

Quran Translation: A Historical-Theological Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The traditional prohibition on translating the Quran into other languages is considered to be one of the discussable issues within Islamic theology and jurisprudence. From the eleventh century, when the Islamic state extended politically and geographically, a need arose to understand the Quran, which is the essence of the Islamic religion. Most non-Arab converts were unable to understand the original Quran text. As a result, they could not understand the true message of their new faith and perform the prescribed worship and practices. This article deals with the topic translating the Quran from a historical and theological point of view. Firstly, some historical factors that lead to the realization of the Quran translation are examined, including the need to understand the Quran both by the new Muslim generations and the People of the Book to defend their own faith against the Islam. Secondly, attention is paid to the theological consensus on prohibiting translation of the Quran into other languages because of its inimitable nature and style. Finally, the problem of the Quran translation is discussed with a focus on the current need for understanding the universal message of the Quran that can only be achieved through translation.

Keywords: Quran translation, Islamic religion, inimitability, untranslatability

Translating the Quran is considered one of the controversial issues in Islamic theology and jurisprudence. As a result, a strange paradox has emerged, in which the Quran has been published worldwide in different languages on the one hand while on the other fatwas are issued by authoritative scholars who forbid translation of the Quran. To understand the issue of the impermissibility and impossibility of translating the Quran it is necessary to remove the confusion and ambiguity of this contradiction.

In this article we strive to take a closer look at this apparent contradiction. Therefore, a number of questions are addressed on this matter. It actually concerns three categories of questions: Firstly, how did the interest in translating the Quran arise historically with both Muslims and non-Muslims such as the People of the Book? Which factors led to the appearance of the first Quran translations? What are the Eastern and European languages in which the Quran was translated, especially in the early stages of the Quran translation?

Secondly, how is translating the Quran defined, in particular by Muslim theologians and scholars? What are the theological viewpoints regarding the translation of the Quran as a controversial issue? Finally, to what extent forms the consensus among Sunni law schools and theologians on the untranslatability of the Quran an obstacle to translating the Quran? How is it that the Quran translation has a striking dynamic today, despite the fatwas that prohibit it?

Quran Translation: A Historical Overview

The reduction of translation activities in the final phase of the Abbasid era did not mean the end of the Arabic translation movement. New paths were taken within this translation tradition,

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whereby the translation of Arabic into other languages had become very popular (Bahraoui 2010; Baker & Hanna 2009). It is remarkable that the Arabic translation movement has gone through a sort of cycle. Initially, the Arabs and Muslims focused their attention entirely on the transfer of Greek philosophical and scientific works and to a lesser extent on the Persian and Indian texts. Later on, this interest would change completely, especially in Andalusia where new circumstances, needs and target groups appeared on the scene. In the twelfth century a reverse translation movement began in which the Islamic scientific and philosophical works of Arabic were translated into Latin and Spanish.

The religious element was clearly present, since the papal authority was an important factor in this translation cycle or shift. Bahraoui refers to two important underlying causes. On the one hand, the church appointed Raymond bishop of Toledo, where he established a translation team of Christians, Arabs and Jews to translate Arabic philosophical books into Latin (Bahraoui 2010: 76-78; Juynboll 1931: 26-27). On the other hand, the king of Castile, Alfonso X (1252-1284) played a crucial role in the cultural history of Spain (Juynboll 1931: 24). The importance of his initiative in this translation area lies in two things. Firstly, Alfonso X is considered the first one to switch from translating scientific and pragmatic works to translating fictional works. For example, in 1151 he ordered to translate *Kalilah and Dimnah* into Spanish. Secondly, he used Castilian instead of Latin (Bahraoui 2010: 76-78).

It should be noted that the religious purpose was present in both these cases. The church made every effort to regain the Greek works acquired by Muslims and to make them available to the church and the Latin world (Bahraoui 2010: 84). Moreover, the translation initiative of Alfonso X was not only limited to the books of astronomy, science and entertainment, but it also contained some religious texts such as the story of *Isra'* and *Mi'raj* (Bahraoui 2010: 88). -This means the night journey and ascension of the Prophet Muhammad. This event is mentioned in the Quran: "*Glory to (Allah) Who did take His Servant for Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose precincts We did Bless in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the one Who heareth and seeth (all things).*"(17:1) [translation by Yusuf Ali]; see also the biography of Prophet Muhammad (Ibn Hisham 1990: 2/53-57).

In general, this was mainly the situation of translation in Andalusia. What is the situation for the translation of the Quran, which began in the 11th century as most historical sources indicate? How did the interest in translating the Quran arise historically with both Muslims and non-Muslims? Which factors led to the creation of the first partial and full Quran translations?

