

Translation of Cultural References in the Context of the Qur'an

A Theoretical and Analytical Exploration of Culture-Specific Items in English Translations of
the Qur'an

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1 Abstract

In translating the Qur'an, there are serious challenges related to language, religion and culture, mainly when bringing culture-specific terms from one language to another. In this article, the author closely looks at the difficulties involved in translating terms from CSIs used in the Qur'an into English, emphasizing the Arabic–English translation process. While other faiths depend on translations, some people have debated if it is appropriate for the unique Qur'an even to be translated because it was first revealed in Arabic and is God's Word. The article investigates the idea of doctrinal untranslatability, explains how the Qur'an's language is tied to culture and describes various attempts to translate the Qur'an into English by orientalist and Muslims. The article takes a look at prior research on translation strategies for comprehension-based SIs, identifying critical theory points that still need attention and the limitations found in the research. The study calls for a framework that focuses on the ways the text is written and also on how the translation is understood in the receiving culture. To conclude, this article points out that translating the Qur'an should consider faithfulness to the original while ensuring the translation makes sense to people in other cultures.

Keywords: Qur'an translation, culture-specific items, untranslatability, sacred texts, Arabic-English translation, Islamic studies, descriptive translation studies

2 Introduction

Using translation makes it possible for people to communicate ideas, beliefs and knowledge even if their languages and cultures are very different. This issue is especially noticeable in religious translation, because both the content and the texts involved carry a great deal of importance for believers. In the world of religious writings, the Qur'an is ranked as an important and distinctive text. Respected by Muslims as being revealed from God in Arabic as the Qur'an, it is considered to be impossible for someone to alter (Abdul-Raof, 2005). As a result, people have regularly discussed whether the Qur'an's meanings can be or should be put into languages other than Arabic. Even though the Qur'an is meant for all people, translating it raises questions related to religion, language and culture that should be treated with care.

Translation of the Qur'an has been taking place for a long time. Efforts to spread the translations of the Qur'an to people who do not speak Arabic started right after its revelation. Qur'anic texts have been made available in numerous languages such as English and the translators have had different purposes and used many styles. Even so, the existence of many Qur'an translations does not resolve the main issue of interpreting culture-specific items (CSIs). They are some of the phrases or terms that represent the original culture the best and, in most cases, cannot be directly translated into the target culture (Al-Barakati, 2013). In the Qur'an, CSIs may concern religious rites, important historical happenings, common tribal customs or phrases common to people in seventh-century Arabia. So, the role of a CSI translator is not only about words; it also takes skills in dealing with various cultural, doctrinal and situational elements.

This article studies the translation of CSIs in the Qur'an by paying special attention to versions in English. Given that people all over the world rely on English versions of the Qur'an, this subject is relevant and important. For certain people, these translations allow them to study Islam, so the words used and their quality are very important (Amjad and Farahani, 2013). The writer discusses how translators have handled CSIs, the methods they have applied and the effects of their approaches on readers. Although some CSIs make sense to all Muslims regardless of their native language because of shared cultural practices, different groups may not understand others, meaning they must be interpreted.

This study matters because it looks closely at the translation of culture-bound terms in one of the most well-known but sensitive books in the world which may help in translation as well as

Islamic studies. The author points out where more studies are needed and mentions the issues involved in translating the Qur'an, so that future translations will be both thoughtful of its significance and understandable to readers (Arberry, 1955). In addition to the text, I also look at the social, cultural, religious and how the workplace shape which choices the translator makes.

The article has been constructed in this way to accomplish this goal. Following is a basic outline of the issues that come with translating sacred texts in various religions. After that, the book covers the special features of the Qur'an, like its language, the style of its writing and how it fits with the Islamic culture (Amjad and Farahani, 2013). Later discussions look into theological issues linked to translatability, historical records of Qur'an translations into English and major scholarly works relating to CSIs. In the end, the article introduces the framework to analyze the translation of CSIs in the Qur'an and recommends future topics for exploration in this field.

3 Translating Sacred Texts: General Challenges

Moving sacred writings from one language to another raises a variety of difficulties that go beyond everyday language translation. The followers of a religion see sacred writings as handed down or revealed by God and these writings are always related to a specific religious, cultural and historical context. It makes the work of translation careful and requires finding a balance between the original meaning and clearness in the translated language (Asad, 1980). Although translation is meant to bring people from different cultures closer, religious texts add another aspect by transmitting faith, rituals and important traditions. So, those who translate these writings encounter language problems as well as challenges related to theology, culture and deciding on the correct meaning.

Theological boundaries are often the main difficulty faced in translating holy books. Many world religions hold that their scriptures were given by God in a certain language and so cannot be expressed faithfully in any other way. In the case of Islam, Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the exact word of God as it was written in Arabic (Bewley and Bewley, 2005). Here, the Qur'an itself is not called a translation, since the function of a translation is to convey the meanings, not the words, as found in the original. In Judaism, as well as in some versions of the Bible in Christianity, the same concern appears, but not all traditions have equal levels of theological opposition.

Another big barrier is the way culture shapes people. Most of these texts introduce the customs, narratives, values, idioms and social norms of the cultures in which they appeared. In order to translate these elements, one has to go beyond lexical swaps and must consider the culture connected to them (Chesterman, 1997). There is a continuous effort to decide between holding on to the source culture's distinctness and making the story easy for the intended audience. Not addressing culture-focused beliefs appropriately can result in losing their spiritual meaning or showing them inaccurately.

Sacred languages sometimes represent an additional problem to translators. Many holy writings use an unusual language, including words from the past, rich poetry and repetitive language. These features usually do not have the same counterparts in the target language. For example, in the case of the Qur'an, the rhymes, rhythm and different word structure make it stand out from anyone else's writings (Davies, 2003). Almost all translation of poetry results in compromise between its artistic elements and the meaning it carries.

It becomes more challenging due to the wide range of people using these deliveries. Usually, sacred texts are translated to reach many types of readers such as followers of the religion, those considering change, researchers and interfaith experts (Dawood, 1956). For this text to work, the translation has to remain true to its original form and yet be understandable by several groups with their own traditions and perceptions.

Issues relating to who is in charge and their authority are important. Many religious groups believe that only specific groups or people are fit to make or certify translations. The translation process and how people see it may be affected by theological or doctrinal elements established by religious bodies (Irving, 1985). Because these groups are involved, it raises doubts about whether there will be bias, censorship and which interpretations the translations will include.

