

CHAPTER 1

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Literature is made of language. In another broad sense, language is made of words and words form chains of sentences. One may know what the words mean and how they can be used together in meaningful combinations. However, one may or may not be able to express the rules of those combinations - the grammar. But as a user of a language, one can recognize when a group of words makes sense and when it does not. This knowledge of the system makes it possible for one to make sense of the particular combination of words that a text provides. One has to apply this knowledge of the system of language - its meanings and forms - before a work of literature can come to life.

An individual may experience a story or a poem that one reads differently than the next individual. This is because a reader brings what he reads to his own background and belief as well as his own knowledge and each one imparts one's own meaning into what one reads. However, there are certain rules that a reader must abide by where meaning is concerned. There are language rules, literary rules and cultural rules which make up the systems of meaning. Thus, one cannot make what one reads whatever one wants it to mean. Reading literature actively and critically draws one's attention to these systems of meaning.

An attentiveness to language in reading literature helps one to anchor on specific linguistic analysis within the text to focus on linguistic features such as distinctive word orders, choices of vocabulary, patterns of sound and rhythm, and complexities of meaning . These structures of language are clearly visible and present in literature.

When one reads a poem, for example, one first looks at the language used - the words. When one goes on to analyse a poem, one must consider its subject matter, the poet's approach to it and the form and style in which the poem is written. The subject matter and the poet's approach generally influence his choice of form and style. If a poet writes about a violent subject, for example, *The Tornado*, the poet will tend to use words violent in their meanings and sounds.

Stylistics is a tool for analysing literary texts. It is a tool used to analyse a literary text using linguistic descriptions. Stylistics spans the borders of linguistics and literature. In this study, a stylistics approach will be used to analyse *exemplary surah* (selected chapters of the Quran) from two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran, by Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

In the academic setting, especially at tertiary level Islamic institutions, attempts have been made to incorporate Islam into all courses. The use of English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts would surely be a way of incorporating Islam to a larger extent in a literature classroom in the English language as the medium of instruction.

1.2 PURPOSE

In this study, a stylistic analysis on exemplary (selected) surah (chapters) from two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran will be done. The two versions are :

- i) The Message of the Quran-English language translation of the meaning of the Quran by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al Andalus Limited, 1980)
- ii) The Holy Quran-English language translation of the meaning of the Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Al-Madinah: King Fadh Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1983)

A further objective of this study is to explore the possibility of using exemplary surah from each of the two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran mentioned above as literary texts for the teaching of literature in the English language. Also, an attempt will be made to assess the understanding, acceptability and preference of appeal in terms of language use of extracts from these exemplary surah by undergraduates at an Islamic institution through a questionnaire.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION

The majority of Muslims in the world are non-Arabic speakers which indeed makes it a necessity to deal with the Quran in various languages. The English language, especially, as the world's major international language would make a good medium for understanding Quranic teachings and thereby helping Muslims spread peace and harmony internationally through their practice of and commitment to Islam.

There is no general consensus on which translations of the meaning of the Quran are the "closest" or best. Each scholar may have his or her own reasons for preferring or rejecting a particular text. Translated versions by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Asad have been subject to varying opinions of their quality as well.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's version has been chosen for this study because this book, The Holy Quran, has numerous footnotes which provide one with helpful explanations and background information. On the outset, the English language used in this book is generally considered more poetic than others.

The Message of the Quran by Muhammad Asad is the other chosen book. Upon skimming through, Muhammad Asad's version uses a narrative prosaic style of language.

This study focuses on the stylistic analysis of exemplary surah from two versions of the English language translations of the Quran. This focus may help in identifying the strong and weak points in these two versions. This will consequently help to achieve a better understanding of the language used as well as of the subjects and topics discussed in these books. Hence, inevitably, a deeper understanding of

Islam can be absorbed. It is hoped that this research work can provide a basis for better future English language translated versions of the meaning of the Quran.