Understanding Quran as Main Factor for Translation

Until the arrival of the Seljuks in the eleventh century and the Ottomans in the fourteenth century, and until the creation of the Toledo translation school, there was no question of translation of the Quran. Some sources refer to some translated parts of the Quran into other languages, such as the chapter *al-Fatiḥah*, the opening verse, which by the companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Salman al-Farisi (568-657) translated into Persian for some members of his tribe to use in prayer (Allouche 2008:7). Various Quranic verses were also translated during the time of the Omayyad caliph Hicham Ibn Abdul Malik (691-743) by Syrian priests. A collection of Syrian manuscripts can be found in the Manchester Library and in the British Museum in London (Abu Laila 2002: 383). Furthermore, various Quranic verses were translated in the Middle Ages, both by Christians, especially Maltese theologian Ya'qub Ibn al-Ṣalibi (d. 1171), who translated it into Syrian in the twelfth century (al-Zarqani 1995:2/89) and by Jews, for example by, among others, the philosopher Saadia Gaon (892-942) and the poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1120-1158) (al-Bahansi 2014:153).

This indicates that these partial Quran translations were made by Muslims and non-Muslims. Al-Farisi translated *surah al-Fatiḥah* with the aim of facilitating prayer for Persian converts who were unable to express themselves in Arabic and memorize short Quranic verses. However, the Christian and Jewish translators translated parts of the Quran into Syrian and Hebrew to defend their own faith. They used these Quranic verses as arguments in theological

polemics and in apologetic debates with Muslims. While in both cases the understanding of the Quran was in the first place the reason for translation, but the goal differs per party. For Muslims, the goal was above all understanding the own religion and the prescribed prayers, and thus, correctly carrying out religious duties. In contrast, non-Muslims were concerned with religious polemics and apologetics.

Only after the eighth century the first integral Quran translation would emerge, which was the translation of Ibn Ḥaj al-Shirazi into Argosian, an old Turkish dialect. Some claim that the first Turkish Quran translation dates from the tenth century and contains two thousand five hundred (2500) words, including ten words in Arabic and Persian and the rest in the ancient Turkish language (Ramadan 1998: 130).

Abu Laila confirms the existence of a number of manuscripts of Persian translations of the Quran from the eleventh century. This is based on the data of the Dutch orientalist Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883) who created a special list of 74 Persian Quran translations, eight different translations of the Quran and various Persian and Hindi translations of unknown translators (Abu Laila 2002: 381-382). In the introduction of his French-language Quran translation, Hamidullah quotes the position of the Italian Orientalist Ignazio Guidi (1844-1935) on the fact that the Quran was translated into the Berber language in the eighth century. On top of that, he adds that the Quran was also completely translated into Hindi in the ninth century (Allouche 2008: 8). However, Abu Laila doubts the existence of these early translations due to a lack of concrete evidence to confirm this fact (Abu Laila 2002: 381).

The Berber translation of the Quran is linked with the Burġwaṭah dynasty that reigned in the West of present-day Morocco between the eighth and eleventh century. One of the strong and famous rulers of this dynasty was Ṣalih Ibn Ṭarif (ruled until 746) who studied astronomy and followed the Ḥariġitic Ṣufariyyah movement. Later on, he founded a new religion, wrote a new Quran of 80 suras, and named himself a prophet and an expected Mahdi or messiah. This is how this Berber ruler is introduced to most sources of history. Dozy says about this: "The Quran of Ṣalih, which was written in the Berber language, consisted of eighty *surahs* or chapters, usually bearing the name of a prophet. The first name was that of Job, the last that of Jonas." (Dozy 1900: 255). Abdul Razzaq has thoroughly investigated this issue and concluded that "what is being written about the Quran of Burġwaṭah is unfounded, and it is no (...) more than a translation of the Quran into the Berber language. At that time, it was necessary, because the Berbers of Tamasna were not fully Arabized until the time of the Almohads." (Abdul Razzaq 1977: 53). -In my book, *Islam and Amazigism*, I have dealt with this controversial issue in the history of Morocco on the basis of various standpoints and theories including those of Ibn Khaldun and Abdul Razzaq (Boulaouali 2009: 100-105).

This shows that the Quran translations made by Muslims came into being centuries later with the aim of meeting the religious needs of the new Muslim generations, especially outside the Arabian Peninsula in Persia, Turkey, India, North Africa, etc. In other words, the urgent need to understand and practice one's own new faith was the main reason for making those early partial or full Quran translations. On the other hand, the motivation of the Christian and Jewish apologists was completely different. They translated the Quran into their own languages, either to defend their own faith dogmas, or to criticize Islam and to question various verses of the Quran.

Quran Translation and Theological Polemics

During the Abbasid period, the translation of Greek philosophical and logical works played a crucial role in the theological and apologetic debates, both internally between the Islamic schools and branches and externally between Muslims and those of other religions, especially the People of the Book (Gutas 1998; Baker & Hanna 2009). That theological controversy continues to this day, with the Quran always in a central position. Understanding the words of God was important for Christian and Jewish apologists. On the one hand to advocate their own faith against the

Muslim defenders, on the other to oppose Islam and the Quran. This is how the first partial or integral Quran translations were made by non-Muslim theologians and translators.

