio assessment which Goff-Kfouri (2003, 5) explains:

> Portfolio assessment is also a relatively new
> technique to aid students in tracking their
> progress. Not only do the students track their own
> level but also the instructor is able to judge the
> student's work in reference to past assignments. A

portfolio is a file that students compile throughout the semester or course and in which they choose the work they have done and want to be marked for a final grade. Instructors can determine the minimum number of assignments per week, or each two weeks, to be included in the portfolio. The portfolio method is time consuming for instructors who have large classes, but the advantage is that instructors can gauge the progress of the student by actually consulting the work done by the student at the beginning of the course or in the middle rather than only consulting the marks in their book.

Another method related to Maria Julia. She teaches translation from English to Spanish in the University of Uruguay. Her process comprises five stages:

Development is a stage during which intended to understand and anticipate students' needs in order to those needs more efficiency.

Implementation is a stage during which students get the "correction chart" shown on the following:

Mistakes	Possible Correction	Source	Type of Mistake

Under "Mistakes" students write the word, phrase or sentence which was understood as incorrect in their translation.

Under "Possible Correction" they try to produce an "error free" version.

The source of the answer for students' correction is entered under the column "Source" as: 'Myself'; 'Peer'; 'Dictionary'; 'Teacher'.

The column "Type of Mistake", filled in by the students, can become a good exercise to help students recognize what types of mistake they are making and consequently eliminate them.

Monitoring is a stage during which teachers can monitor the process in order to make adjustments as the course unfolds, on the basis of the information they retrieve from the 'Correction Chart'.

Integration is a stage during which teachers can fill in their own chart of "Types of Mistakes" for a particular translation piece.

Self-monitoring is a stage during which students can check their own progress in the course, at the same time, become critical about their learning.

At the bottom of the 'Correction Chart', students are asked to circle the figure, ranging from +3 to -3, which they think best matches their idea about their performance in that particular translation passage and to make any other comments.

Both of them are very useful in translation classes. By these careful systems the students are subject to constant revision and changes in order to be improved. Small changes can sometimes create great effects. These methods based on that we have a class and during the semester we evaluate students' translations but in case we did not have any class, how can we evaluate translations?

Methods for evaluation of all translations

I believe this evaluation is more difficult than the former. Here, the three other methods are suggested to be followed:

The first one belongs to Mildred L. Larson (1984: 49) in which the accuracy, clearness and naturalness of translations should be evaluated. He proposes the following three questions to be answered regarding the evaluation of translation: 1) Does the translation communicate the same meaning as the source language? 2) Does the audience for whom the translation is intended understand it clearly? 3) Is the form of translation easy to read and natural receptor language grammar and style? He also suggests a careful comparison between translation and original text to see whether any additions, deletions, or change of information have crept in.

Another method during which we can evaluate the *Accuracy and Appropriateness*, as Farahzad (1992) explained in

her paper which is called 'Testing Achievement in Translation Classes'.

Accuracy which is related to the norms of the ST. the examiner should see whether the translation conveys the information in the ST precisely.

Appropriateness which is related to the norms of the TT. Sentences sound fluent and native, and are correct in terms of structure.

The third method which is outlined by Hurtado (1995) completes Larson's and Farahzahd's methods. It is grouped by Waddington (2001, 313) under the following headings:

(i) Inappropriate renderings which affect the understanding of the source text; these are divided into eight categories: *contresens, faux sens, nonsens,* addition, omission, unresolved extralinguistic references, loss of meaning, and inappropriate linguistic variation (register, style, dialect, etc.).

(ii) Inappropriate renderings which affect expression in the target language; these are divided into five categories: spelling, grammar, lexical items, text and style.

(iii) Inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of either the main function or secondary functions of the source text.

. In each of the categories a distinction is made between serious errors (–2 points) and minor errors (–1 point).

In this paper, inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of main function of the source text in the Qur'an translations are evaluated. The verb plays the most important role in renderings. So, the research focuses on the Material and Mental verbs and their expansions and reductions. For, Material and Mental verbs are the most frequently selected process types in most of the texts. Then, the expansions and reductions of Material and Mental verbs were distinguished.

Material and Mental verbs

Material processes are processes of acting, doing, creating, changing, and happening. Although prototypically physical and concrete, they may very well be abstract (Halliday, 1994: 111).

Mental processes, on the other hand, are processes of sensing, thinking, and understanding.

In material processes all participants are "things" in the sense of entities, as opposed to embedded facts or metaphenomena in mental or relational processes.

Mental processes necessarily feature at least one conscious participant that can act as a Sensor. Finally, unlike mental processes, prototypical material processes can be probed by

questions formed with *do* or *do to/with* (*ibid*). For some of the more peripheral material verbs, however, questions such as "What happened?" or "What was the result?" may appear more appropriate.