Quite often, the question of whether education is equivalent in different systems comes up. Because they are so important in religious or cultural traditions, some terms or expressions from sacred writings cannot be translated 1-to-1 into other languages (Khan, 2015). In these situations, translators might come up with different words, explain the original meaning in footnotes or run the risk of making the idea less complex.

In order to clearly display how serious these difficulties are, Figure 1 proportionally describes six key issues that translators often face when dealing with religious texts.

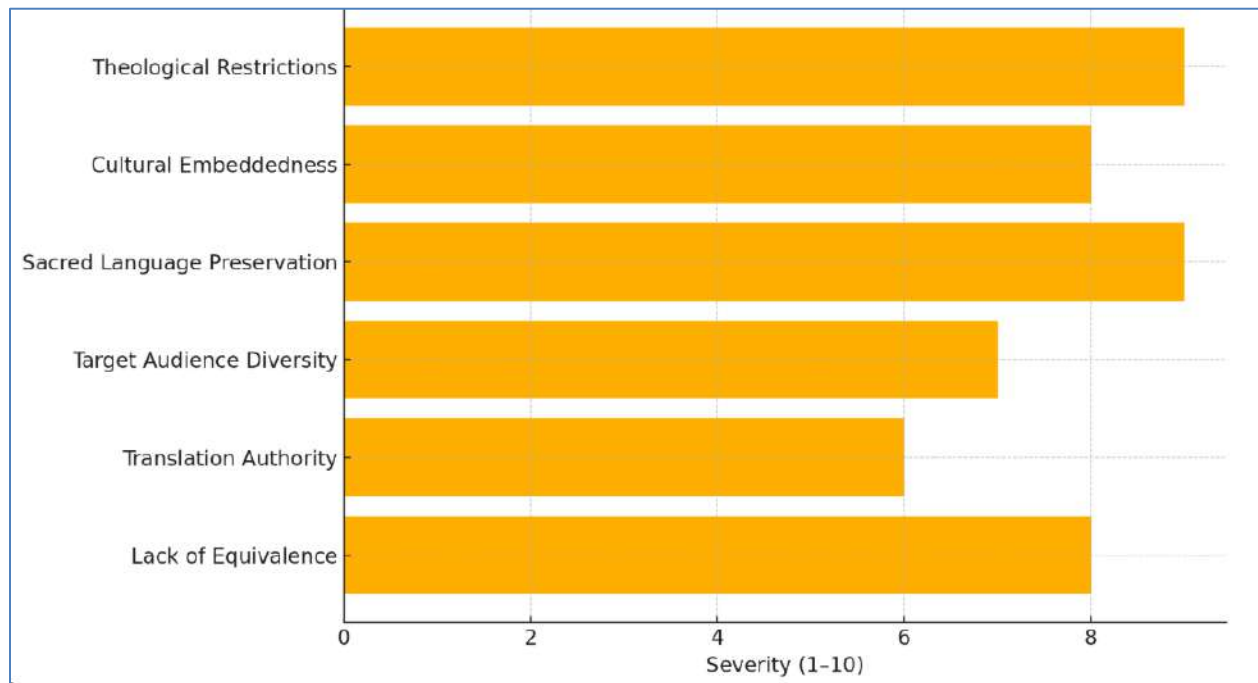


Figure 1: Key Challenges in Translating Sacred Texts Across Religions

As shown in the diagram, theological restrictions and upholding sacred language are considered the biggest issues because they can affect the religion's approval of the translation (Nasr et al., 2015). Cultural rootedness is very influential, as are the great challenges in translating complicated meanings and words that are not found in other languages.

To sum up, translating religious writings goes beyond just changing words from one language to another. Religion helps societies by looking at cultural traditions, theology and what is ethically right. When translating, translators have to make sure they do not lose the main message while making the text understandable (Newmark, 1988). Even though these challenges can be overcome, they call for careful planning and may use knowledge from linguistics, theology and the study of cultures.

4 The Qur'an as a Unique Linguistic and Cultural Text

The Qur'an is recognized as the main religious text of Islam as well as a great work of language from the 7th-century Arabian context. For over a thousand years, the Quran has been left

unchanged in its original language of Arabic. The way Chinese is written and spoken, along with the country’s many cultural features make it tough for translators to translate what’s meant in Chinese to another language (Palmer, 1880). Here, we examine what makes the Qur’an unique by considering its historic and religious background, its way of using language and the great number of CSIs included in its passages.

4.1 *Historical and Religious Context*

Over a period of 23 years, in cities Mecca and Medina, the Qur’an was shown to Prophet Muhammad, speaking about various social, spiritual, legal and moral situations. What was going on in history at its time is closely connected to the Qur’an’s message. Many times, people asked the Prophet questions and the response was a verse of the Quran which closely linked text and daily life (Pedersen, 2005). They involve struggles between different groups, lawsuits, official communications and spiritual musings which help determine what each verse says.

At first, the Qur’an was taught orally and many disciples of the Prophet committed it to memory. At first, scribes put verses onto rough materials and it wasn’t until the Prophet died that they recorded everything in one mushaf (Pickthall, 1930). Islamic worship and everyday life in today’s world are still deeply connected to reciting religious texts.

Another special aspect of the Qur’an is its religious role. People do not view it as the words of a prophet outlining what God meant, but as God speaking directly. Because of this distinction, it is especially important to pay attention to how Spanish translations are done. Any work to translate the Qur’an is overshadowed by its main role in theology and by religious principles which prevent it from being translated. Thus, many translations come with statements that they explain the meaning of the Qur’an, not the Qur’an itself.

4.2 *Linguistic and Stylistic Features*

The Qur’an is known for its special language that is different from both the ancient and current modern forms of Arabic. Because the Qur’an uses a range of techniques, its importance in Arabic literature is outstanding (Robati, 2015). The speech is different from poetry or plain prose; it often goes by the name *saj‘*, as it uses rhyming, rhythm and intense language.

