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the nearest equivalent (or words to explain or paraphrase the concept) in brackets. This is not to imply that the translation should read like a string of transliterated Arabic words punctuated with brackets. But, as indicated earlier, it means that the method should be adopted when the notion is new to the speakers of the target language. It should also be adopted when the Arabic word is so pregnant with meaning that translating fails to do it justice.

In translating however the explanation should be in a footnote because brackets used in the body of the translation are usually reserved for the sole purpose of adding cementing words, i.e. words, not in the original but, added to render certain parts of the translation comprehensible.

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translators, i.e., Pickthall and Ali. As for the non-Muslim translators, poor performance, emanating from a desire not to excel, i.e., to present a distorted version of the original and /or an unsound knowledge of the source language, is in each case obvious. Muslim translators, it would seem, also have problems with translating the Quran, but, as we have seen, their problems seem to spring from the fact that each has his own philosophy of how he should translate the Book. Moreover, all translators discussed here are convinced that, in addition to translating the meanings of the Quran, they should try and reproduce its "sublime rhetoric", hence some of the mistakes are discussed under the examples cited. One should however mention here that they at least tried to be fair to the original.

Arabic is not an easy language to translate from. This is especially so when the target language is English. For the two languages are so widely and radically different in both structure and genius that literal translation cannot be achieved without looking rugged, dreary and incomprehensible. For instance, a large number of Arabic verbs cannot be translated into English on a one-to-one basis, e.g. استوى. So such verbs like استوى must be rendered by a combination of words. But finding the right combination can sometimes be elusive in the extreme.

When the notion is new to the speakers of the target language, the translators should mention the Arabic term first and then give

text. The brackets are of course to explain the verse. But, is this a translation or exegesis? In simple English the verse says: "Multiplication keeps you occupied" (see الرازي، ٢٠٠١: ٢٥٦).

Ali's translation of verse 3 of sura xc وما ولد follows:

And(the mystic ties of) Parent and Child;

The brackets again. "And child" is not the exact translation of وما ولد and even "Parent" is not the right word in this context, for the verse deals with "the begetter" and "all whom he begot". And why do parent and child begin with capital letters?

And this is his rendition of verse 5 sura LXXXIV: وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحَقَّتْ

And hearkens to

(The Command of) its Lord;

And it must needs

(Do so): (then will come Home the full Reality)

In plain words (وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحَقَّتْ) mean "and obeys its/her Lord in true submission" or "and yields to its/her Lord, and is made dutiful". But Ali uses a number of brackets, a cumbersome sentence construction, extra words and extra ideas to say that the earth will obey Allah without asking questions.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has tackled seven translations, five of which belong to non-Muslim translators, that is, Sale, Rodwell, Palmer, Arberry, and Dawood whereas the other two translations belong to Muslim

would be able to reproduce them fully. In his 'Preface' he speaks of the possibility of reproducing "but a faint reflection".

The rhythm, music and exalted tone of the original are difficult to reproduce, but in his attempt to reproduce them Ali tends to use more words (these he usually puts in brackets) or inexact words. Moreover, Ali uses an unusual method of translating that depends on the heavy use of brackets to explain what he seeks to convey. The presence of these brackets implies that the original is not clear or that it is impossible to translate without the use of these brackets, which is not true.

Generally speaking, translators of the Quran do not or seldom use brackets (they of course use footnotes), and yet their translations are easy to understand. In Ali's case, the brackets are part and parcel of the translation. It follows, therefore, that if you omit them, the translation does not make sense. Oddly enough, footnotes abound in his work. Here are some examples:

His translation of verse 1 sura CII reads as follows:

The mutual rivalry

For piling up (the good things

Of this world) diverts you

(From the more serious things),

All these words and brackets to translate two words *إلهمم التكاثر*

"The mutual rivalry/for...." is nowhere to be found in the Arabic

States of America by the Muslim Students' Association of the United States and Canada.

He also insisted on reproducing not just the meaning of the original, but also "its nobility, its beauty, its poetry, its grandeur and its sweet practical reasonable application to everyday experience (Ali 1975:IV). Ali elaborates when later on in his 'Preface' he writes:

The English shall be, not a mere substitution of one word for another; but the best expression I can give to the fullest meaning which I can understand from the Arabic Text. The rhythm, music, and exalted tone of the original should be reflected in the English Interpretation. It may be but a faint reflection, but such beauty and power as my pen can command shall be brought to its service. I want to make English itself an Islamic language, if such a person as I can do it (ibid.).

