

**Towards an investigation of Islamic media discourse translation
from Arabic into English**

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Abstract:

Translating Islamic media discourse, specifically Islamic TV programs, plays a crucial role in circulating Islamic religion to English-speaking audience. The translator is considered as a mediator between the Islamic preacher and the viewers. Thus, to reach an optimal translation, he should follow certain strategies.

For this end, this research paper was conducted. It is a descriptive study of translation strategies used by translators working at Iqraa subtitling centre. It was applied on a TV program broadcasted by Iqraa channel. The research has found that the prevailing employed strategy was paraphrasing. This can be due to cultural peculiarities and audio-visual translation limitations.

Key words: Translation strategies, Islam, Media discourse, audio-visual, IQRAA TV

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Translation of Islamic media discourse plays a pivotal role in broadcasting the divine message and the basics of Islamic religion to non-Arabic speakers. For this purpose, the translated media content should be a powerful instrument for communicating Islam. It should also be as accurate as possible. To achieve this, translators must understand the original text and transfer it correspondingly to the audience.

This research work is a descriptive study tackling the English translation of an Islamic program broadcasted at Iqraa channel. It was presented by the Egyptian Islamic preacher Mustafa Hosny in 2014. The program is named “الكنز المفقود” “the lost treasure”. So, our research investigates both strategies and challenges related to conveying Mustafa Hosny’s words into English. It aims also at determining the nature of problems encountered by translators to reach a meticulous communicative translation.

2. An overview of Islamic media discourse:

Amid the incessant growth of media technologies, Islamic media takes also advantage of this technological development. It spreads various forms of Islamic content to Muslim audiences through different medium like television, social media, YouTube and various internet platforms. Television was the jumping-off point for Islam message transmission.

The establishment of Islamic satellite channels originated in the Arab Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia. A set of journalists and professors of Islamic studies were assembled In Jeddah to debate the idea of creating an Islamic channel (Moll, 2020, p623). They showed their interest in creating such channels in order to diffuse Islam concepts not only for Muslims living in Arab countries but also for those who are living abroad. Hence, in 1998, a transnational satellite channel called Iqraa was established. It is based in Jeddah. Its mission is broadcasting contents that advance Islamic values.

Towards an investigation of Islamic media discourse translation from Arabic into English

Abu Haiba (2011, p15) states that Iqraa was the first channel to broadcast Islamic programs until “Alrisala” channel appeared on March 2003. Hence forth, many other channels have been markedly evolving in Islamic countries like Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. Some of these stations diffuse purely Islamic programs while others provide moderate contents such as music, films and video clips. As Abu Haiba (2011, p15-16) explains,

Two easily identifiable media discourses in the Islamic media environment today can be observed.... The first one is obviously the Saudi-influenced one...Salafi stations focus on rituals and spirituality, where women and music are virtually non-existent on the airwaves... the second trend that characterizes the other face of Islamic media is a moderate, or middle ground ideology.

The expansion of Islamic broadcasting helped in shaping new Islamic media personalities like Amr Khaled, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Tareq Suwaidan, Moez Masoud, Ahmed Al Shukairy and others. These prominent Muslim television preachers have made Islamic concepts and beliefs popular and approachable by a wide range of Muslims all around the globe. They reflect moderate inclinations in Islam as they encourage channelising “soft Islam” that concentrates on self-betterment and strong religious belief (Lynch, 2017,p3).

In connection with the reasons of Islamic channels inception, mention should be made of their definition. According to Tash (2004) there is no consensus on their definition and nature. Some researchers see that Islamic channels lies in airing religious TV programs while others consider that it is a set of da'wa (religious preaching). A central difference can be noticed between the concept of Islamic preaching media and Islamic media. Islamic preaching media is a part of Islamic media since it more comprehensive. (Tash, 2004).

Islamic channels have played a vital role in conveying Islamic principles and knowledge to Muslim societies living in non-Islamic countries and enhancing their identities. For this, Iqraa started in 1999 translating its programs into English to cater for the needs of English-speaking public.

3. Translation and discourse of Islamic channels

Translating Islamic principles and guidance into other languages is a tricky process. It goes beyond words tackling mainly cultural and ideological aspects of Islamic discourse. Carefulness and faithfulness are of a high importance in conveying the doctrinal messages and Islamic teachings and values.