The first Quran translation made by Europeans was in Latin, which is a well-known Latin translation that dates from 1143 and is associated with the name of the English astronomer and translator Rodbertus Ketenensis (1110-1160). This translation project was started by the church under the direction of the French priest Petrus Venerabilis (1092-1156), with the help of a team of translators consisting of Rodbertus Ketenensis, Hermann le Dalmate, Robert de Chester and a Muslim scholar named Mohammed. The intention was to present this translation to the order of Cluny in order to combat Islam (al-Zarqani 1995: 2/89; Bahraoui 2010: 81-82; Abu Laila 2002: 384). Juynboll states in her dissertation on seventeenth-century Arabic practitioners in the Netherlands (*Zeventiende-eeuwsche beoefenaars van het Arabisch in Nederland*): "Abdallah, more commonly known as his Christian-accepted name Johannes Andreas, who recorded a comprehensive 'refutation of the Mohammedan sect' in Spanish (1487), a scripture that enjoyed great prestige in Western Europe and which was translated into Latin as well as in other languages in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries. Moreover, he translated the Quran from Arabic into the dialect of Aragon. However, this work has been lost, as well is a Latin Quran translation, made around 1300 by the Dominican monk Ricoldus de Monte Crucis." (Juynboll 1931:12). Various Latin Quran translations followed later, including the translation of the German orientalist Abraham Hinckelmann (1652-1695) and the translation of the Italian orientalist Louis Maracci (1612-1700) (al-Zarqani 1995:2/89). -The dates of these translations in this source are incorrect. al-Zarqani mentions that Hinckelmann's translation was published in 1594, while he lived between 1652 and 1695. al-Zarqani also states that the translation of Maracci was made in 1598, while Maracci lived between 1612 and 1700!

The Latin translation of the Quran would form the basis for the following translations of the Quran in all kinds of European languages, and thus hundreds of Quran translations have appeared in Europe since the 12th century. Common translations include the Italian translation of Andrea Arrivabene (1547), the German translation of Salomon Schweigger (1616), the French translation of Andre du Ryer (1647), the English translations of Alexander Ross (1648) and George Sale (1734), which is considered to be the first to be translated directly from Arabic. Also, worth mentioning are the Dutch translation by Jan Hendrik Glazemaker (1657), the Russian translation by M.I. Veryovkin (1790), the Spanish translation of The Jose Garber de Robles (1844), and many others. -According to the bibliography of the Quranic translations of The Center for the Translation of the Quran, it contains dozens of titles of old and new translations of the Quran in different languages: Urdu (171), Persian (57), Turkish (50), English (41), Bengali (33), German (22), Indonesian, Malay and Javanese (together 19), French (17), Panjabi (14), Sindhi and Spanish (both 13), and Pashto (11). See: Qarai, Ali Quli. (2018). *The Quran and Its Translators*. <http://www.islamic-sources.com/>, (Retrieved: 6 May 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the first Latin and European Quran translations were driven by apologetic debates between Muslims and Christians. Most translations from the Middle Ages were made with the aim of defending Christianity against Islam. In order to do so, translation was encouraged but the Arabic texts were distorted and the truths manipulated (Bahraoui 2010:94). It also becomes clear that the translation project of Petrus was launched to "condemn and combat the heresy of Islamic law" (Bahraoui 2010:101).

The same applies to the translations of the Quran made by Jews in the Middle Ages. Shahlan states that Jews who settled in the Arab world did not have to translate the Quran at the time, because they could understand Arabic without any problem. Those who translated the Quran, primarily into Hebrew, had no real knowledge of the Quran, its language or its content. They only used the lexicon for the literal meaning of various words, and as a result, their translation attempts are characterized by errors and deviations (Shahlan 2014:12).

Both the partial and later full Hebrew translations of the Quran (For example, the Quran translations of Jacob ben Israël Ha-Levi 1614, Hermann Reckendorf 1875, Joseph Joel Rivlin 1936 (al-Bahansi 2014: 154-157; Shahlan 2014: 17, 18) -are part of the religious polemics between the Muslims and the People of the Book. The biblical influence is undeniable here, especially with

regard to the use of the biblical style and the language of the Old Testament. Additionally, these translations often emphasize the fact that the Quran was influenced by the Torah, and every translator tries to attribute the Quran to biblical origin (al-Bahansi 2014: 155-157).

The conclusion is that the translation of the Quran into European languages was initially initiated by Christian and Jewish theologians and clerics for apologetic and missionary motives. Thanks to the evolution in communication between Muslims and Christians, the discovery of the sources of Islamic knowledge and the transmission of science and enlightenment, translating the Quran would go in new directions, and thus some translators distanced themselves from theological polemics (Abu Laila 2002: 399-400). In Spain, a new phase was initiated in the history of translation, in particular when King Alfonso X decided to end the translation of Arabic into Latin, the language of the church, and replace it with Castilian, the language of the Spanish people (Bahraoui 2010: 105).