Material processes have one obligatory participant, which is the Actor. It corresponds to the logical subject or the doer of a certain activity, but it need not be present in the linguistic representation of the action, as in the case of passive voice clauses. The second, optional, participant in a material process is the Goal. To this participant a process is extended and it typically becomes grammatical subject in a passive voice clause. It is the "done-to" or "done-with" participant and can be probed as such. A further participant, sometimes difficult to distinguish from the Goal, is the Range. It is not inherent in the process itself. The Range is either a restatement of the process as in 'make a reply' or the extent of the process as in 'play a game' (Halliday, 1994: 146).

Mental processes present a narrator's inner world. Whether they project or respond to facts, in any case they present facts and ideas as syntactically and therefore also experientially dependent on the narrator's point of view.

Expansion and reduction

Expansion: Acording to Nida and Taber (1969), "it is distribution of the semantic components over a number of

different words" (qtd, in Manafi, 2005: 6). Therefore, the expansion means SL word or phrase, as a translation unit, is replaced with a TL word or phrase which covers the SL word meaning plus something else.

Reduction: Acording to Nida and Taber (1969), "it is translating several words of the source language by a single term or fewer words in the receptor language" (qtd, in Manafi, 2005: 7). In other words, SL word or phrase, as a translation unit, is replaced with a TL word or phrase which does not embrace part of the SL word meaning.

It is permitted to the translator to make explicit any information implicit in the source language text or to reduce some expressions in the process of transfer to make the translation semantically comprehensible to the readers of the target language.

Types of expansions

The concepts of additions and subtractions have been developed by Nida (1964). As he argues the additions are: (a) filling out elliptical expressions (b) obligatory specification (c) additions required because of grammatical restructuring (d) amplification from implicit to explicit status (e) answers to rhetorical questions (f) classifiers (g) connectives (h) categories of the receptor language which do not exist in the source language (i) doublets (qtd, in Baker, 2004:81)

These concepts are further developed by Nida, E. A. and C.R Taber (1969: 166-167). They divided the expansions between syntactic (formal) expansions which are: (a) identification of the participants in events (b) identification of objects or events with abstracts (c) more explicit indication of relations (d) filling out of ellipsis; and lexical (semantic) expansions which are: (a) classifiers (b) descriptive structures (c) semantic restructuring. (qtd, in Manafi, 2005: 25-26).

Types of reductions

Nida, E. A. and C.R Taber (*ibid*) classified the reductions as following: (a) simplification of doublets (b) reduction of repetitions (c) omission of specification of participants (d) loss of conjunctions (e) reduction of formulas (f) using more extensive ellipsis than those commonly used (g) simplification of highly repetitious style.

Examples

Bashir & Nadhir Ayahs of the second and third Surahs of the Holy Qur'an and their translations by Qaraei (Shitte), Yusuf `Ali (Sunnite) and Arberry (Christian) were selected as the corpus of this research.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ'

(M2)   (M2)

Qaraei: As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith. (6)

Yusuf Ali: As to those who /reject/M2 Faith, it is the same to them whether thou warn them or do not warn them; they will not /believe/M2. (6)

Arberry: As for the unbelievers, alike it is to them whether thou hast warned them or hast not warned them, they do not /believe/M2 (6)

Discussion: there are two Mental verbs in the original text of the Qur'an. The translations include the Material and Mental verbs as following:

Qaraei: 0 Material verb and 0 Mental verb.

The Mental verb of "كفروا" is reduced to "the faithless". (Using more extensive ellipsis than those commonly used)

Yusuf Ali: 0 Material verb and 2 Mental verbs.

The Mental verb of "كفروا" is expanded to "reject faith". (Descriptive equivalence)

Arberry: 0 Material verb and 1 Mental verb.

The Mental verb of "كفروا" is reduced to "the unbelievers". (Using more extensive ellipsis than those commonly used)

فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِى وَقُودُهَا النَّاس وَ الْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّت لِلْكَفِرِينَ ٢

(M1)   (M2)

Qaraei: Then beware the Fire whose fuel will be humans and stones, /prepared/M1 for the faithless. (24)

Yusuf Ali: Then /fear/M2 the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, - - which is /prepared/M1 for those who /reject/M2 Faith. (24)

Arberry: Then /fear/M2 the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones /prepared/M1 for unbelievers. (24)

Discussion: there are one Material and one Mental verbs in the original text of the Qur'an. The Material and Mental verbs of the translations are:

Qaraei: 1 Material verb and 0 Mental verb.

Yusuf Ali: 1 Material verb and 2 Mental verbs.

The verb of "أعدت" is expanded to "which is prepared". (Descriptive equivalence)

Arberry: 1 Material verb and 1 Mental verb.