1.4 SCOPE

Exemplary surah will be selected from two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran for a stylistic analysis (Refer to 1.2).

An exemplary Medinan surah is selected from two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran by Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali respectively (Refer to Chapter 4). An exemplary Meccan surah is then selected from the two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran (Refer to Chapter 5). A comparison will be made under the umbrella of a stylistic analysis to highlight the differences and similarities in the language used in both versions and to recognize the two different kinds of English language used in these two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran (Refer to Chapter 6).

1.5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The areas which relate to this study are basically stylistics and the study and teaching of literature in relation to the use of exemplary surah from the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts.

1.5.1 REVIEW OF STYLISTICS

Regarding stylistics, there are several books which provide a closer look into stylistics. Mick Short's books, Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose, 1996, and Reading, Analysing and Teaching Literature, 1988, however, provide particular insight into what a stylistic analysis is as well as a step-by-step guide in analysing the three major genres (poems, plays and prose) stylistically.

Short's explanation on linguistic features helped a great deal in shaping the concept of stylistics used in this study. In his book, Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose, 1996, he spends a comparatively long time on a very small example to make clear what is involved in the process of understanding a linguistic feature. When an author writes, he uses various kinds of knowledge which he shares with the reader to constrain the reader into interpreting what the reader reads in a particular way. The possibility of varying interpretations occurs because the reader cannot and may not be absolutely constrained by the author. Stylistic analysis, besides helping one to acquire an explicit and rational basis for deciding between interpretation, also helps one to become more consciously aware of the processes of interpretation which is used in order to get to grips with the texts that one reads. It is on this phenomenon that one must concentrate in order to understand how texts are interpreted as well as what one understands them to mean. The concentration on how we understand texts means that stylistic analysis can often be of help when one finds it difficult to come to grips with a particular text. In other words, the main effort in stylistic analysis is to

help one to try to understand the relationship between the literary text, on the one hand, and how one understands it, and is affected by it, on the other.

Four other books on stylistics were used. Firstly, The Elements of Style, 1997 by Strunk and White. This book is actually an attempt to cut the vast tangle of English rhetorics down to size and write its rules and principles as concisely as possible. In essence, this book is a summation of the case of cleanliness, accuracy and brevity in the use of English. It proposes to give in brief space the principal requirements of plain English style. It concentrates on fundamentals: the rules of usage and the principles of usage which are most commonly violated.

The second book used was Alan Duff's Translation, 1989. This book is valuable to those who wish to refine a learner's sensitivity to alternative ways of expressing meaning and to apply this sensitivity to rendering English texts. Duff explains that using translated material is a natural and necessary activity for language activities. The appropriate material of translation is authentic and not 'made-up' language. And all language is relevant to translation—all styles and registers of both speech and writing. These provide a basis for writing and discussion which is suitable for use with different translation techniques.

The third book used was Practical English Usage, 1980 by Michael Swan. This book is a practical reference guide containing information at various levels, ranging from relatively simple points to very advanced problems of usage in the English language. A clear and complete treatment of each problem area is given so that the user can concentrate on the area that he needs to be clear about. Each entry contains an explanation of a problem, examples of correct usage and sometimes also

examples of typical common mistakes and errors. More complicated problems are divided into separate entries – a general explanation first and then a more complete information. Stylistic differences are also mentioned where they are appropriate to clarify some points further.

The fourth book used was ELT Methodology—Principles and Practice, 1995 by Nesamalar Chitravelu, Saratha Sithamparam and Teh Soo Choon. Although this book does not promote any single approach, it attempts to increase choice and to build enough knowledge of pedagogic theory and awareness of issues to make informed choices. In addition, this book deals with teaching vocabulary and also literature and language teaching. This book adheres to the Malaysian School System syllabus.

In addition to these main sources on stylistics that were used in this study, other books were also consulted. For example, Principles of Pragmatics, 1983 by G.N. Leech, Linguistic Style and Persuasion, 1977 by Rolf Sandell and Essays in Stylistic Analysis, 1972 by H.S. Babb.