Theological Consensus on Banning Quran Translation

Literal Translation and Transfer of Meaning. The above paragraphs outlined a historical overview of Quran translations from Arabic into other languages. A number of things are examined, including the reasons for translating the Quran, the need to understand the word of God, the apologetic polemic and the partial and complete Quran translations. Now, we go further to the theological level, where the concept of Quran translation will be defined first, and then a range of (Islamic) theological standpoints concerning the translation of the Quran will be discussed.

Translation is generally considered as a process “from a source language to a target language” (Catford 1965: 20). This key concept can be found in most definitions of translation. But, every translation theorist adds extra ingredients, often from his/her own perspective. With regard to the translation of sacred scriptures, emphasis is placed on some elements, such as the transmission of the truth, the reliability, the untranslatable, the synthesis, the rhetoric, and so on. This also applies to the Quran, which is a major challenge for translators, in particular because of its metaphorical style, which is untranslatable. That is one of the important reasons for the consensus among Muslim scholars that the Quran translation is not a Quran, but rather an explanation of its meanings in the target language. In other words, the Quran translation strives for the linguistic interpretation of the Quran text in other languages in order to approximate, simplify, and clarify its original purpose. “Such an explanation is considered as an attempt to transform the connotations of the Quran. In this way, it is common for people to simply see it as a translation of the meanings of the Quran.” (Zawaqa 2014: 74).

Probably for this reason, al-Zarqani distinguishes between two meanings of Quran translation. On the one hand, Quran translation means transferring the Quran from Arabic into another language. On the other hand, Quran translation stands for expressing the connotations of the Arabic terms in non-Arabic words while complying with all meanings and purposes of the Quran (al-Zarqani 1995:2/114). This translation is called the interpretative translation or the transfer of meaning, which is more focused on the connotations and intentions of the words, as opposed to the literal translation that imitates the original text in its synthesis and order (al-Zarqani 1995:2/114).

Such problematic duality was constantly present in the history of Bible translation in Europe, especially with Jerome, Luther, Aelfric and others (Gutas 1998). Nida, an influential figure in religious translation, addressed some of the dilemmas encountered by Bible translators, such as “word versus mind” and “form and meaning”. The Bible translator only succeeds if he establishes a kind of balance between these opposing elements (Nida 1964: 2). This means that the literal translation of the sacred texts is impossible, while the transfer of meaning can be achievable. An example of this is the translation of Quran (al-Isra’ 17: 29). “*وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ (غُلْفَكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا)*” “*Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard’s) to thy neck nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach so that thou become blameworthy and destitute*” (English translation text by Yusuf Ali). When we literally (word for word) transform this verse from Arabic

into other languages, the meaning becomes vague and unclear, as al-Zarqani notes (1995:2/92). Let's see how this Quran verse was translated into Dutch:

Kramers (1956): "*En houd uw hand niet aan uw nek gekluisterd, en spreid haar ook niet geheel open uit, zodat gij neerzit, beladen met verwijten en benepen.*"

["And do not keep your hand glued to your neck, and do not spread it out completely open, so that you sit down, loaded with accusations and fools."]

Kramers (1992): "*En houd uw hand niet gekluisterd aan uw nek⁴ en spreid haar ook niet geheel open uit zodat gij neerzit beladen met verwijten en benepen.*"⁵

⁴. D.w.z. weest niet gierig (Ĝalalayn).

⁵. Ĝalalayn: Doordat u, vanwege uw vrijgevigheid, niets meer bezit.

["And do not keep your hand glued to your neck⁴, and do not spread it out completely open, so that you sit down, loaded with accusations and fools."⁵

⁴This means: don't be cheap, stingy (Ĝalalayn).

⁵. Ĝalalayn: Since you no longer own anything because of your generosity.]

Verhoef (2016): "*En houd uw hand niet op slot, maar doe uw hand ook niet al te wijd open. Dan zou u schuldig en zonder iets achterblijven.*"

["And don't keep your hand locked, but don't open your hand too wide either. Then you would be left behind guilty and without anything."]

Leemhuis (1989): "*Houd je hand niet aan de hals gebonden en strek haar ook niet helemaal uit, want dan zul je met verwijten overladen beschaamd terneer zitten.*"

["Do not keep your hand tied to the neck and do not stretch it out completely, because then you will sit embarrassed showered with accusations."]

Aboe Ismail (2018): "*En maak jouw hand niet vastgebonden aan jouw nek (d.w.z. wees niet gierig) en strek het niet volledig uit (als een verkwister), anders blijf jij vol verwijt en spijt achter.*"

["And don't make your hand tied to your neck (i.e. don't be stingy) and don't stretch it out completely (like a waster), otherwise you'll be left with reproach and regret."]

