In the Name of God

the Compassionate

the Merciful

Allameh Tabataba'i University

Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages

Department of English Translation Studies

Strategies Adopted by Qur'an Translators to Achieve

Lexical Adequacy

A Corpus-Based Comparative Approach to English Translations of

Divine Names .

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts in Translation Studies

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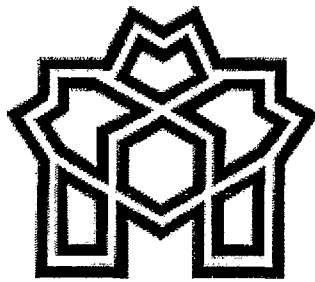
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Advisor: Dr. Salar Manafi Anari ......S. Manafi......

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September 2007

To

my parents

and

my children

Maryam and Mohammad

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Abstract

The present study is concerned with translation of Divine Names as lexical items incorporated in the Holy Qur'an. An LSP corpus is built and explicit criteria selected for analysis, including: expansion, morpho-semantic pattern, and variety in translation. Certain translation universals are also examined.

The problem is how to state the meaning of a Divine Name with sufficient generality so as to cover the full range of different uses and at the same time, with sufficient specificity so as to distinguish it from its conceptual neighbors. Unlike the single meaning approach cognitive linguistics allows the proliferation of the number of senses of a word. Variety in translation of Divine Names is suggested to stem from the semantic ambiguity raised by the polysemous nature of Divine Names.

Linguistic structuring of reality differs across languages. Findings of this research corroborate the fact that like every individual language, the Qur'anic Arabic is a system of its own. The semantic map of Qur'anic Arabic is different from English.

Examples of Divine Names in this survey illustrate translation loss and attempted compensation. Loss of literal meaning is the issue in translation

of Divine Names. The compression value of the Divine Names is distorted via explicitation and expansion.

Divine Names are assigned more than one meaning and their meaning is usually extended in different directions after translation. The associative chains around a Divine Name break down once it is translated into another language because of dissimilar associative networks in the TL.

There is no stability of meaning and total transparency in Divine Names. *Context* of a Divine Name is a space of variations with its own constraints. In order to choose a different interpretation, we must always have better reasons.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background

Translation is a means through which those who do not know Arabic can understand the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. Many nations obtain this knowledge through English translations, as English is the second language, next to Persian into which the Holy Qur'an has been translated most. The present study is an attempt to investigate the strategies adopted by Qur'an translators in translating the Divine Names. Although much is lost of the divinely instructed content and the unique style of the Qur'an in the process of transfer, a precise and adequate translation will serve as a means through which the receptors in the target language can be acquainted with the content of the Word of Allah. Therefore, the main focus in this study will be on lexical adequacy and semantic equivalence of the renditions.

As a corpus-based research this work is intended to survey translation strategies adopted by Qur'an translators. In pursuit of lexical adequacy it is assumed that the three translators under study have made their best effort to achieve this type of adequacy.

For the purpose of this study, the works of three Qur'an translators have been selected; these translators have generally adopted semantic translation which also adopts archaic language and some literal word

order. These literal translations have adopted an approach that allowed the source language to have dominance over the target language.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A problem arises when Divine Names are to be translated into a language other than the language of the Holy Qur'an. Considering the semantic component of a text is a critical factor in preserving the content and meaning of the original text. Failure to recognize polysemous words and homonyms, the lack of congruence between source and target language terms, misinterpretations and arbitrary additions or omissions are the greatest source of danger for the translator. (Reiss 2000: 53)

To determine *semantic equivalence* the linguistic context must be examined, because this is where it can be seen most clearly what the author intends by what is said. (ibid)

Since we are concerned specifically with materials that are texts in a fixed written form (the Holy Qur'an), any investigation with regard to the effectiveness of semantic component should also make allowance for the fact that many meanings are not represented explicitly in the text. For the very fact that meanings are concepts (Löbner, 2002:20) and as recognition of the meaning of a word is possible if the sound pattern and

form of a word is stored in one's mind as part of one's linguistic knowledge, as for the words which are not known to the translators, the meanings have to be worked out initially, interpreted and rendered in the target language. Now, since meanings are not explicitly represented in the text, the above process results in different understandings and hence different renderings among translators.