Ahmed Said Mohammed (2023,p1-2) argues that Mass media and social platforms are efficient means to spread negative and positive ideas. Islamic media, however, encourages more positive ideas because it is important for Muslim nations to restore the basic values and creed in people. As a result, multitudes of writers are working hard to achieve that.

So, translating these moderate and positive Islamic messages promotes understanding, and boost peace among different religious and cultural groups. Accordingly, translators tasked with rendering discourse of Islamic channels should guarantee an accurate comprehension to audience and provide them with the same spiritual effect presented in the source speech.

They may face various obstacles when transferring the speech of Islamic preachers on TV. The most common complexity, as mentioned by Saleh Sirriyah (2009, p15), is that the considerable difference between the Islamic culture expressed in Arabic and the non-Muslim, non-Arab cultures communicated in English needs proper recognition. To bridge this divide, particular techniques and methods must be employed.

Towards an investigation of Islamic media discourse translation from Arabic into English

Insofar subtitled Islamic TV programs, specifically those broadcasted by Iqraa, address mixed viewers (English-speaking Muslims, new converts...etc), translators should afford to spend time and effort to realise a reliable translation for terms related to Islamic religion. Thus, English may serve as a language suitable for expressing Islamic concepts, allowing many Islamic terms to be translated into English more effectively.

This operation aims at eliminating the need for transliteration, italicization, or additional notes to denote Islamic terms (Noviyenty et al, 2020, p879). In point of fact, the strategy of translation adopted at the beginning by Iqraa subtitling centre was foreignization. This means that the source language Islamic terms, like Zakat, Salat, Hajj, Ramadan and Jihad, were transliterated (Elgebaly, 2012, p424).

Later on, this strategy was replaced by domestication in order to cope with the characteristics of English language as well as to reduce the gap between both languages at the linguistic and cultural level. On this subject, Elgebaly (2012, p424) clarifies:

This means that now Islamic concepts are explained in plain English and, if transliteration is necessary, it is done sparingly and is followed by an explanation between brackets. One of the most illustrative examples is that now the word God is used in subtitling instead of Allah, to stress the fact that God, for Muslims, is the same for Christians and Jews; the God of Abraham, the Monotheist.

Hence, the main challenges that translators must overcome are conceptional and terminological issues. As some Islamic concepts are not easily perceivable even to Arabic viewers, the task of the translator grows more difficult. For instance, translators working at Iqraa subtitling centre undertake two tasks: the first is to mediate a different image of Islam to the west and the second is to act as preachers (Moll, 2017, p334).

Therefore, they are allowed to manipulate the source text. Although this is a delicate process, it is crucial to transmit the cultural side as sanely as possible. As reported by Moll (2017, p335),

A recurring idea I heard from translators during my fieldwork was that they were translating not language (lugha) but culture (thaqafa).

In the following section, we will explore the nature of strategies i.e the procedures followed by Iqraa translators in subtitling the utterances of the Egyptian Islamic preacher, Mustafa Hosny. The study will be applied on his program "الكنز المفقود" 'The lost treasure'. The majority of the speech was uttered in Egyptian dialect. The program was broadcasted in 2014, arguing that knowing God the Almighty is the right path to paradise. This can be achieved by feeling God in all the circumstances that come through our lives and also by focusing on the divine messages sent by Him to us.

Towards an investigation of Islamic media discourse translation from Arabic into English

4. Analysis of English translation strategies

Table 1

Extract N°	Source Text (the Islamic preacher utterances)	English subtitles
1	بتسمع ربنا أراد يوصللي ايه النهار ده	As you hear the message God intends for you.
2	لا إله إلا الله	There is no deity but God
3	قال ﷺ إن الله سبحانه وتعالى سيخلص رجلا من أمتي يجيب يوقفو قدامي	The prophet (PBUH) said 'On the day of judgement God will separate a man from my followers
4	يا رب نكون مش مكسلين ننزل نصلي التراويح أو نكون مشغولين بالأفلام والمسلسلات	I hope nothing keeps you from offering Ramadan's post evening prayer.
5	حديث النهار ده قال ﷺ قال الله عبدي مرضت فلم تعدني	Prophet Muhammad says that God would say on the last day 'O Son of Adam! I was Ill and you did not visit and comfort me' (episode4)
6	في حطة في المسجد النبوي كده اسمها أهل الصفة	In a place called As-Suffah (stone bench) (episode4)

In extract 1, we observe that the utterance of Mustafa Hosny is not wholly rendered. It was shortened instead of translating it literally as: "Do you hear what God wanted me to know today?". The meaning of the broadcasted subtitle was reproduced sanely. In this, the strategy used by the translator is "Deletion". He concentrated more on the signs of TL. Hence, he under translated the content of SL because of constraints imposed by Audio-visual translation. The space and time on the screen are limited.