In the above-mentioned translations it appears that the Quranic verse 17:29 is literally transferred from Arabic to Dutch, with the exception of Verhoef who dropped the word *'unuq, hals/nek* in Dutch, "neck" in English, and replaced it with "not locked". The editors of the translation of Kramers and Aboe Ismail have provided additional explanations based on Jalalayn's exegesis, either in the footnote, as with the editors of Kramers did, or in two brackets as with Aboe Ismail. If we drop this additional explanation, then these five translations will be fairly equivalent. Readers without any basic knowledge of Arabic and Islam are unable to find out the original meaning of this Quranic verse. That is why Jalalayn's explanation is of great importance in clarifying this Quranic metaphor; holding your neck with your hand means being greedy or cheap, and extending the hand completely represents exaggeration in generosity and wastage. In this way, the Flemish-Dutch target group is brought closer to the original meaning of the original text (the Quran) and the source language (Arabic). The other translation option to clarify the first phrase "*wa la taj'al yadaka maghlulatan 'ila 'unuqika*" is to borrow a meaning-related expression in the target language, Dutch such as "*op de penning zijn*", (which is similar to "looking at the penny twice before spending"), which has a connotation of greed.

Quran Translation in Theological Perspective

Interpretation of the Quran in Another Language. Four types or meanings of the Quran translation are distinguished, with the first type being the transfer of the Quran terms. The second one is the explanation of the Quran in Arabic and the third is the interpretation of the Quran in a different language. Finally, there is the translation of the Quran into another language (al-Zarqani 1995:2/107-114). -There are various works that have covered the theological views on the

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Qur'an translation, including El-Shater (1936), al-Zarqani (1995), Allouche (2008), Ramadan (1998), and others. In this section the book of al-Zarqani is cited more because it explains and analyses most of the views of the four law schools and authoritative scholars on translating the Quran. What is striking here is that the first and second types are intralingual in nature, while the third and fourth types are interlingual as defined by Roman Jakobson (Gentzler 2001: 29, 30). The last two types interest us most in this section.

There is a broad consensus among Muslim scholars and the four Sunni law schools about allowing the interpretation of the Quran in other languages. Such an interpretation is necessary especially for non-Arabic speakers. This is also judged just as legally as the interpretation of the Quran in Arabic itself. In both cases, it is an explanation of God's Word in a language the recipients understand, and not the translation of the Quran itself (al-Zarqani 1995:2/107). According to al-Shatibi (1320-1388) there are two types of meanings. On the one hand, there is the original (*al-aşliyyah*) meaning where the words have absolute meanings. On the other hand, you have the secondary (*al-tanawiyah*) meaning in which the terms carry certain meanings. The first type is common between human languages, while the second type only relates to Arabic (of the Quran). Quranic Arabic is characterized by certain cultural, contextual, linguistic and rhetorical properties (al-Zarqani 1995:2/130). Ibn Qutaybah (828-889) denies the possibility of translating the Quran, but it is allowed to explain the Quran to those who are unable to understand its purpose. Muslim scholars unanimously agree on this (al-Zarqani 1995:2/130). Such a theological point of view is confirmed by al-Ghazali (1058-1111), who adds that the intention is to understand the Quran and to convey its meaning to the public. However, the terms used for worship remain untranslatable (al-Zarqani 1995:2/132). -Most traditional scholars confirm this judgment. In addition to the above names, there are other authoritative theologians including Ibn Taymiyya and al-Nawawi

Regarding the translation type 'the interpretation of the Quran in other languages', al-Zarqani makes a number of observations that must be taken into account. The Quran must be written in the Arabic alphabet to avoid any distortion or deformation, because there are a number of Arabic sounds that have no equivalent in Latin script. -In addition, the rhyme is lost in every translation of the Quran. Verhoef speaks about this from his own experience with Quran translation:

"Nor will I discuss the common rhyme in the Quran. That rhyme is usually not properly reflected in a translation. It is therefore lost and that is a pity. But there is no other way. Incidentally, there is still a lot of uncertainty about the rhyme. It is often argued that even outputs of certain words would be influenced by the need to match that word with a certain rhyme. I hesitate. Because if the author makes singular or plural, male or female or even the choice of words dependent on the need for rhyme, how can I still know what he actually wants to say? Also, with regard to the use of rhyme, I believe that much more research is needed before responsible judgments can be made about it." (Verhoef 2017:12).

The interpretation must come immediately after the original Arabic text of the Quran. The Quran interpretation should not be interpreted as a translation. Moreover, this translation must be called "the translation of the Quran interpretation" or the interpretation of the Quran in another language (al-Zarqani 1995: 2/107-109). This translation type has a number of benefits, such as: showing the beauty of the Quran to non-Arabic speakers and facilitating their comprehensibility, removing suspicions about Islam and the Quran, and notifying non-Muslims about the truths and teachings of Islam (al-Zarqani 1995: 2/110, 111).