Table 1: Key Linguistic Differences Between Qur’anic and Modern Standard Arabic

Feature	Qur’anic Arabic	Modern Standard Arabic
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1. Syntax complexity	Very high (multi-tiered clauses, elliptic structures)	Moderate to high (but standardized)
2. Rhetorical devices	Extensive use (parallelism, metaphor, oath)	Moderate (less ornate)
3. Phonological patterns	Rhymed prose (saj'), assonance, consonance	Standardized intonation and articulation
4. Cultural references	Context-specific to 7th century Arabia	Broader, less context-bound
5. Stylistic repetition	Frequent and purposeful	Used sparingly
6. Semantic density	Layered meanings in minimal wording	Less compact, more explicit

The Arabic from the Qur'an shows multiple levels of clauses, omitted parts and unexpected patterns in the way people talk. As a result, tone and accent shift a lot, but they cannot be expressed directly in grammatical English terms. Rhythm and sound play such a key role in how Qur'an recitative conventionally sounds that they cannot be translated to speech in other languages (Rodwell, 1861). Repetition, parallelism and rhetorical questions may be used in translation, but they can sometimes appear repetitive or clumsy.

Also, in addition to its main arguments, the Qur'an is highlighted by the use of divine oaths, metaphors, exaggerated language and dramatic quiet periods. For example, invoking daylight with words like "by the morning brightness" has religious and literary value. This kind of translation which keeps the emotional impact and hidden meanings, is not easy (Ross, 1649).

The understanding of Qur'anic words is just as difficult as its grammar. A number of Arabic terms found in the Qur'an convey various meanings since their meanings are influenced by their root, how they are used and the Qur'anic chapter they appear in. Since English is different from other languages in structure and culture, it does not always have matching words. Every now and then, Qur'anic words have to be explained using several English words (Sale, 1734). Because the language is not identical, translators have to decide between a direct word-for-word translation or an explanation of the meaning and each has drawbacks.

These features make the Qur'an even more amazing and are considered to be part of its wondrous nature. As a result, any deviation from the original words is considered less admirable since it loses some of its connection to God (Sarwar, 1981). All in all, these language points make it widely understood that the essence of the Qur'an is rarely visible in any translation.

4.3 Embedded Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs)

Apart from its language, the Qur'an has cultural parts that reflect the era and setting in which it was revealed. There are CSIs that include religious practices, social habits, ecological meanings, important events in history and even tribe formations. To people not familiar with Arabic or Islamic culture, these references are usually difficult to match in translation.

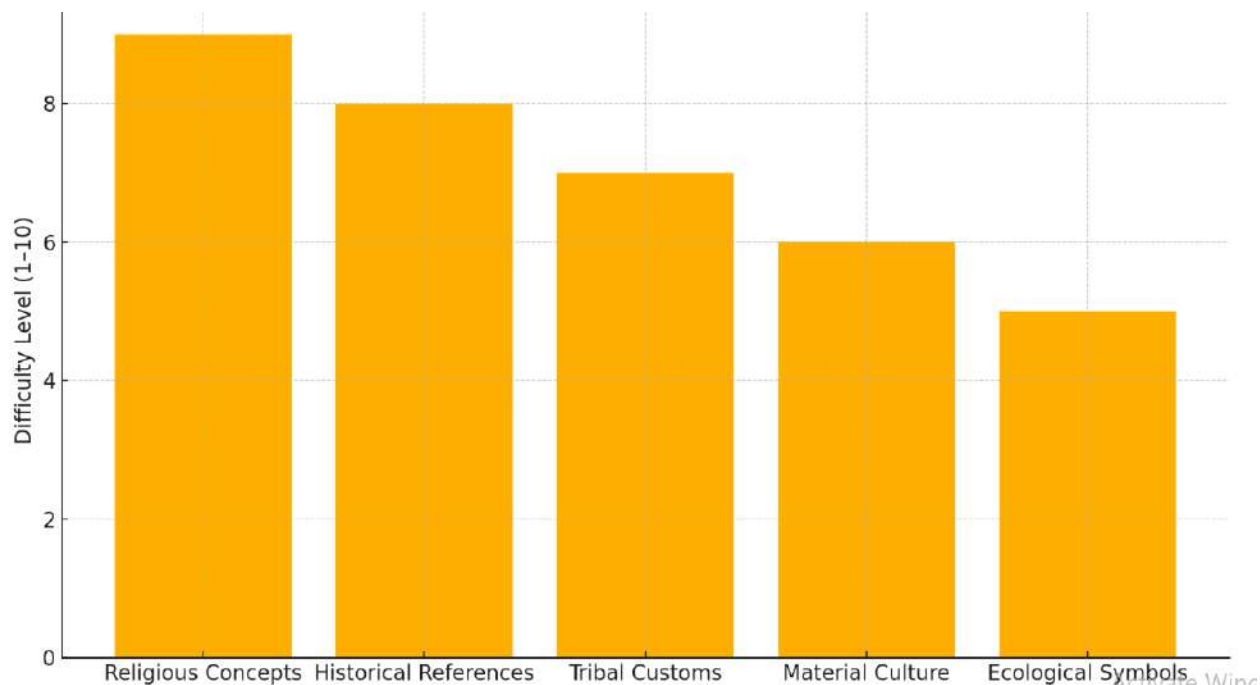


Figure 2: Relative Difficulty of Translating Different Cultural Reference Types in the Qur'an

Terms like zakāt, ṣalāt and ḥajj which are important to Muslims, are the most difficult for scholars to interpret. Having an equivalent word still means that the original meaning is sometimes missing or expressed differently. To call zakāt charity only is to miss the subjects and rules related to zakāt in Islamic law (Tourey, 1995).

Certain religious beliefs draw on information from old historical texts. Verses about ancient tribes or communities of prophets (for example, 'Ād, Thamūd or Pharaoh's court) rely on a story that most people understood already (Yusuf Ali, 1934). People who have not come across these stories before might find the contents of literal translations confusing, especially without much annotation.

Also, the traditions and objects of these societies make archaeology challenging. There is no equivalent in the West for terms connected to traditional clothing, rites of passing or tribal

customs like jilbāb means an outer cloak and nasī' meaning calendar manipulation. Such items usually have to be explained through footnotes or commentary.

Symbols from the natural world featured in the Qur'an—like the date palm, olive tree or fig—are rarely as meaningful to those who read these passages where they are not common. So, translators must consider whether to keep the original styles and culture or use terms that make sense to the readers in the target language (Abdel Haleem, 2004). Every decision includes ethical and interpretive costs and this influences readers' responses to the Qur'an.

5 Untranslatability and Theological Tensions

There are many problems involved in translating the Qur'an and they are not limited to translating the words only. The main problem is that Islamic tradition holds the Qur'an, as God's unmatched word revealed in Arabic, to be sacred in both style and meaning. Due to these differences, people have started to examine the idea of untranslatability. For Muslims, the idea of untranslatability is important in practice as it determines how translations are prepared, received and reviewed (Kidwai, 2017). This section analyzes the issue of untranslatability in theological, linguistic and cultural terms by comparing and studying different scholars' views.