In the extract 2, the term "الله" was not transliterated by "Allah", but instead translated properly by "God". This operation implies providing an optimum native equivalent for the sake of delivering a precise message to the TL audience. As pointed out previously, the strategy adopted in this case is an attempt to convince viewers that the term "God" is common in all religions and doctrines. However, the meaning of a word, in such cases, is never completely identical with meaning of a similar word in another language (Sirriyah, 2009, p31 as cited in Nida, 1964, p96).

In extract 3, according to the context of the preacher's utterance, the expression of "يجيب يوقفو قدامي" is easily perceived by a Muslim Arabic native speakers. Therefore, in Quran when human beings stand before God, their afterlife will be determined according to their good or evil deeds in earthly life. This will happen at the end of the universe. It is called "يوم الدين", "يوم القيامة", or "اليوم الآخر". Although the meaning is not exactly similar to SL, the expression was carried by Iqraa translator as "The Day of Judgement" in order to make the meaning closer to the receptor of English subtitles. It is worth mentioning that this concept already exists in other religions, but it is received differently.

Towards an investigation of Islamic media discourse translation from Arabic into English

In extract 4, the expression “نصلي التراويح” was rendered as “offering Ramadan’s post evening prayer”. Transliteration was not established here i.e the translator did not resort to the following equivalent “to pray Tarawih”. Working at AVT centres may restrict the authority of the translator. Hence, he is obliged to provide a convenient and apprehensible message for the TL audience. The strategy used is paraphrasing which consists in explaining the SL expression and providing extra information in order to bridge the gap between both languages.

In extract 5, the term “عبدى” was rendered as “O son of Adam”. It literally means “servant” or “slave”. In Islamic religion, the word “Abd” or “servant” refers to submission, humility and subordination to Allah, nevertheless it denotes, in English, performing duties for others. As for the word “slave” which is also an equivalent of “Abd”, means a person who is owned by someone or someone who is entirely dominated by some influence or person. To avoid unclarity and opacity in TL, the translator resorts to paraphrasing. Although many semantic details are lost in this case, the strategy provides explanation for TL readers who are not acquainted with SL culture. Dealing with cultural terms, as stated by Newmark (1988,p82) depends on the readership and the type of text.

In extract 6, the term “أهل الصفة” was translated as “As-Suffah (stone bench)”. We notice that the translator used two different strategies. The first is transliteration “As-Suffah”. The second is an explanation (paraphrasing) put between brackets. The reason behind this strategy lies in the fact that the translator considered transliteration as inadequate to communicate the precise message, especially when the SL term must be known to the TL reader.

5. CONCLUSION

The present research concluded that the nature of challenges facing translators in rendering (subtitling) Islamic media discourse lies in the specificity of Islamic terms as well as the limitations of audiovisual translation. At Iqraa subtitling center, translators are responsible for providing an accurate and faithful translation to the audience as they are authorized to act for Islamic preachers in English language.

To effectively carry Islamic knowledge and values to non-Arabic audience, the translator of the program “The Lost Treasure” which was presented by Mustafa Hosny and broadcasted by Iqraa Channel in 2014 opted for paraphrasing instead of Transliteration. His choice is an attempt to establish cultural bridges with viewers and make English an appropriate langue for spreading Islam. Thus, Iqraa English subtitles are no more transliterated and even if it is the case, the transliterated term should be followed by an explanation between brackets.

Paraphrasing serves as an efficient strategy to make the meaning closer to the viewer who generally ignores the basics of Islamic religion. However, during the process of subtitling the Islamic preacher’s speech from Arabic into English, paraphrasing may be insufficient to communicate the whole semantic aspects of the term. The operation becomes more crucial if audiovisual translation is concerned for the space at the bottom of the screen will not accommodates a thorough explication.

Translating in an Islamic television context is not a straightforward task as it is restricted, from one hand, by the peculiarities of the Islamic discourse and limitations of audiovisual translation from the other hand.

Towards an investigation of Islamic media discourse translation from Arabic into English

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