Translating the Quran into Another Language

According to al-Zarqani, translating the Quran into another language is unachievable in two ways. On the one hand, there is 'the normal impossibility' of translating the Quran into another language, given that it is impossible to display all original and secondary meanings of the Quran in a translation. Moreover, it is also impossible to realize the three main goals of the Quran. The first goal involves the secondary meanings of the Quran, which are attached to its supreme characteristics that underlie its rhetoric and inimitable nature. People cannot oversee or represent those meanings in their own words, otherwise there would be no question of the dogma of the inimitable nature of the Quran (*'I'jaz al-Qur'an*). Secondly, the Quran is the Word of God that cannot be adequately represented in a human language, neither in Arabic nor in any other language. Otherwise, the Quran would no longer be a wonderful word that exceeds the capacity of man. Finally, the Quran translation in this sense cannot be equated with the Quran itself (al-Zarqani 1995:2/110, 111).

On the other hand, there is 'the legal impossibility' of transferring the Quran to another language. Al-Zarqani lists eight elements in this regard. The most important ones will be discussed here. Firstly, the claim that the Quran translation is identical to the original Arabic Quran is contrary to the Quran itself, especially with the Yunus chapter: "*But when Our Clear Signs are rehearsed unto them, those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, Say: "Bring us a reading other than this, or change this," Say: "It is not for me, of my own accord, to change it: I follow naught but what is revealed unto me: if I were to disobey my Lord, I should myself fear the penalty of a Great Day (to come)."*" (10.15). Thus, people who use Quran translations, distance themselves from the Word of Allah when they limit themselves to these translations. Over time, the translation will be considered as the real Quran. So, they say: this is an English Quran and that is a French Quran. As an example, El-Shater refers to Javanese Muslims who recite and read the Quran translation to their children and believe that it is the real Quran (El-Shater 1936:17). Finally, when the Quran translation is adopted instead of the Quran, the original Arabic Quran will eventually disappear, just as it did with the Hebrew origin of the Torah and the Aramaic of the Gospel (al-Zarqani 1995: 2/117, 118).

The above demonstrates that the above-described theological framework regarding the translation of the Quran was previously established by the four Sunni law schools and by the most authoritative scholars. In such a consensus it is firmly confirmed that "both the translation of the Quran and the writing of the Quran in a non-Arabic alphabet, and also the reading of the Quran without prayer in Arabic are not permitted." (El-Shater 1936: 48). In this way, everything that is not in Arabic is not considered Quran, and the translation is merely an interpretation of the characteristics of the Arabic language (Didaoui 2014: 42). It has been a long time since El-Shater determined that none of the prominent Muslim scholars have said that the full translation of the Quran is permitted. Those who allowed the Quran translation have set conditions that are hardly possible-For instance, the Ḥanafi Law School sets two conditions for the translation of the verses used for prayer. On the one hand, the original word must be translated into an equivalent in form and meaning. On the other hand, the worshiper must realize that the meaning is completely identical to the original Arabic word (El-Shater 1936: 79; 104). The only exception in the Islamic *fiqh* was the (former) opinion of Abu Ḥanifa, which allowed the reading of the Quran during prayer in another language, either in Persian or in another language. However, later he distanced himself from his view (El-Shater 1936:60-62; al-Zarqani 1995: 2/128).

The later Muslim theologians, such as al-Zarkashi, Hussein Khedr, and El Hajjioui, allowed the translation of the Quran, but only if that translation was not called a Quran, but was rather considered a Quranic explanation. In this regard, El Hajjioui argues that the literal translation is misleading, especially because of synonyms. Synonyms cause deviations in meaning. A number of terms are seen as synonyms, while they actually have different connotations. However, displaying the meaning is a challenge, especially due to the rhetorical and figurative style of the Quran. That is why El Hajjioui equals the translation with the interpretation and the interpretation with the translation (Didaoui 2014: 41).

Such a remark also applies to polysemy, in which a word has more than one meaning. As an example, the word *fitnah*, referring to a variety of meanings (testing, temptation, torture, punishment, idolatry, beauty, etc.), (see: Ibn Khatir 1999) is in most verses translated by Kramers in only one meaning, *verzoeking* (temptation in English). I limit myself for the example to three different connotations of the term *fitna*, but they are nevertheless reduced in one meaning. The first connotation is tough test: “*Doch dezen onderwijzen niemand, zonder dat zij zeggen: “Wij zijn slechts een verzoeking, word dus niet ongelovig.”* (2:102). [In English translated by Yusuf Ali as: “*But neither of these taught anyone (Such things) without saying: We are only for trial; so, do not blaspheme.*”]. The second connotation is punishment: “*maar de verzoeking is erger dan de doodslag.*” (2:191). [In English: “*for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter*”]. The final connotation is idolatry: “*En bestrijdt hen, totdat er geen verzoeking meer is en de godsdienst geheel aan Allah behoort. Indien zij dan ophouden, dan is Allah scherp ziende op wat zij bedrijven.*” (8:39) [English: “*And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God altogether and everywhere; but if they cease verily God doth see all that they do*”]

In short, we can argue that Muslim scholars make a clear distinction between translating and interpreting the Quran into another language. They agree that the meanings of the Quran can be conveyed in a certain language. This representation should not be interpreted as a Quran translation, but rather as a translation of the meanings of the Quran. This means that the Quran remains untranslatable, in particular the so-called secondary meanings that are related to contextual, linguistic and rhetorical untranslatable characteristics of the Quranic language. This traditional theological view is still present in modern Islamic *fiqh*. As a result, we now face a ‘strange’ paradox, where the Quran is being translated into various languages worldwide, while fatwas exist that prohibit the translation of the Quran.