5.1 Theological Untranslatability

The Qur'an is thought to be untranslatable according to this belief because it is God's exact language, as it first appeared in Arabic. In Islam, it is commonly believed that the Qur'an is a miraculous message in which the very way it is written and organized comes from God. So, every translation is regarded as someone's interpretation of the Qur'an, rather than the original material itself (Kilgariff, 2014). In addition, the Qur'an claims that it cannot be matched in eloquence, meaning and effect on the heart which seems to only make the challenge harder for non-Muslims. Since this call for translation comes from the Qur'anic text, readers can see that faithful translation does not fully imitate the wonders of the original Qur'an.

For this reason, Muslim scholars and organizations have become more careful in their actions. Most books that translate the Qur'an normally have a disclaimer stating that the translation is an interpretation, not a direct meaning (Klinger, 2015). Theologians tend to ask that both the Arabic and translation be provided to ensure that no one thinks the translation can take the place of the original message.

In history, theological objections to translating were based on the fear that the original meanings would get twisted or used inappropriately. Because some non-Muslim translators could inadvertently change or misinterpret the sacred texts, strict rules have been set for translation in such places (Koller, 1995). Still, spreading the Qur'an's teaching has led many to accept translations that are reviewed by religious experts.

5.2 Linguistic Untranslatability

The reason for linguistic untranslatability is that Qur'anic Arabic's features of style, syntax and rhetorical devices are not exactly like those in English or any other language. The Qur'an is written in an expert form of Arabic that has many levels of meaning, challenges readers with its grammar and uses various forms of strong expression (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1963). Because these features are so much a part of the language's structure, translators find it extremely difficult to reproduce them.

The Qur'an attains its unique character in part because it includes *saj'* which brings together rhythm and sonic patterns without using poetic metres. Its rhythm helps enhance the sound of a spoken work and aid in remembering and prayer (Kruger, 2012). When translated, the unique sound of the text is missing which lowers how dramatic and emotional the text can be.

A Qur'anic word might refer to several themes in theology, law or imagery when seen in context or interpreted by experts. For instance, the word *taqwā* means many things such as being afraid of sin, praying often, paying attention to one's actions and always remembering God. When this is translated, its meaning gets less dense because it must be reduced or reformulated in other words.

Moreover, the Qur'an uses different structures in sentences, changes the voice within stories and makes some statements incomplete to make readers ponder. Mirroring such stylistics in a different language often leads to confusion or means breaking up the connectedness. Consequently, translators are required to decide if they put clarity before faithfulness or vice versa.

As a result, we realize that translating is reading or explaining rather than copying (Kruger, 2012). No real equivalence exists between Arabic and English for Qur'anic terms and figures of speech, so the task is not exact and interprets the original a lot.

5.3 Cultural Untranslatability

Cultural untranslatability is the name given to the challenges involved in adapting to modern language concepts, symbols and practices found in the Qur'an that come from ancient Arabian society. Such elements which are commonly called Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), bring up images of ancient groups, old customs, sacred ceremonies and places in nature that could have no clear likens in the audience's culture.

For instance, words such as ḥajj (pilgrimage), zakāt (obligatory charity) or naṣī' (postponement of sacred months) are strong traditions in Islam and Arab society. Simply calling zakāt "charity" hides the organizational, legal and theological aspects of the concept. Just like hijab, jilbāb which is usually called a cloak or garment, does not explain its role in Islam (Kruger, 2012).

Tiny details such as date palms, brittle olive trees and desert breezes, have deep symbolic meanings in the Qur'an. Sometimes, if the text is translated into languages whose audience has no background for the things mentioned, its poetic impact could be reduced.

This loss goes beyond words and it also influences how people interpret the text. Without understanding the setting, some people may not grasp the true meaning of the Qur'an (Kruger, 2013). Using such things as footnotes, glossaries or longer comments often helps cover up these points, yet it can be distracting or weary for the reader.

Table 2: Types of Untranslatability in Qur'anic Translation

Type	Definition	Translation Limitation
Theological	Concerns the divine origin and sacred status of the Qur'an, making translation inherently inadequate.	Translation cannot capture the sanctity and inimitability of divine speech.
Linguistic	Relates to linguistic features unique to Qur'anic Arabic that cannot be replicated in target languages.	Loss of stylistic, rhetorical, and prosodic features essential to Qur'anic meaning.
Cultural	Involves cultural references deeply embedded in 7th-century Arabian context	Loss or misrepresentation of culturally specific practices, symbols, or values.

with no equivalents.