وَ بَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّلِحَتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الأَنْهَرُ

                      (M1)   (M1) (M2)

Qaraei: And /give/M1 good news to those who have faith and /do /M1 righteous deeds, that for them shall be gardens with streams running in them. (25)

Yusuf Ali: But /give/M1 glad tidings to those who /believe/M2 and /work/M1 righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers /flow/M1. (25)

Arberry: /Give/M1 thou good tidings to those who /believe/M2 and /do /M1 deeds of righteousness, that for them await gardens underneath which rivers /flow/M1. (25)

Discussion: there are two Material and one Mental verbs in the original text of the Qur'an. The translations include the Material and Mental verbs as following:

Qaraei: 2 Material verbs and 0 Mental verb.

The Verbal verb of "بشر" is translated to Material verb and it is expanded to "give good news". (Semantic restructuring)

Yusuf Ali: 3 Material verbs and 1 Mental verbs.

The Verbal verb of "بشر" is translated to Material verb and it is expanded to "give glad tidings". (Semantic restructuring)

Arberry: 3 Material verbs and 1 Mental verb.

The Verbal verb of "بشر" is translated to Material verb and it is expanded to "give thou good tidings". (Semantic restructuring)

وَ مَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن مَّنَعَ مَسَٰجِدَاللَّهِ أَن يُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَ سَعَى فِى خَرَابِهَا أُولَٰئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَن
(M1)   (M1)
يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ لَهُمْ فِى الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَ لَهُمْ فِى الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ'
(M1)

Qaraei: Who is a greater wrongdoer than him who denies access to the mosques of Allah lest His Name be /celebrated/M1 therein, and tries to /ruin/M1 them? Such ones may not /enter/M1 them, except in fear. There is disgrace for them in this world, and there is for them a great punishment in the Hereafter.(114)

Yusuf Ali: And who is more unjust than he who /forbids/M1 that in places for the worship of Allah, His name should be /celebrated/M1? - -whose zeal is(in fact)to /ruin/M1 them? It was not fitting that such should themselves /enter/M1 them except in fear. For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the world to /come/M1, an exceeding torment.(114)

Arberry: And who /does/M1 **greater** evil than he who /bars/M1 God's Places **of worship, so** that His Name be not rehearsed in them, and /strives/M1 to /destroy/M1 them? Such men might never /enter/M1 them, saved in fear for them is degradation in the present world, and in the world to /come/M1 a mighty chastisement(114)

Discussion: there are three Material verbs in the original text of the Qur'an. The Material and Mental verbs are found in the translations as following:

Qaraei: 3 Material verbs and 0 Mental verb.

The Material verb of "منع" is expanded to "denies access". (Semantic restructuring)

Yusuf Ali: 5 Material verbs and 0 Mental verb.

The Material verb of "سعى" is expanded to "whose zeal is (in fact)". (Semantic restructuring)

The word of "الاخرة" is expanded to "the world to come" (Descriptive substitutes), so one Material verb is added to the translation.

Arberry: ٦ Material verbs and 0 Mental verb.

The word of "أظلم" is expanded to "does greater evil" (descriptive substitutes), so one Material verb is added to the translation.

The word of "الاخرة" is expanded to "the world to come" (Descriptive substitutes), so one Material verb is added to the translation.

قُل لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَتُغْلَبُونَ وَ تُحْشَرُونَ إِلَى جَهَنَّمَ وَ بِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ

                (M1)   (M1)   (M2)

Qaraei: Say to the faithless," You shall be /overcome/M1 and /mustered/M1 toward hell, and it is an evil resting place."(12)

Yusuf Ali: Say to those who /reject/M2 Faith:" Soon will ye be /vanquished/M1 and /gathered/M1 together to Hell, - -an evil bed indeed (to /lie/M1 on)!"(12)

Arberry: Say to the unbelievers:" You shall be /overthrown/M1, and /mustered/M1 into Gehennam (Hell) an evil cradling! (12)

Discussion: there are two Material and one Mental verbs in the original text of the Qur'an. The translations include the Material and Mental verbs as following:

Qaraei: 2 Material verbs and 0 Mental verb.

The Mental verb of "كفروا" is reduced to "the faithless". (Using more extensive ellipsis than those commonly used)

The Material verb of "ستغلبون" is reduced to "you shall be overcome" (reduction of repetitions), and Material verb of "تحشرون" is reduced to "mustered". (Omission of specification of participants)

Yusuf Ali: 3 Material verbs and 1 Mental verb.

The Mental verb of "كفروا" is expanded to "who reject Faith". (Descriptive substitutes)

The Material verb of "تحشرون" is reduced to "gathered together". (Omission of specification of participants)

The phrase of "بئس المهاد" is expanded to "an evil bed indeed (to lie on)" (More explicit indication of relationals), so one Material verb is added to the translation.