Quran Translation Between Prohibition and Acceptance: A Paradox

The problem of the Quran translation is primarily due to the difference about the concept of translation. “The different opinions about translating the Quran is a consequence of the difference in determining the definition of translation. Despite this contrast between the proponents and opponents of the Quran translation, they all agree on some important points. On the one hand, only the text revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic is called the Quran. This may prevent translations from being an alternative to the original document. On the other hand, the proponents and opponents agree that the message of Islam should be transmitted to non-Arab speakers.” (Haziri & Hadj 2009: 20). To what extent can the Quran reach non-Arabic speakers if there are no Quran translations? The same question has been asked by Campanini who believes that “if the Quran is written in Arabic to be comprehended by Arabs, it is obvious that it can be readily understood. But Islam is a universal religion and its message has been conveyed also to the non-Arabs. Revelation is for all creatures, but God spoke in Arabic. How is it possible then to convey to all human beings, who speak many languages, the meaning of a message originally expressed in one particular language, Arabic?” (Campanini 2008: 115).

Another factor is related to the fact that the translation of the Quran is inferior and secondary for Muslims, while the translation of the Bible is essential and fundamental for Christians. In this way, the Quran translation is not equated with the original Quran, but is seen as a normal translation of the meanings of the Quran. However, the church regards the translated Bible as a holy Bible, which in its essence contains a holiness that is identical to the holiness of the original Bible (Nida 1964). The translation of the Quran was not a priority in the Islamic *fiqh* and in the society until the eleventh century. However, the Arabs and Muslims have nevertheless made an immense contribution in the field of translating Greek and Persian works into Arabic. In other words, such an absence of the Quran translation is mainly attributed to the theological prohibition (Gutas 1998; Baker & Hanna 2009).

Besides, the prohibition on replacing the original Quran with the translated versions should not be mixed with the prohibition on translating the Quran. Evidence of this problem can

be found in the legal judgment, *ḥukm* about reading the Quran during prayer in a non-Arabic language. This is how this issue was moved to the Quran translation, which is now central to the thinking of Muslim scholars (Haziri & Haj 2009:19).

The difference of opinion on the concept of 'religious translation' does not only exist among Muslim scholars and researchers, but also among Islamic and Western theologians and translation theorists. The biblical definition of the religious translation is entirely different from the Islamic definition of the Quran translation. Therefore, such a theological and theoretical discrepancy must be taken into account, both when converting the Quran and when researching and comparing (religious) translation theories.

The translation studies in the western theologians have led to some hypotheses and theories that seem to contradict the principles of translating the religious text among Muslims. To illustrate this paradox, it should be noted that the West means by translating religious texts merely translating the Bible. In contrast, Muslims engaged in religious translation studies started with the Quran translation. The difference in the religious text between Muslims and the West was probably the reason for the difference in the concept of religious translation, and the principles of this translation between Islamic and Western thinking." (Haziri & Hadj 2009: 29; see also Nida 1964; Campanini 2008).

That means that the religious translation in Islam differs from that in the West in many respects. For the sake of justifying this point of view, it is important to consider a number of translation procedures concerning the sacred texts in modern translation studies in order to ascertain to what extent they apply on translating the Quran. Four translation procedures are discussed in the following, namely: dynamic equivalence, naturalization, synonymy, and indeterminacy.

Dynamic Equivalence

According to Nida, a translation that seeks to apply dynamic equivalence relies on the principle of the equivalent effect. In such a translation, one is less concerned with coordinating the target language message with the source language message, and more with the dynamic relationship. The relationship between the recipient and the message must be the same as between the original receptors and the message (Nida 1964:159). In this way, the principle of dynamic equivalence gives the translator the opportunity to choose what he considers appropriate in order to achieve the effect of the original text on the readers. In other words, the dynamic equivalence gives the translator special authority over the authority of the original text; he can absolutely and without restriction intervene in the original text according to the personal taste of the translator. Such a principle would not be accepted by Muslim scholars, especially when translating the Quran, because it allows the original text to be subject to the free interpretation of the translator. That might result in distortion of the word of God (Haziri & Hadj 2009:29-30). In addition, the meaning of the Quran has to do not only with the measure in which it can affect the readers, but also with the fact that the original meaning is accurately transferred to the readers.