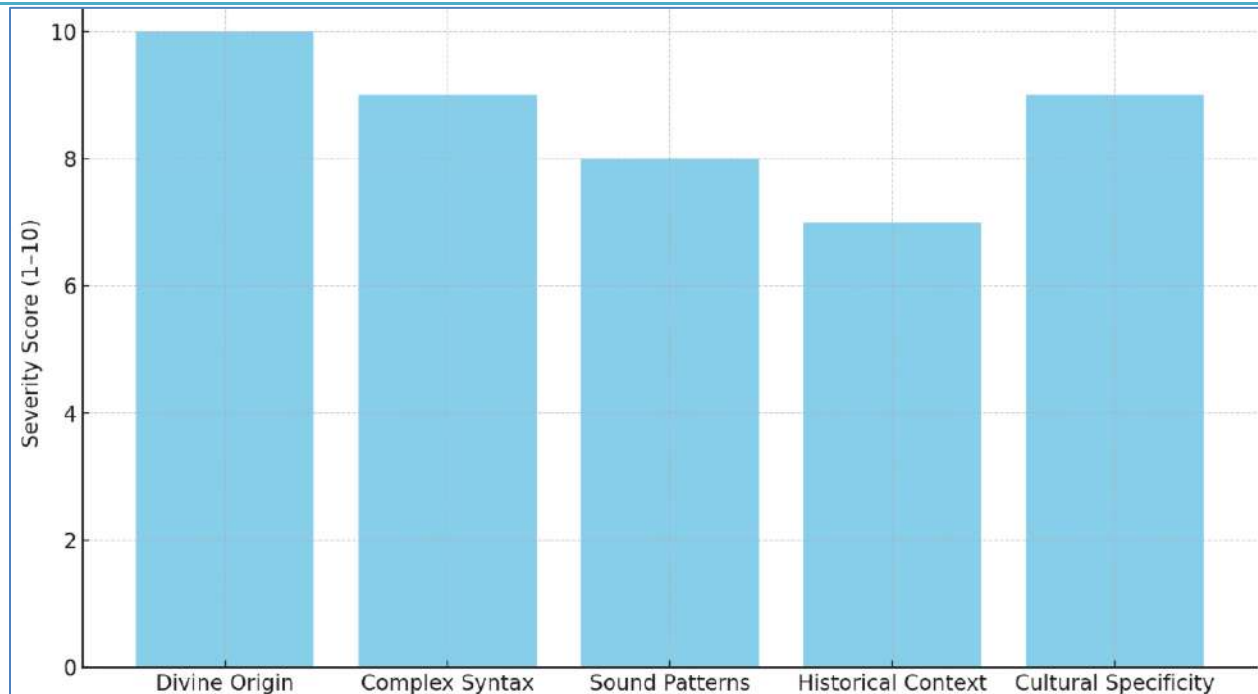


Figure 3: Perceived Barriers to Qur'an Translation by Domain

All these qualities of untranslatability are linked to each other and operate as a group. According to Figure 3, scholars consider theological, linguistic and cultural challenges to be related yet different and believe that divine origin as well as cultural characteristics stand out as the most serious hurdles. In short, the Qur'an cannot be translated fully due to its being a religious text, an unusual language and tied to a unique culture. A serious translator must pay attention to these different layers (Kruger, 2019). Those who translate religious texts need to connect the languages and deal with possible differences in teaching and traditions, often watched by both religious leaders and scholars. Because of this, there are new challenges and opportunities in translating the Qur'an around the world.

6 A Historical Overview of Qur'an Translation into English

Translating the Qur'an into English has been difficult and has been influenced by many religious, political, language and reader changes over time. Every era of translating Muslim religious texts into English has been affected by specific historical, cultural and religious circumstances (Kruger and Van Rooy, 2012). The section describes this development using three

time periods: the first phase was early Orientalist and missionary translations, followed by twenty-century translations by Muslims and academics and today's methods.

6.1 Early Translations: Orientalist and Missionary Contexts

Most early English translations of the Qur'an came from a Christian and colonial setting and many were made with clear polemical motives. Because many of these scholars did not know Arabic, they usually used information taken from Latin or French writers for their work (Kung, 2013). At this time, the main purpose of these writers was to judge Islam or present it as weaker than Christianity, rather than to foster ties among people of various faiths.

Alexander Ross finished the first English translation of the Bible in 1649. Still, Ross was not fluent in Arabic and worked from André du Ryer's French version. His translation was full of errors and seen from a hostile viewpoint, as shown by its title that described the Turks' traits as "vanities." In 1734, George Sale's version also came out, showing some stronger engagement with Islamic materials despite the continuing presence of orientalist views (Lauzière, 2010). Sale's insights gave Western scholars information on Islam that influenced their intellect for numerous centuries.

Around the 1890s, works by John Medows Rodwell (1861) and Edward Henry Palmer (1880) accepted the latest academic trends but continued to reflect orientalist thinking in their translations. Rodwell's method of placing surahs out of their usual habitual sequence marked a different way of looking at Islam historically, instead of honoring the Qur'an's traditional spiritual structure (Lauzière, 2010). Though these early works formed the core study of Islam in the West, they were doubted or rejected by Muslims. Many of them lacked expertise in religious matters, Arabic language skills and preferred to focus on things they felt were out of place or morally questionable. By contrast, they shaped new ideas and sparked improvements and better understanding in the 20th century.

6.2 Twentieth-Century Muslim and Academic Translations

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the field of Qur'an translation into English changed greatly. Many Muslim scholars, people who converted to Islam and experienced linguists started creating translations that were both theologically right and grammatically beautiful. They were set in motion because old translations weren't accurate enough and were influenced by post-

colonial circumstances, the increasing number of Muslims living outside of the Middle East and a greater desire for basic Islamic information among English speakers (Laviosa, 2002).

Among the important people in these years was Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, a British man who embraced Islam and published his translation in 1930. The work of Gibb showed he was the first to do scholarly translations into English who was also a Muslim, aiming to remain accurate to the form and meaning of the Qur'an. Nonetheless, using "thee" and "thou" made his writings hard for most readers at the time to relate to. In 1934, Abdullah Yusuf Ali presented a famous translation as well as comprehensive commentary. Works by him are very popular everywhere, but especially in South Asia and North America (Leech et al., 2009). While his work is famous for being sophisticated and well-researched, Yusuf Ali's use of poetic words and archaic expressions led to later people revising and adapting his version.

In 1955, Arthur J. Arberry, a non-Muslim expert, released a well-known translation that was faithful to the Koran's texts. Since he was familiar with Arabic and Persian literature, he was able to imitate the features of Qur'anic writing as well as earlier translators (Lefevere, 1992a). His writings are still respected in both academics and interfaith settings because of how unbiased and clear they are.

Later on, Dawood, Irving and Sarwar produced modernised translations focused on certain topics and created versions with thematic changes, simplified language and made them easier for Western readers to understand. There were problems with some translations, since some gave wrong meanings or made the texts too familiar to Westerners.

This era brought about a wider range of translators such as traditional scholars, linguists and reformers in Islam which made the tradition more lively and flexible. Because they all had different priorities, each translation saw readability, strictness, amount of explanation and loyalty to teachings treated in special ways.

