

Preface

The Noble Qur'ān, the very Word of Allah, is matchless and inimitable in both its content and form. It is not only the content of the Qur'ān which is from Allah, the container is also Divine and these two cannot be separated from each other. It contains the total of revelations revealed to the Last Prophet (May God bless him and his household and give them peace) as a final expression of Allah's will and purpose for man. No translation of the Qur'ān in any language can take the place of this Divine Book. Therefore, it is a highly recommended religious task for every Muslim to learn to read and understand the Qur'ān in its original Arabic text, and not in a translation. But as this task is not always an easy labour for every believer, he may get help from many commentaries compiled by learned exegetes, and from numerous translations rendered by knowledgeable translators.

Many English translators of the Glorious Qur'ān have transliterated some Islamic words into English letters instead of translating them. Pickthall, the first English Muslim who translated the Qur'ān into English, has retained the word "Allah" throughout his English translation, and he has said that there is no corresponding word to it in English. According to him, the word "Allah" has neither feminine nor plural and it has never been applied to anything other than the unimaginable Supreme Being. Pickthall has used the word "God" only where the corresponding word "ilāh", which has both feminine and plural, is found in the original Arabic text.

There are some other translators who hold this view that as the word "Allah" is usually mispronounced by many English speakers (they put the stress on the first syllable), so in order to avoid such a mispronunciation it is better to use the word "God" instead of "Allah" in English.

However, as we use both "Khudā" (خدا) and "Allah" (الله) in Persian and we take both of them to be acceptable, in English also it is linguistically right to transliterate the word "Allah" or use the word "God" instead of it; they are both correct.

Each English translation of the Qur'ān is, in fact, an attempt to present the meaning of Allah's Book in English. Every translator has employed a different style of language in his rendering. Some of these renderings seem dull in comparison with the original Arabic text because the splendid style of the Glorious Qur'ān is ignored in them to some extent. Some others are satisfactory and among these, there are a number of renderings that are really masterpieces as far as translation is concerned.

It is an undeniable fact that the rhetoric of the Qur'ān is really sublime. The eloquence of this Divine Book is a miracle in Islam. It is a miracle of speech which has remained unchallengeable since it was revealed more than fourteen centuries ago. Professor Arthur J. Arberry, whose interpretation of the Qur'ān is among the most esteemed ones, in the introduction to his translation says:

"In making the present attempt to improve on the performance of my predecessors, and to produce something which might be accepted as echoing however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran, I have been at pains to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms which—apart from the message itself—constitute the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind. This very characteristic feature has been almost totally ignored by previous translators; it is therefore not surprising that what they have wrought sounds dull and flat indeed in comparison with the splendidly decorated original. For the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both."

The meaning of the Qur'ān is not limited to the outward level. Rather, behind this splendid exterior there is a profound interior which cannot be transferred into a translation. It is narrated that the Prophet has said: "The Qur'ān has a beautiful exterior and a profound interior." Neither the beautiful exterior of the Qur'ān nor its profound interior will be retained in its translation composed of the translator's own words in a style which can never be equal to that of the original. Translation cannot convey the profound inward meaning of the Qur'ān, nor can it echo its unchallengeable outward beauty.

Meaning is of prime importance in translation, and there is no discussion on this point that it is the meaning which should be transferred from the source language into the target. If the meaning of the original text is distorted in the process of transfer, the translation will be incorrect. However, the prime importance of the meaning does not invalidate the significance of the

linguistic form of the source language; the style of the original text is also important, especially when translating the Word of Allah is concerned.

A faithful translation is that in which the meaning is communicated without any distortion, addition, or deletion, and the linguistic feature of the original text is not ignored. To have fidelity to the meaning of the original the translator must communicate the message as it is, and he should not add any unnecessary information to it. If there is a need to clarify an ambiguity or explain a point existing in the original, the translator can give a footnote or use his explanatory words in parentheses where necessary. This will let the reader have a distinction between what the original text says and that which is given as additional information by the translator.

Fidelity to the linguistic feature of the original text is also important, but this does not mean that the translator should copy it in the receptor language without necessary modifications or adjustments. Each language has its own linguistic characteristics; therefore, to have faithfulness to the linguistic feature of the source language the translator should employ, in the target language, a style which is the closest one to that of the original to convey the same meaning.

Introduction

The aim of this book is to familiarize the students with English translations of Qur'ānic verses and of Imam Ali's Instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar. It has been prepared as a textbook for the Iranian university students of English language.

The book consists of fifteen lessons and three tests. Each of the lessons has the following format:

- I. Points for Discussion
- II. Translated Islamic Texts:
 - A. Qur'ānic Verses
 - B. Imam Ali's Instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar
- III. Translating Islamic Texts:
 - A. Guided Translation (Words and Expressions)
 - B. Translating from Persian into English

In part A of section II in all the lessons, the English translation of the Qur'ānic verses is from Arthur J. Arberry, and the equivalents presented after that are from the following translators of the Qur'ān:

	Initial	Name	Publication Date
1.	(S.)	G. Sale	1734
2.	(R.)	J.M. Rodwell	1861
3.	(Pl.)	E.H. Palmer	1880
4.	(P.)	M. Pickthall	1930
5.	(Y.)	A. Yusuf Ali	1934
6.	(D.)	N.J. Dawood	1956
		(also the version revised by Mahmud Zaid and others, 1980)	
7.	(Am.)	H. Amir Ali	1974
8.	(Sh.)	M.H. Shakir	1984 (Offset Copy)
9.	(As.)	M. Asad	1980

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| 10. | (I.) | T.B. Irving | 1985 |
| 11. | (Ah.) | Mir Ahmad Ali | 1988 (U.S. Edition) |

The renderings of most of the above translators have also been used in preparing the three tests, each of which consists of forty multiple-choice questions.

The English translation in part B of section II is that of William C. Chittick and the equivalents given after that, are in some cases extracted from English translation of *Nahjul Balagha* rendered by Seyed Ali Reza, and in some other cases they are my own choices mostly from Collins Gem Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms. The first cases are indicated by (A.) and the second ones by (M.).

From pedagogical point of view, section II in all the lessons is regarded as the stage of "Recognition" in which students will be familiarized with some English translations of Islamic texts. In this section various renderings of Islamic words and expressions have been quoted from different translators in order to let the students have a comparative study and learn how one and the same expression can be rendered in many different ways using various wordings and structures.

Section III of the lessons is to function as the stage of "Production". This section contains two parts, both of which have been prepared with the aim of giving a chance to the students to practice translating Islamic texts. Each part in this section is to reinforce, in a certain way, the learning acquired through recognition in the previous section. Most of the words, phrases and sentences in the two parts of this section are derived from the texts presented in section II, and in part A the initials of the key words have been given for guidance. Therefore, if the students learn the second section of each lesson well, they may not have any difficulty in doing the exercises in section III, nor need they refer to a dictionary or consult a person for help concerning them.

The book is designed and arranged in such a way that it can be considered as a student-based textbook. To take most advantage of class time the students are highly recommended to do all the exercises in each lesson in advance and before the lesson is actually presented in class. If they follow this procedure, they will most probably be able to have active participation in class discussions, understand the lesson better, and take more benefit from the presentations of the students and instructions of the teacher.

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