Concerning the study and the teaching of literature through stylistics, few resource books for teachers are available. However, the search for suitable exercises to teach literature to tertiary level students was the main concern and in particular, those exercises which could accommodate extracts from exemplary surah from the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts. The main book which was finally used was Stylistic Analysis and the Teaching of Literature, 1975 by H.G. Widdowson.

1.5.2 REVIEW OF TRANSLATIONS OF THE MEANING OF THE QURAN

According to Ahmad von Denffer, Muslim scholars agree that it is impossible to transfer the meaning of the original Quran word-for-word to another language (Von Denffer,1985:143). Some academicians refer to any translated version of the Quran in any language as *translations of the Quran* which are actually expressions of words and phrases that convey the meaning of the Quran in other languages.

Muhammad Al-Ghazali and Umar Ubayd Hasanah write that there is a consensus among Muslim scholars that when the Quran is translated into any other language, the translated work cannot convey the Quran's original and exact meaning (Al-Ghazali and Hasanah,1991:239). Thus, it is appropriate to call these translated work, *translations of the meaning of the Quran* in for instance, English, French, and German. Scholars concur that the original text which was revealed in Arabic is the only book that can be called the Quran.

M. Pickthall opened the foreword section of his book, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran-English language translation of the meaning of the Quran, with these lines:

The aim of this work is to present readers what the world over holds to be the meaning of the words of the Quran and the nature of that Book The Quran cannot be translated (Pickthall,1963: i).

Muhammad Asad writes in his book, The Message of the Quran -English language translation of the meaning of the Quran:

I do not claim to have “translated” the Quran in the sense in which, say Plato or Shakespeare can be translated. Unlike any other book, its meaning and its linguistic presentation form one unbreakable whole. The position of individual words in a sentence, the rhythm and the sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Quran, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable – a fact that has been pointed out by many earlier translators and by all Arab scholars. But although it is impossible to “reproduce” the Quran as such in any other language, it is nonetheless possible to render its message comprehensible to people who, like most Westerners, do not know Arabic at all or – as is the case with most of the educated non-Arab Muslims – not well enough to find their way through it unaided (Asad,1980: v).

In order to underscore the fact that the Quran cannot be fully communicated in any other language, the phrase *translations of the meaning of the Quran* has been used throughout this study.

With respect to the language and literary aspects of the Quran and the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran, the foreword sections of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran by M. Pickthall, Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Asad are particularly helpful and informative. In their introductory remarks, these writers explain that through their experience, *translating* the Quran is not possible and is not what they have attempted to do. Instead, they have attempted to translate the meaning of the Quran from Arabic to English.

Toshihiko Izutsu wrote several books in English which encompass vocabulary, semantics and terms in Arabic found in the Quran. His books include God and Man in the Koran, 1964, The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran, 1959 and Language and Magic, Studies in the Magical Function of Speech, 1953.

Muhammad Asad's The Road to Mecca, 1996 and M.A. Sherif's Searching for Solace, 1994 are autobiographies of the translators. A brief look at the features of each translator's book is done in Chapter 1 (Refer to 1.10 and 1.11).

The translations of the Quran are actually expressions of the meaning of the Quran in other languages. Although these translations cannot adequately express all the meanings of the Quran carried by the original text, these translations are greatly in need. Since the majority of Muslims in the world are non-Arabic speakers, translations of the meaning of the Quran in other languages serve their purpose of existence. Translations of the meaning of the Quran therefore becomes a practical

basis for the spread of Islam to others all over the world. While choosing a translation, a reader should keep in mind that the original Quran which was written in Arabic, has been revealed as guidance for mankind. A translation is to lead a reader to understand the meaning of the Quran so that one gets the guidance from it. Since the first published English translation of the Quran, about 350 years has passed. Within this period, 40 complete English translations have been published (Khan,1997:245).