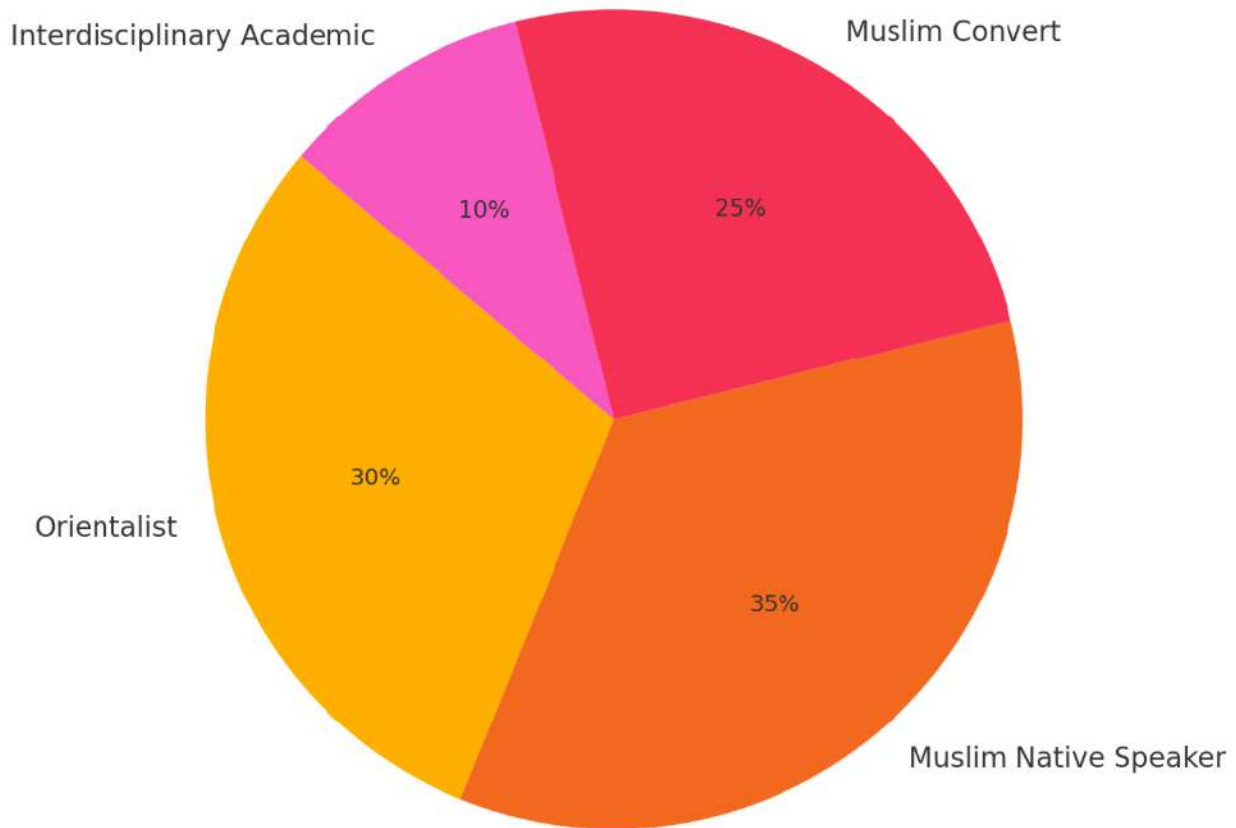


Figure 4: Backgrounds of Key English Qur'an Translators by Proportion

6.3 Contemporary Approaches in the Twenty-First Century

In the beginning years of the twenty-first century, English Qur'an translations started to become more diverse due to technology, increased readers around the globe and more involvement by religious organizations (Lefevere, 1992a). Modern versions are usually written so that people can read and understand them, showing exactness in meaning and still making sense theologically to people with different religious backgrounds.

Abdel Haleem's translation of the Quran is used in educational institutions and Western universities. The translation is easy to read with simple and modern English and its context is explained in the text, not through detailed notes. He tries to keep the meaning of the Qur'an while making it easier for those without Islamic backgrounds to read it (Lefevere, 1992a). Aisha and Abdalhaqq Bewley are two Western Muslims who produced a translation that remains true to the classical interpretation but tries to be easy for newcomers to read. They are respected in the community because of their clear teachings that reflect the true tenets of Islam.

Saheeh International, translated by a group of American Muslim women, appeals to many because it is written in clear, easy-to-read form and is very accessible (Lefevere, 1992b). Saudi religious authorities guidelines mean its explanation is conservative, yet it is accepted by many to be taught and as a guide. Editors Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Khaled Abou El Fadl produced The Study Quran, published in 2015 and now seen as a prominent scholarly research (Leppihalme, 1997). It provides a lot of information, historical background and different ideas from scholars in the Islamic community. This translation stands out because it draws from a variety of sources, aiming at scholars, experts and readers who want a deep look at Qur’anic interpretations (Kearns, 2009).

Table 3: Key Milestones in the History of English Qur’an Translation

Period	Key Translators	Features
Pre-20th Century	Alexander Ross (1649), George Sale (1734), Rodwell (1861), Palmer (1880)	Orientalist influence, polemical intent, limited Arabic proficiency
Early 20th C.	Pickthall (1930), Yusuf Ali (1934), Arberry (1955)	Faithful rendering, literary quality, partial exegetical context
Late 20th C.	Dawood (1956), Irving (1985), Sarwar (1981), Asad (1980)	Expanded readership, modernized English, chronological reordering
21st Century	Abdel Haleem (2004), Bewley & Bewley (2005), Saheeh Int’l (1997), Nasr et al. (2015)	Accessible language, institutional oversight, contextual sensitivity

All in all, several factors including ideology, theology, linguistics and sociopolitical considerations played a role in the history of Qur’an translation into English. We can notice that translations have become more thoughtful, aware of different cultures and open to an increased number of translators (Leppihalme, 2001). This shift keeps shaping the way contemporary Qur’an translators deal with these issues.

7 Reviewing the Literature on Translating CSIs in the Qur'an

Working with some items that relate to culture in the Qur'an is especially difficult for translators, since they are anchored in the age and traditions of the first Muslims (Katan, 2009). A number of scholars from translation studies, Islamic studies and comparative linguistics have been drawn by the English translations of these items (Leppihalme, 2011). We look at recent works on this topic by splitting them into three sections: methodological trends, reviews of major studies and an analysis of any gaps that exist.

7.1 7.1 Methodological Trends in CSI Translation Research

Study of how CSIs are translated in the Qur'an commonly takes both qualitative and quantitative routes, depending on the background of the researcher. A widely used method is analyzing the Qur'an within a corpus which means looking at different English translations and grouping different terms according to set strategies. Usually, these studies use established taxonomies, for instance, Chesterman's (1997) and Davies' (2003), to identify techniques in translation, for example, preservation, addition, omission, transformation or creation.

A different trend focuses on how things like social or political contexts affect ideas from CSIs and their translatability. The approach usually reviews cultural, religious and political impacts that guide the translation of Qur'anic expressions for specific readers (Levshina, 2015). This is most helpful when interpreting information on rituals, kinship terms and religious concepts.

A recent trend in consideration is using reception and reader-response studies. These research projects explore how people from different backgrounds interpret teaching stories from different CSI translations (Lindquist, 2009). A few researchers use surveys, conduct interviews or hold focus groups to find out how useful different translation strategies are in supporting cultural understanding.