Arberry: 2 Material verbs and 0 Mental verb.

The Mental verb of "كفروا" is reduced to "the unbelievers". (Using more extensive ellipsis than those commonly used)

The Material verb of "ستغلبون" is reduced to "you shall be overthrown" (reduction of repetitions), and Material verb of "تحشرون" is reduced to "mustered". (Omission of specification of participants)

The unit of evaluation is the Ayah of the original text. In this paper the three English translations with different ideologies by the Material and Mental processes and their expansions and reductions are evaluated. Inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of main function of the source text in the Qur'an translations are examined. The verb plays the most important role in renderings. So, the research is focused on the Material and Mental verbs and their expansions and reductions. First, the Material and Mental verbs are placed in all of the Arabic and English texts. Second, Ayahs are selected randomly, so each three Ayah is selected in this

research to evaluate the Qur'an Material and Mental processes. If there is no Material and Mental processes in the related Ayah, the researcher skipped to the Ayah which has the Material or Mental processes. The full point is +1. Third, the expansion and reduction of Material and Mental verbs in each of Ayah are discussed independently.

Conclusion

Qaraei, Yusuf `Ali, and Arberry translations got the following points in rendering Material and Mental verbs of the Bashir and Nadhir Ayahs of the second and third surahs of the Qur'an.

Qaraei:15/5 Points

Yusuf Ali:20 Points

Arberry:21/75Points

The total of expansions and reductions are 86 items. 83% belongs to the expansions (descriptive substitutes = 32%, semantic restructuring = 29%, filling out of ellipses = 8%, more explicit indication of relationals = 12%, and indication of participants in events = 2%) and 17% to the reductions (using more extensive ellipses than those commonly used = 7%, omission of specification of participants = 6%, and reduction of repetition = 4%). Therefore, the most frequent strategy of the Qur'an translations in Material and Mental verbs is expansion and the descriptive substitute is the most popular among the types of expansion.

It is clarified that the Material and Mental verbs play important role in rendering the original message of the Qur'an and the expansions are the most frequent strategies in translating Material and Mental verbs of the Qur'an.

It is concluded that we can evaluate the English translations of the Qur'an by different criteria and one of them is Halliday's functional grammar by which the researcher evaluated the three English translations of the Qur'an. Arberry translation is better than Qaraei and Yusuf Ali translations in rendering the Material and Mental verbs of the original text of the Qur'an. Therefore we can evaluate all of the Qur'an English translations by the cited method. It is also concluded that the Qur'an has different dimensions and understanding each dimension needs to make explicit the implicit information of the Qur'an. For this, many translators admitted that their translations are not merely translations but they are also commentaries. Therefore, the most frequent strategies of the Material and Mental verbs of the Qur'an are expansions.

Works Cited

The Holy Qur'an

Ahmed, Muhammad & Samira (1995), *The Koran Complete Dictionary & Literal Translation*, U.S.A, M., J., & S. Ahmed Pub.

Al-Qinai, Jamal (2000), "translation quality assessment: Strategies, Parameters and Procedures", Meta, XLV, 3, 2000 (pp. 497-519)

Arberry, A.j. (1955), *The Koran Interpreted*, New York, Macmilan Pub.

Baker, M. (2004), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies*, London: Routledge

Farahzad, Farzaneh (2006), "translation criticism", article (unpublished)

.... (1992), "testing achievement in translation classes", *Teaching Translation and Interpreting*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins pub.

Goff-Kfouri, Carol (2004), "testing and evaluation in the translation classroom", Paper, PP. (1-19)

Halliday, Michael (2005), *On Grammar*, London: Antony Rowe Ltd., Chippenham, Wiltshire.

.... (1994), *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar*, London: Edward Arnold.

Manafi Anari, Salar (2005), *An Approach to the English Translation of Literary and Islamic Texts (II)*, Tehran, SAMT Pub.

Nida, Eugene A., and Taber, Charles R. (1982), *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Qaraei, Sayyid Ali Quli (2005), *The Qur'an with an English Paraphrase*, Qum, Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences (Jami Tafasir-e Noor software)

Sainz, Maria Julia (1993), "student-centered corrections of translations", *Teaching Translation and Interpreting2*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins pub.

Waddington, Christopher (2001), "different methods of evaluating student translations: the question of validity", Meta, XLVI, 2

Yousuf Ali, Abdullah (2005), *The Glorious Koran; Translation and Commentary*, Qum, Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences (Jami Tafasir-e Noor software)

Endnotes:

1- Al-Baqarah , 6
2- Al-Baqarah , 24
3- Al-Baqarah , 25
4- Al-Baqarah , 114
5- Aal-e `Emran , 12