Dr. Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan's English Translations of the Holy Quran, 1997 is a book that has presented collected information to facilitate the location, identification, verification, evaluation and selection of the English translations of the Quran. This book provides a general background and a history of translations in general and English translations in particular.

The journals available on stylistics have not dealt with the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran. There were some that touched on the Bible. However, it is not within the scope of this study to deal with any type of comparisons of the Bible and the English translated versions of the Quran. Thus, no mention of the Bible is made throughout this study.

In this study, the English language translation of the meaning of the Quran is being viewed and used as a literary piece of work. Its literary features are being exploited through stylistics in such a way that it becomes possible to highlight its religious content.

It is necessary to state that this study attempts to analyse exemplary surah from English language translated versions of the Quran and to compare the English language used in two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of

the Quran. This study also attempts to explore the possibility of using extracts from these exemplary surah as literary texts in the teaching of literature. This writer is by no means attempting to compare the translated versions with the original Quran or probe the original Quran as revealed in Arabic.

As far as this writer can ascertain, no documented attempt has been made so far to make a comparative study of two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran through a stylistic analysis. Thus, this research work will hopefully be a contribution to the field of the study and the teaching of literature in the English language especially in an Islamic setting.

1.6 METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The methodology of this research work is analytical in nature. Two main books were used to select two sets of surah (Refer to 1.2). The steps taken were:

- i) Exemplary surah (A), one Medinan surah is selected from The Message of the Quran and The Holy Quran, two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran by Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali respectively for a stylistic analysis. The exemplary surah (A) is the sixty-first surah, As-Saff (a Medinan surah).
- ii) Exemplary surah (B), one Meccan surah is selected from both translated versions by Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali respectively for a stylistic analysis. The exemplary surah (B) is the seventy-seventh surah, Al-Mursalat (a Meccan surah).

- iii) A comparative study of the two sets of exemplary surah from both versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran is done with the inclusion of an interview with experts, highlighting the similarities and differences in the English language used.
- iv) Use of a questionnaire to test the acceptability, understanding and preference of appeal in terms of language use of extracts from these exemplary surah from the two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran by undergraduates at an Islamic institution. One hundred questionnaires are distributed to and collected from students at an Islamic Institution. The extracts printed in the questionnaire were marked (A) and (B) and the names of the translators were not disclosed. Thus, the responses from the students were based solely on their opinions on reading extracts (A) and (B). This is beneficial for those who have no idea who Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali are. The results were also illustrated by tables to facilitate better understanding of the responses to the questions in the questionnaire.
- v) In Chapters 4 and 5, two exemplary surah are selected from two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran by Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali respectively for a stylistic analysis (Refer to 1.6). Chapter 4 seeks to analyse one exemplary surah from both translated versions. The exemplary surah (A) is the sixty-first surah, As-Saff (a Medinan surah). In Chapter 5, a stylistic analysis is done to another exemplary surah from both translated versions. The exemplary surah (B) is the seventy-seventh surah, Al-Mursalat (a Meccan surah).

vi) In Chapter 6, a study of a comparative nature is done to both surah by both translators. This chapter seeks to critically assess the similarities and differences of the abovementioned surah in the two versions of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran by Muhammad Asad and Abdullah Yusuf Ali respectively, with the help of experts through an interview. This writer then attempts to accommodate extracts from these surah into exercises for the teaching of literature at the undergraduate level.

1.7 SELECTION OF SURAH

The surah are selected randomly from the list of Medinan and Meccan surah (Refer to Appendix). These aspects were considered when the selection was made:

- a) That both surah are of medium length-not too long or short. This writer has considered the approximate time of one class period to complete the teaching of one medium length surah.
- b) That both surah contain issues interesting and appropriate for the undergraduate level. Familiar issues are important for class participation and adequate points for essay writing.
- c) To show that a Medinan surah carries more rhetorics than a Meccan surah. The Meccan surah are more factual.