What Ali suggests to do here is not easy to accomplish. But his translation seems in many places to live up to his main aim, i.e. translating the meaning of the Quran. However, reproducing what he calls "the rhythm, music, and exalted tone of the original" reminds us of the inimitability of the Quran. Ali's attempts to reproduce the stylistic aspects of the Book do not in many places reflect those of the original. But to be fair, Ali never said that he

16. The lying, sinful forelock-
17. Then let him call upon his benchmen!
18. We will call the guards of hell.
19. Nay! Obey not thou him. But prostrate thyself, and draw near (unto Allah).

We do not think that Pickthall has been successful in reproducing what he calls "the charm of the Book" here, but this is extremely difficult to reproduce.

This brings us to meaning. Generally speaking, the translation of the sura is good, but there are certain words with which we take issue. To give some examples: "Read " in verse No.1 should be "Recite"; "rebellious" in verse No. 6 should be "contumacious" (i.e. stubbornly disobedient); "slave" in verse No. 10 should be votary (i.e. a devout or zealous worshipper); "cease" in verse No. 15 should be "desist" (a more formal equivalent); "henchmen" in verse No. 17 should be "council" or "helpmates". Finally, instead of "the guards of hell" in verse No. 18, we would use the transliteration of the Arabic word "al Zabāniyah" and put (the guards of Hell) in brackets or a footnote.

### *Ali's Translation*

A. Yusuf Ali was one of the best Indian Muslim scholars. His translation was first published in 1934 in Lahore, India, by Shaikh Mohammad Ashraf, and then republished in 1975 in the United

connection with the translator's ability to present something of the charm of the Book, one can only refer the reader to the translation itself. Here is however, an example, chosen randomly to illustrate Pickthall's attempt to present the meaning and something of the charm of the original. The example is surah XCVI:

### *THE CLOT*

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1. Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth.
2. Createth man from a clot.
3. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous.
4. Who teacheth by the pen,
5. Teacheth man that which he knew not.
6. Nay, but verily man is rebellious.
7. That he thinketh himself independent!
8. Lo! unto thy Lord is the return.
9. Hast thou seen him who dissuadeth
10. A slave when he prayeth?
11. Hast thou seen if he relieth on the guidance (of Allah).
12. Or enjoineeth piety?
13. Hast thou seen if he denieth (Allah's guidance) and is  
froward?
14. Is he then unaware that Allah seeth?
15. Nay, but if he cease not We will seize him by the forelock-



Arabic. In his "Translator's Foreword", he sums up the case for Muslim translations of the Quran when he writes:

It may be reasonably claimed that no Holy Scripture can be fairly presented by one who disbelieves its inspiration and its message; and this is the first English translation of the Koran by an Englishman who is a Muslim. Some of the translations include commentation offensive to Muslims, and almost all employ a style of language, which Muslims at once recognise as unworthy.

After stating the view that "the Koran cannot be translated".

Pickthall sums up his achievement as follows:

The Book is here rendered almost literary and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Koran—and peradventure something of the charm — in English. It can never take the place of the Koran in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so. (Pickthall, 1930: vii).

Pickthall speaks of presenting "the meaning of the Koran—and peradventure something of the charm - in English". In

As mentioned earlier , Dawood has deleted words during translation . For instance , he has deleted the Arabic word ( و ) when translating the following verses :

(وَحَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا (٨) وَجَعَلْنَا نُومَكُمْ سُبَاتًا (٩) وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لَيْسًا (١٠) وَجَعَلْنَا  
الْهَارَ مَعَاشًا (١١) وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا) (النبا: ٨-١٢)

Also , he has deleted the sequential letter ف in the previous verse فقال أنا ربكم الأعلى for no obvious reason despite the fact that all the other translators have rendered it into ( Then ) .

Dawood has translated the verse (عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ) (النبا: ١) into (About what are they asking ? ) and this is a big mistake because the Arabic word تسأول differs from the word السؤال . التساؤل means to question one another whereas السؤال means to ask something. As such the verse should be rendered into something like : About what they question one another?

One last example to show Dawood's distorted version of the Quran is his translation of العالمين in the (الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ) (الفاتحة: ٢). He has rendered it into (creation), a word which is far from being correct . Indeed , it is not reasonable to think that he does not know the meaning of العالمين which is the plural of العالم .