Yet, these methods have given us important understanding, but at the same time, they have discovered gaps in data size, detail and area of analysis (Hanna, 2016). There aren't many studies that cover all three approaches and most tend to work on just a few translations or cases of CSIs. Therefore, their conclusions cannot be used broadly and comparisons among translation options are challenging (Hasan, 2013).

7.2 Critical Evaluations of Key Studies

There is a significant quantity of research that focuses on how the Qur'an translates certain CSIs. You can find the key achievements, approach and shortcomings of each in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Key Studies on CSIs in Qur'an Translation

Study	Focus Area	Methodology	Limitations
Amjad & Farahani (2013)	Divine Names in 3 English Translations	Corpus-based; Chesterman's model	Small corpus; lacks mainstream translations
Robati (2015)	Translation of 'jilbab' in Persian & English	Corpus-based; Davies' taxonomy	Focuses on one term; lacks broader implications
Abdul-Raof (2005)	Six categories of culturally loaded items	Qualitative contextual analysis	No quantitative component
Al-Barakati (2013)	Translation of sex-related euphemisms	Contextual analysis + reader response	Limited generalisability beyond sample
Khan (2015)	Children's Qur'an storybook translation	Descriptive analysis using Toury's norms	Not focused on CSIs specifically

Using only three English translations, Amjad & Farahani (2013) try to classify different strategies used to translate divine names. However, because the study neglects to look at widely used translations, it reduces how useful it can be.

Robati (2015) carried out a detailed investigation of jilbab translation and effectively used Davies' classification. Still, Studdard focuses only on one word in this chapter which does not provide a conclusive insight into how the whole Qur'an is translated.

Abdul-Raof's book (2005) is known for offering an extensive qualitative research approach. It is useful to see the way Benton sorts cultural items such as theological terms, ritual acts and social customs. Regardless, the strategies Dubinsky suggests are mostly based on descriptions and do not rely on evidence to show or measure their benefits.

In the study by Al-Barakati (2013), Skopos theory, equivalence theory and reception theory are used together to look at the translation of euphemistic expressions. He applies methods of analyzing scripture along with reviewing what the audience suggests which is quite rare but works well. Even so, the size of the sample is not large and the study looks only at narrow topics.

Khan's study is special since it uses Toury's guidelines for interpreting a children's story from the Qur'an. Even though it is not main topic, the study demonstrates that beliefs about the audience affect translation strategies which is important for CSIs that require formal language.

7.3 *Strategy Synthesis and Identified Gaps*

Based on what was reviewed, translators tend to apply a smaller number of strategies while working with CSIs. Such techniques can generally be assigned to literal transcription, adding more information, footnotes, adapting texts to the target language and dropping details (Hassen, 2011). Every strategy has its ups and downs depending on whether you are writing for a specific group and how you intend to use the translation. Figure 5 gives an overview of the average frequency with which these strategies are mentioned or practiced among the reviewed papers.

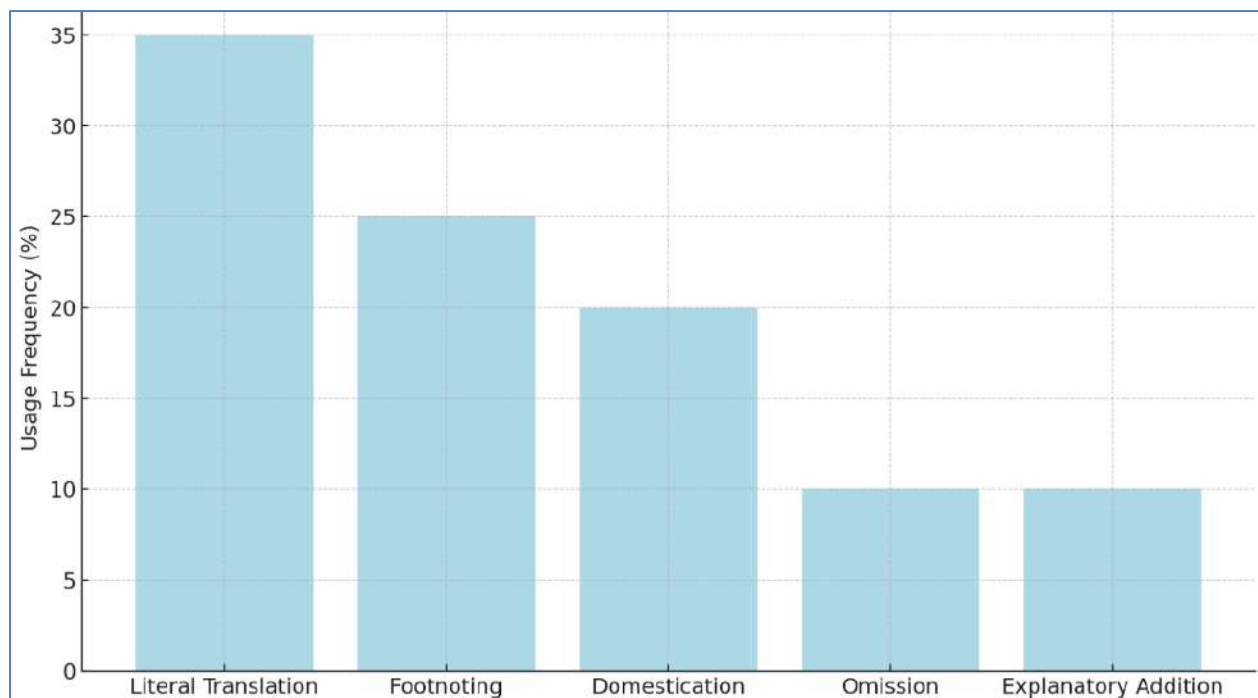


Figure 5: Common Strategies Used for Translating CSIs in the Qur'an

Out of all techniques, literal translation is used more often, especially when dealing with texts that must be handled very sensitively. Frequently, that means readers become confused or find it culturally uncomfortable (Hatim and Mason, 1990). Although footnotes and explanations give more information, they may interrupt the pace of reading or overwhelm the readers' brains. Attempting to adapt the term in the target culture might cause misunderstandings, yet rarely does someone leave it out which leads to the loss of specifics.