1.8 MEDINAN AND MECCAN SURAH

The Quran was revealed over a period of twenty-three years. The growth and development of the Muslims during the period of revelation are marked by two great phases:

- a) The period in Mecca, before the Prophet's migration.
- b) The period in Medina, after the Prophet's migration.

The knowledge of Meccan and Medinan revelations (or surah) is of great importance to a Muslim. Altogether there are one hundred and fourteen surah in the Quran (Refer to Appendix). It has been observed that Medinan surah carry more rhetorics whereas Meccan surah are more factual. Furthermore, Medinan surah are usually longer than Meccan surah. There are eighty-five Meccan surah and twenty-nine Medinan surah (Refer to Appendix).

The Meccan phase of revelation lasted about thirteen years from the first revelation up to the Prophet's migration. The main themes of the Meccan surah are:

- a) Allah and the oneness of Allah
- b) The Day of Judgement
- c) Righteous conduct

The Medinan phase lasted about ten years, from the Prophet's migration up to the death of the Prophet. The main themes of Medinan surah are:

- a) legislation
- b) rules for social dealings
- c) property and inheritance.

1.9 THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF THE MEANING OF THE QURAN

According to Dr. M.H. Khan, the first complete translation of the Quran was done in Latin by an Englishman, Robert of Ketton. Robert professed that he attempted to undertake this project of translation by "selecting nothing, altering nothing in the sense except for the sake of intelligibility." He completed this project somewhere between 16th June and 16th July 1643 (Khan,1997:2).

Dr. Khan also highlighted the first English translation of the Quran was done by a Frenchman, du Ryer. The translation which was lengthily entitled: The Alcoran of Mahomet, translated out of Arabique into French; by the Sieur du Ryer, Lord of Malezair, and Resident for the King of France, at Alexandria. And newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities, was printed in London in 1649. Dr. Khan summed up reviewers' comments of the first English translation of the Quran to be "*very far from perfect*" and "*an indifferent translation of an inadequate version*" (Khan,1997:34).

1.10 MUHAMMAD ASAD

Two exemplary surah, the sixty-first surah, As-Saff and the seventy-seventh surah, Al-Mursalat, were taken from The Message of the Quran-English language translation of the meaning of the Quran by Muhammad Asad for a stylistic analysis.

Muhammad Asad, formerly known as Leopold Weiss, was born in 1900 in the Polish city of Lvov. In 1958, he went to Switzerland and commenced the translation of the Quran into English. About 5 years of work, Asad published The Message of the Quran in 1964. It was a preliminary, limited edition of part of his complete translation. The complete translation of Asad, the first of about twenty-two years of labour, came out in 1980, published by Dar al-Andalus Limited, Gibraltar.

The features of his book include a page of dedication "*for people who think* " and a table of contents which gives both Arabic captions and their English translation of surah, a list of works of references and a foreword explaining the need for a new translation. Arabic text and English rendering are printed in parallel columns while short commentaries appear as footnotes in the translation. A brief introduction to each surah explains the chronological order of it but sometimes goes further to present its inner message. The work includes four useful appendices: "*Symbolism and allegory in the Quran, al-Muqattaat, the term and the concept of Jinn, and the night journey*" (Khan,1997:146).

1.11 ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Two exemplary surah, the sixty-first surah, As-Saff and the seventy-seventh surah, Al-Mursalat, were taken from The Holy Quran-English language translation of the meaning of the Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali for a stylistic analysis.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, also known as Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali was born on 4th April 1872 in Surat, India. He died on 10th December 1953. Abdullah Yusuf Ali

is a well-known figure in the Quranic literature. His English translation of the Quran is so popular that almost every English speaking Muslim has read it, heard of it or has a copy of it.

The features of his book are that the Arabic text and English translation are printed in parallel columns, series of notes are arranged as commentary on the lower half of the page, and each individual surah starts with a poetical summary. The book starts with a general introduction, poetical introduction and a table of contents. The first edition came out between 1934 and 1937. In all, 93 different editions by Abdullah Yusuf Ali were identified (Khan, 1997:123).