### ***Pickthall's Translation***

The first English Muslim to translate the Quran was Marmaduke Pickthall, a literary man of standing and a scholar of

To conclude, we shall look at the following two verses and their translations:

(وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ (٢) اِبْحَسِبُ الْاِنْسَانَ اَلَّذِي نَجَمَعَ عِظَامَهُ) (القيامة: ٢-٣)

Here is Arberry's translation:

No! I swear by the reproachful soul .

What , does man reckon We shall not gather his bones ?

النفس اللوامة in verse 2 should be " the self-reproaching soul" and not " the reproachful soul". نجمع عظامه in verse 3 should be "put his bones together again" or " assemble his bones" and not " gather his bones" . (see الرازي، ٢٠٠١ : ٧٢٢).

### ***Dawood's Translation***

Dawood's translation first appeared in 1956 . He is an Iraqi Jew specializing in film translation and translation of trading advertisements . This is reflected in his translation of Quranic verses in that he opts for the language of common dialogue in rendering such verses . For instance , sometimes he foregrounds a word and backgrounds another , other times he omits a word and adds another from his own .

In the verse (فَقَالَ اَنَا رَبُّكُمْ اَلْاَعْلَى) (النازعات: ٢٤) the word فقال comes at the beginning of the verse, but Dawood puts it at the end. Here is his rendition of the verse:(I am your supreme Lord , he said)

Dawood has translated this verse freely using a narrative style and this is not acceptable in translating Divine Texts .

### *Arberry's Translation*

A.J. Arberry, a non-Muslim scholar of Arabic, tried to be fair and accurate in rendering the meaning of the Quran. However, the following examples will prove that his translations are far from being accurate.

In the verse (هل أتى على الإنسان حين من الدهر لم يكن شيئا مذكورا) (الإنسان: ١) Muslim exegetists are of the opinion that هل means something like قد or a question conveying corroboration, that is, ألم يأتي على الإنسان زمن كان فيه شيئا لا يذكر. However, Arberry has rendered it as an interrogative sentence:

Has there come on man a while of time when he was a thing unrememberd ?

Harking back to the verse (هو الذي خلق لكم ما في الأرض جميعا ثم استوى إلى السماء فسواهن سبع سماوات وهو بكل شيء عليم) (البقرة: ٢٩) we have noticed that Arberry has failed to translate استوى successfully in that he has rendered it into (Then he lifted Himself to heaven). As mentioned earlier, the meaning of استوى in this verse is قصد rather than 'lifted'.

Another striking mistake is his rendition of يتلو عليكم آياتنا in the verse (كما أرسلنا فيكم رسولا منكم يتلو عليكم آياتنا) (البقرة: ١٥١). Arberry has translated it into (To recite Our signs). The word آية denotes Quranic Verses rather than 'sign' as the context makes it clear.

seven heavens . And He is Knower of all things .

So the meaning of استوى is that : having done one thing , Allah "turned" His attention to something else , that is , it means (الصابوني، ١٩٨١: ٤٦) وجه إرادته or (الزمخشري، بلا تاريخ: ٢٧٠) قصد in Arabic.

Here is another example of استوى :

(وَالَّذِي خَلَقَ الأزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الفلكِ وَالنَّاعِمِ مَا تَرْكَبُونَ (١٢) لِيَسْتَوُوا عَلَى ظُهُورِهِ ثُمَّ تَذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ رَبِّكُمْ إِذَا اسْتَوَيْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَتَقُولُوا سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ لَنَا هَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لَهُ مُقْرِنِينَ (١٣)) (الزخرف: ١٢- ١٣)

into 'settled', which is wrong-The word استوى Palmer has rendered is used twice in verse 13 and in each case it should be 'mount' and not 'settle'. Palmer's idea of a rider balancing himself on the back of his camel which he cites to justify his use of the word 'settled' is not to be found in the verse.

Another example to illustrate the striking mistakes of Palmer's rendition is the following verse

(يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْنُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ) (الزلزلة: ٦)

which Palmer translates as ( On the day when men shall come up in separate bands to show their works ) . A look at Pickthall's translation of the same verse can show that Palmer's version is far from being accurate . Pickthall has rendered it as (That day mankind will issue forth in scattered groups to be shown their deeds) (see الرازي، ٢٠٠١: ٢٥٦)

the fact that he refrained from using the phraseology of the authorised version of the Bible.

Palmer did not understand the significance and the shades of meaning of certain Arabic words and phrases. Referring to ambiguous words in the Quran, he discusses the ambiguous nature of استوى and then writes (p.LXXIX):

I have, therefore, adopted a rendering which has a similar confusion of signification, and translated it 'made for', as in Chapter 11 ver.27, 'He made for the heavens'. Where no question can arise concerning its interpretation, as, for instance, when it is used of a rider balancing himself on the back of his camel, I have rendered it simply 'settled', (see chapter XL III. ver. 12).