If full equivalence with the source text is the criterion by which the semantic components of the target text are to be judged, the standard for the *lexical* components must be *adequacy* (Reiss 2000:57). A kind of word for word translation cannot serve as an objective criterion because the vocabularies of the two languages, here Arabic and English (with their structural and conceptual differences) cannot coincide completely. Therefore, this research is an attempt to describe and examine the strategies adopted in translating certain lexical components of the Holy Qur'an i.e. Divine Names. It seeks to describe how the components of the original text have been adequately carried over to the target language on the lexical level. This may involve dealing with technical terminology (Divine Names), homonyms, collocations, hyponyms, untranslatable words, plays on words, idiomatic usages, etc.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Translation studies suggest different approaches to the study of the language of translation. Most of these methods have dealt with the language of translation from a **qualitative perspective** and hence have been quite **subjective** in nature. One of the recent approaches is the **quantitative** study of language – under the title of **Corpus-Studies** – which has increasingly become popular among translators. Nowadays, translators and language teachers can have access to vast sources of texts (corpora) and are able to run researches on the language. Although a quantitative analysis forms the basis for this investigation, a qualitative approach is also included in order to give comprehensive description for the question.

There are specially designed corpora which can act as benchmark against which translators can improve their translations on a number of different levels.

In the field of **translator training**, trainers must attempt to present students with a representative cross-section of subject areas and text types. Teachers, especially non-native ones, see corpora as invaluable tools helping them have a better grasp of the language they are teaching with firsthand information about different lexical and grammatical structures (Bowker, 2000:184). "Now corpora ... are being put to use

more and more every day. Access has become fairly easy on standard small computers, user-friendly software is available for most normal tasks, websites are accumulating fast, and corpora are almost part of the pedagogical landscape" (Sinclair, 2004:2). Meanwhile it is the main resource for the data-driven language learning (DDL) or the main source for the learners to take on the role of a discoverer, a researcher and insights into the language they are learning (see Bernardini 2004; Ghadessy et al. 2001) and aid them make their own generalizations. "Ideally, the goal of all teachings should be to make students independent of their teachers so that they can continue to learn along after they have left the classroom" (1996:546, as quoted in Bowker, 2000:186). To achieve this independence, students must be given constructive feedback, which can be accomplished by the easy access to an electronic corpus of the LSP, religious texts in our study.

Parallel corpora or translation corpora are collections of translated texts along with their original texts. They allow translators to see "texts as repetition of an earlier text with small variation" (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001:7). As Sinclair explains "they can be seen as large repositories of the decisions of professional translators, supplied together with the evidence they had for those decisions." (ibid: 133). They "can act as expert systems, drawing the learner's attention to **(un)typical solutions**

for typical problems found by *mature, expert translators.*" (Bernardini, 2004:20). Use of such corpora by learners "in their everyday activity may result in better documented, more accurate as well as more fluent translations" (ibid).

It is unreasonable to expect a translator trainer to be an expert in all the subjects that could come up: mastery of one subject field and its associated LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) does not imply the understanding of others, even if they are fairly closely related (Bowker, 2000:186). It is generally agreed that in order to produce a good translation, a translator must have at least the following skills: a good knowledge of the SL, an excellent mastery of the TL, and an understanding of the subject field (Larose, Sager and Snell-Hornby as quoted in Bowker, 2000:184), the latter two of these skills are the ones that can best be enhanced by using computerized corpora. LSP corpora are of great use because translators, even when translating into their mother tongue, do not always have the specialized linguistic knowledge (e.g. vocabulary, syntax, phraseology) required to express the subject matter in the appropriate way.

Those interested in Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) have also found corpus-based or "corpus-driven" (see Tognini-Bonelli, 2001) studies a great source to formulate new theories or back up or test their

existing theories about issues like translation *universals and regularities*, *translation behavior*, criticism and evaluation, and historical studies of translation.

In this study a corpus-based approach has been chosen for investigation. The study aims to run a corpus-driven research on the strategies adopted by translators of the Qur'an in achieving lexical adequacy when translating Divine Names.

For this reason, a specifically designed corpus is provided and it is demonstrated that such a corpus can be used to significantly reduce subjectivity in the study of language of translation and bring about practical outcomes for translators and translator trainers.

Following Abdul-Raof (2001) framework of analysis, the present study presents the major problems encountered by Qur'an translators. It is believed that there is no possible theoretical or practical solution to translational problems for Qur'anic expressions as linguistic/rhetorical features remain Qur'an specific. It is believed, however, that a pragmatic translation of the surface meanings of the Qur'an and the provision of linguistic and rhetorical patterns suitable for the target language, and following general cognitive principles (rather than purely formal linguistic principles) are possible strategies for communicative purposes.