Nevertheless, there are not enough studies looking into why particular strategies are used or how they affect people with different interests. Also, because CSI taxonomies are not standardised and there are no broad comparison corpora for multiple translations, it is hard to make general conclusions (Hatim and Munday, 2004). The difference between standards and text proves that a complete, interdisciplinary and evidence-based study is needed to better and more ethically translate CSI books and films.

8 Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

It is necessary to have sound frameworks and methods to deal with translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) in the Qur'an. Researchers have examined this issue by using various methods, for example, studies in language or those based on society and culture (Heilbron and Sapiro, 2007). Here, we outline the main theoretical models and approaches to translation of CSI, helping to form a conceptual link to new research or analysis.

8.1 *Defining CSIs*

Some things, called culture-specific items, reflect the source culture's viewpoint and it is not usually possible to describe or translate them without explanation (Hermans, 2009). Among the seven CSI categories described by the Qur'an are religious rituals, social customs, historic happenings, words used among families, nature-related things and rules for life.

No matter how definitions differ, the main traits found in CSIs seem to be: (1) no literal translation into the target language, (2) meaning only understood when linked to culture and history and (3) a need for extra information outside the text. *Zakāt*, *ḥajj*, *jilbāb* and *nasī'* are words found in the Qur'an and each of them implies meaning in faith, meaning in usage and meaning in manners (Katan, 2004).

Though Nedergaard-Larsen and Aixela have set up criteria to identify CSIs, these are mostly meant for audiovisual or secular settings. When studying the Qur'an, it becomes difficult because anyone exploring the text might face religious objections.

So, when translating CSIs in the Qur'an, one must use several elements, including studying the root words, meaning as a whole, commonness of usage and how important it is theologically. So, it is necessary to combine techniques from descriptive linguistics with those in cultural translation theory (Hermans, 2014).

8.2 Translation Strategies

Numerous taxonomies have been created by scholars to describe translation strategies for CSIs. You may follow these strategies by saving the words as they are, altering them to make them clearer or by offering observations or explanations (Hermans, 1985). Looking at Table 5, you will find that four key strategy taxonomies are used in CSI translation.

Table 5: Major Taxonomies for Translating CSIs

Model	Key Strategies	Context of Use
Davies (2003)	Preservation, Addition, Omission, Globalization, Localization, Creation	Audiovisual and literary translation
Newmark (1988)	Transference, Cultural Equivalent, Functional Equivalent, Descriptive, Modulation	General cultural translation
Chesterman (1997)	Literal, Semantic, Syntactic, Textual, Pragmatic	Linguistic and pragmatic focus
Pedersen (2005)	Retention, Specification, Direct Translation, Generalization, Substitution, Omission	Subtitling and constrained translation

Davies' approach is especially useful for religious texts since it includes both language and cultural aspects along with the way the texts are received (Holmes, 2000). The framework includes the concept of functional and cultural equivalence which is important for keeping both principles and understanding the same (Johnson, 1993). He sets out a multi-level approach that covers pragmatic strategies which can help the translator justify their actions in the text meant

for the reader. Although Pedersen's rules were initially developed for making subtitles, they still help with recognizing the differences in similar situations like interlinear versions.

Because these models are made generally, they can be used to look at how Qur'an translators deal with different aspects of language (House, 1997). The strategy selected depends on the translator's purpose, who the audience will be, the guidelines used by the institution and their personal beliefs. Such decisions are noticeable in different translations and can be counted up using frequency counts, footnotes and comparisons of vocabulary.

8.3 Descriptive Translation Studies and Sociological Approaches

This last type of analysis requires you to look at the bigger picture affecting the decisions translation teams take. DTS which was initiated by Toury and later developed by scholars like Chesterman and Hermans, focuses on analyzing translated works as part of their cultural context (Ivir, 1987). DTS frameworks focus on what translators really do, rather than setting rules and provide instruments to examine and compare several translations.

It is especially useful to use DTS in examining Qur'anic translations because researchers can track how different CSIs have been undertaken, who worked on them and what ideas shaped their translations (Inghilleri, 2011). The institutionalizing norms, strategic methods and reader conventions seen in the text are exactly what these concepts are about (Irving, 1992). Essentially, sociological approaches to translation mainly developed by Bourdieu concentrate on how the translator is influenced by power, ideas and the surrounding institutions. This is very important when translating the Qur'an because questions of authority, religion and how the community will receive it are major concerns. Figure 6 below visualises the relative emphasis placed by different frameworks relevant to CSI analysis.



Figure 6: Emphasis in Translation Frameworks Relevant to CSI Analysis

Comparing DTS and sociological frameworks leads to a better perspective on the freedom and problems present in CSI translations (Itani, 2017). The text makes it clear that translation is part of culture, politics and religion, since it always depends on specific beliefs and power structures.

9 Conclusion

It is still one of the most difficult and controversial tasks in translation studies to translate the Qur'an into English. When it comes to the complexity of Islamic religious terminology, it is culture-specific items (CSIs) that seem especially difficult to replace due to their deep ties to Islam's background and teachings.

It has examined how translating the Qur'an in English started with Orientalists and developed into projects led by Muslims. It reveals that the process of translation is limited by language as well as by particular legal rules, traditions of interpreting and the expectations of those reading or hearing it. Considering that untranslatability exists in both theological, linguistic and cultural fields, we realize how important it is for translators to address the constant balance between being correct, respecting and being readable.

After looking at various studies about CSI translation, it is evident that even with several approaches such as literal translation or adding notes, there is not yet an agreed-upon model. In addition, the current literature often has limited coverage, has weak use of different research approaches or is too dependent on just one translation case. Future investigations should be based on corpora, compare different cases and take into account how the strategies are perceived by the audience.

You can use tools developed by Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), sociological studies and strategy classifications by Davies, Newmark and Chesterman to explain how translators make their choices. The theory shows us that translation serves cultural and ideological interests. The way a CSI is handled in translation from the Qur'an is usually determined by the translator's experiences, the audience for whom the translation is geared and the current setting.

The future for this area would involve using methods that unite textual analysis, digital humanities, ethnographic research and cognitive studies. Besides, community translations and multilingual studies of the Qur'an can help us understand better how the messages are shared worldwide.

To sum up, translating CSIs in the Qur'an goes beyond linguistics and involves issues of knowledge, ethics and interpretation. Involvement in this journey should take into account its varied meanings, accept that equivalence is not possible and pay attention to what readers experience in real life. Being aware of these tensions is not an issue with translation, as it shows the Qur'an's unique role as a meaningful and deeply rooted text.

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