The Quranic word استوى is not an ambiguous word as Palmer seems to suggest in his note above. It, like many Arabic words, has a broad scope of semantic meanings. For example, in the verse  
(هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ

سَمَاوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ) (البقرة: ٢٩)

Palmer has used "made for" in rendering this verse, which is not correct. Pickthall's rendering has approximated the Arabic version:

He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth.

Then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as

He observes that to translate the Quran "worthily is a most difficult task " and then goes on to say (1880:LXXVII-LXXVIII):

To initiate the rhyme and rhythm would be to give the English an artificial ring from which the Arabic is quite free; and the same objection lies against using the phraseology of our authorised version of the Bible: to render it by fine or stilted language would be quite as foreign to the spirit of the original: while to make it too rude or familiar would be to err equally on the other side. I have, therefore, endeavoured to take a middle course; I have translated each sentence as literally as difference in structure between the two languages would allow, and when possible I have rendered it word for word. Where a rugged or common place expression occurs in the Arabic I have not hesitated to render it by a similar English one, even where a literal rendering may perhaps shock the reader.

To preserve this closeness of rendering, I have had in several instances to make use of English constructions which, if not incorrect from a strictly grammatical point of view, are, I am aware, often inelegant.

The fact that Palmer refrained from imitating the rhyme and the rhythm of the original is commendable. Equally commendable is

OPENED thine heart for thee?" may be " Have We not caused your breast to expand?" The word used in the Arabic text is **صدرك** and not **قلبك**.

Here are some examples to illustrate Roswell's odd way of translating the titles of the suras

Sura	Original Title	Rodwell's Translation
XCII	الضحى	THE BRIGHTNESS
CXI	المسد	ABULAHAB
CII	التكاثر	DESIRE
XC	البلد	THE SOIL
LXXXV	البروج	THE STARRY
LXXVII	المرسلات	THE SENT
LXIX	الحاقة	THE INEVITABLE
LVI	الواقعة	THE INEVITABLE

The last two titles account for Rodwell's bankruptcy in giving or rather translating titles.

### *Palmer's Translation*

Professor E.M. Palmer, whose translation was first published in 1876, believed that the Quran should be translated into colloquial language. Palmer, to whom the style of the Quran was "rude" and "rugged", failed to appreciate the beauty and the grandeur of the original.



text . And his translation of *عبدتم* as "ye worship" is grammatically wrong since *عبد* is not present simple.

As regards Rodwell's translation of sura CVII, he gives the sura the title "RELIGION" because the word *دين* occurs in the first verse. It seems that Rodwell is not fully aware of the fact that not every sura takes its name from a word in the first verse. The original title is *الماعون* which is the last word of the last verse.

Rodwell has translated the first verse as (WHAT thinkest thou of him who treated our RELIGION as a lie? The verse may read "Have you seen one who denies the judgement (to come)?" because *دين* may mean either (1) the Judgement to come or (2) faith,. Religion. The context requires the first meaning since the main point here is that because some people deny the judgement to come, they "treat the helpless with contempt and lead arrogant selfish lives." However, Rodwell has chosen the second meaning.

That Rodwell tends to give the suras strange and sometimes misleading names is obvious. For instance, he gives sura XCIV the title "THE OPENING". This may confuse the uninitiated reader for sura 1 *الفاتحة* is THE OPENING CHAPTER to the whole Quran. In translating the title of sura XCIV Rodwell does not deviate from the original *الشرح* but he makes a mistake when he renders it as THE OPENING. *الشرح* here means "The Expansion ."Rodwell's rendition of the first verse of this sura is therefore wrong. "Have we not

notes give the impression that he was a Christian clergyman first and a translator second.

Rodwell fails, in many places, to assimilate the Arabic text. Let us begin with sura CVIII. This is how he renders the first two verses:

TRULY we have given thee an ABUNDANCE

Pray therefore to the Lord, and slay the victims

"an ABUNDANCE" should be Abundance or the fount of Abundance. "... and slay the victims" should be "and sacrifice". "Slay the victims" gives the wrong meaning and the wrong impression.