Naturalization

This concept has also been introduced by Nida, who assumes that naturalization can be achieved by taking into account the source language and culture as a whole, as well as the cultural context of the message and the target audience. The translator must eliminate the language differences and overcome the culture gaps between the source text and the translation. In this way he changes every new concept in the source text, normalizes it, rebuilds it and brings it closer to the readers' understanding. In this way, the translation procedure "is applicable to three areas of the communication process: for a natural rendering must fit (1) the receptor language and culture as a whole, (2) the context of the particular message, and (3) the receptor-language audience." (Nida 1964: 166-1967). The Quran contains countless metaphors and figures of speech that cannot be conveyed literally. Through naturalization as a translation strategy we can normalize and adapt

a number of Quranic metaphors, depending on the socio-cultural context of the recipients. An example of this is the English translation of Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall from the Quran (Taha, 20: 40): *kay taqarra 'aynuha/ كي تقر عينها*, which is translated within the meaning of grief. "When thy sister went and said: Shall I show you one who will nurse him? and We restored thee to thy mother that her eyes might be refreshed and might not sorrow." (Haziri & Hadj 2009:32-33). This also applies to the Dutch translation of Kramers from this verse: "opdat zij goedsmoeds zou zijn en zij niet zou treuren", ["That she might be good-hearted and not grieve."]. However, there are also concepts in the Quran that cannot be normalized, such as *ṣalat*, *zakat*, the statements about the prohibition of alcohol and interest. These issues must be conveyed without any change or naturalization. For instance, the Dutch Quran translation of Eduard Verhoef (2015) who prefers the translation procedures naturalization to translate various fundamental terms (*Allah*, *ṣalat*, *zakat*, etc.), because he assumes that the connotation of these terms is known and accessible to the Flemish-Dutch readers. However, it is not easy for the average reader to distinguish between the Quranic *ṣalat* or *zakat* and the biblical "gebed, prayer" and "aalmoes, alms".

Synonymy

Synonymy is considered as one of the important translation procedures, that is often used by the translators. Peter Newmark uses "the word synonym in the sense of a near TL equivalent to an SL word in a context, where a precise equivalent may or may not exist. This procedure is used for a SL word where there is no clear one-to-one equivalent." (Newmark 1988:84). Based on a number of Dutch Quran translations, we have concluded that the way the translation procedure is applied cannot always reflect the original Quranic meaning. Sometimes the translator fails to select the appropriate translation synonym. For example, the word *ḥanif* that means monotheist in the sense of avoiding polytheism and seeking to believe in the True and One God of all prophets from Adam to Muhammad (Ibn Kaṭṭir 1999: 2/58). In addition, this term has other meanings including sincere, devotee, and one who believes in all prophets (Ibn Manẓur 1980: 1025-1026). Kramers has translated *ḥanif* with "God seeker", Leemhuis with "a follower of the pure faith", and Verhoef with someone with "the true faith". All these translation equivalents are unable to reflect the real meaning of the Quranic concept *ḥanif*. As a result, the original meaning of the Quran can be lost somehow.

Indeterminacy

This translation theory has been presented by W.V. Quine and can also be found with other philosophers such as Derrida and Benjamin. The basic message of indeterminacy is the denying of and doubting about the existence of fixed and absolute meanings. "The general claim of the indeterminacy of translation is that there might be different ways of translating a language which are equally correct but which are not mere stylistic variants. The claim includes what one might think of as the limiting case of translation, that in which a given language is 'translated' into itself." (Zalta 2010). Such a point of view clashes with Islamic truths, because the instability of meaning means that concepts of faith and religious belief may be subject to change and to the personal view of individuals. In this way, the connotations will differ per person. For this reason, we must distinguish between the original social meaning that all people agree with and the subjective meaning that varies from individual to individual (Haziri & Hadj 2009: 33). The indeterminacy translation procedure is probably more valid for poetic texts and prose than for sacred writings, in particular the Quran which must be reliably and appropriately translated or interpreted in terms of its content, according to the consensus of the four law schools and most authoritative Muslim scholars.

To conclude, we have three important conclusions drawn from our research. Firstly, the Arabs have historically made a significant contribution to the translation movement by transferring Greek philosophical and scientific works into Arabic, particularly during the Abbasid era. However, no attention was paid to, or there was simply not thought of, translating the Quran.

At the time there was no religious or social need, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the involvement of the theological prohibition on any form of Quran translation.

Secondly, the Quran translation made its appearance mainly from the eleventh century onwards due to the new socio-cultural and political circumstances. At that time a need arose for understanding of the holy book of Islam by both the new Muslim generations and converts who did not master Arabic, as well as by the other-faiths, namely the People of the Book: Christians and Jews. The first category was unable to understand the main source of his new faith, the Arabic Quran. The translation was essential to understand the Islamic religion and to bring its rules and devotions in practice. The second category used the translation as an apologetic tool with which they could understand the content of the Quran, after which it was questioned in favour of their own Christian or Jewish faith.

Finally, there is a consensus among Muslim theologians and law schools that the untranslatability of the Quran has to do with its linguistic and cultural inimitable nature and with its liturgical nature. But today we face a great need for the understanding of the Quran, especially by the non-Arabic speakers who make up the majority of Muslims. Without translating the Quran into different modern languages, the universal message of Islam cannot be passed on to all men.

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