He has rendered the fourth verse of sura 1 (مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ) as (King on the day of reckoning). This should be "Master (or Owner) of the Day of Judgment". The use of the word "King" and the preposition "on" in this verse distorts the meaning of the original. It means that God is King on that day only, to say nothing of the fact that "King" is not the right word here. In Arabic "Day of reckoning" is not the same as "Day of Judgment." The first is يوم الحساب but the second is يوم الدين and the second is what we have in the Arabic text.

He has translated verse 4 of sura CIX (وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ) as (I shall never worship that which ye worship). This should be rendered as follows: "And I will not worship that which you have been wont to worship." "never" is nowhere to be found in the Arabic

ولو كان هذا (التغيير) يبدو مهماً إلا على الذين هداهم الله

The reason behind this mistake is the ignorance on the part of the translator of the subtle differences between the conditional إن (إن الشرطية) and the lightened إن (إن المخففة) on the one hand and the strong إن (إن الثقيلة) on the other. Had he known that إن in this verse is the lightened form of the strong إن and that the لام of كبيرة is called اللام الفارقة (the distinctive Lam) in Arabic<sup>(\*)</sup>, he might have not committed such a mistake. A successful rendition of the verse is that of Pickthall:

In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom Allah guided.

Before we go to another translator, let us take Sale's rendition of the following verse (البقرة: ١٤٣) (إنَّ اللهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ) to be the final but not last mistake in this paper: (Or God is gracious and merciful unto man). If we make a back translation, the version would appear as follows in Arabic أو الله رؤوف رحيم بالإنسان. That is, Sale has rendered the particle إن as (or) in English. He could have translated the verse (Surely Allah is kind and compassionate unto mankind) to convey the real meaning of the verse.

### ***Rodwell's Translation***

J.M. Rodwell, who arranged the suras in a rough chronological order, published his translation in 1861. It is not accurate and his

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(\*) The distinctive lam is one which distinguishes the conditional إن from the lightened إن and the strong إن.

Sale's translation is 'sloppy'. Here are some examples from his translation:

### *In The Name of the Most Merciful God*

(1) Praise be to God, The LORD of all creatures; (2) the most merciful, (3) the King of the day of judgment, (4) Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance, (5) Direct us in the right way, (6) in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious, (7) not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray. Vol.1, pp.289-90

In this translation (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ) is not considered a verse. In this sura, it should be verse No. 1, because this is the "Opening Chapter" to the whole Quran. Opinion on whether or not (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ) should be numbered is however divided.

Sale's translation of (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ) does not do "impartial justice" to the original. Lumping الله , الرحمن , الرحيم in one phrase (THE MOST MERCIFUL GOD) is contrary to both the meaning and the spirit of the original. Moreover, using the definite article THE here implies that there are other Gods, which is against the main teachings of Islam.

"THE LORD of all creatures" is all wrong. "The" and "creatures" here imply that there are other Lords, each has a certain domain or sphere of influence and that the LORD mentioned here is that of all creatures. The original is رب العالمين which is completely different. It means "LORD of the Worlds" which means not just all

## *Preface*

There is little need here to talk about the language of the Quran and the grave difficulties of translating it since a wealth of articles and books have been written to that end. As such anything related to the إعجاز (inimitability) of the Glorious Quran and its aspects will be ignored in order not to repeat what has already been said.

The Quran has been rendered many times into many languages. The question to be posed is not whether the Quran should be translated but whether or not a certain translation is accurate in rendering the meanings of the Quran. This paper deals with some well-known translations of the Quran.

### *Sale's Translation*

George Sale's well-known translation first appeared in London in 1734. It is based on Maracci's Latin version of 1698. Sale, who in the "Preface" says that in translating this "extraordinary book" he has "had no opportunity of consulting public libraries", speaks of his endeavour "to do the original impartial justice" (Sale, 1896:8-9). But even a casual reading of the translation shows that what Sale says is one thing and what he does is quite another.

Because his main source was Maracci, and because he did not try to consult other sources or even verify Maracci's translation or his (Maracci's) busy comments, and because he was not skilled in Arabic,

*Semantic-Syntactic Inaccuracies in Some  
Translations of the Quran:  
A Critical Study*

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***Abstract***

This paper is a critical study of seven well-known translations of the Holy Quran. Five of the translators are non-Muslims whereas the other translators are Muslims. It is found that many of these translators are not accurate in rendering the meaning of the original. The inaccuracy of these translations is owing to the fact that the translators were in all probability unable to understand the Arabic text and so they either translated from other translations or produced distorted versions of the Arabic Quran. These translations do prove that a little knowledge is dangerous thing. Some recommendations are proposed which are based on the facts emerged during the discussion of the translations.

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