

## PERMISSIBILITY OF THE LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE GLORIOUS QUR'AN: A NEW PERSPECTIVE <sup>(\*)</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The issue of translating the Quran from a legal perspective is not a single issue, but rather a complex mix of issues that vary in views and perceptions, and thus the resulting judgments differ. Despite the recent stability of the legal view on the general permissibility of translating the Quran, there is still much disagreement among translation specialists and Sharia scholars who have written on the issue regarding some translation-related issues. This paper aims to dismantle the roots of the differences regarding the rules of translating the Quran by looking at the methods and techniques of translation that are commonly accepted among specialists, and exploring the possibility of translating the Quran as well as the historical contexts that have significantly influenced the scholars' orientations in questioning the rulings of permissibility and prohibition on Quran translations in general, and reaching their approval with known guidelines. The paper also aims to resolve the conflict between the perceptions of translation specialists and Sharia scholars regarding the nature of literal translation by analyzing texts from both sides. The paper concludes that the literal translation commonly accepted among Sharia scholars is entirely different from the literal translation, which is one of the most important translation methods alongside the semantic translation, and that literal translation of the Quran may be permissible

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from a technical perspective of translation methods while adhering to known guidelines. The paper also concludes that the literal translation intended by Sharia scholars is referred to among translation specialists as "interlinear translation," and that the ruling standard for the permissibility and prohibition of Quran translation is based on specific criteria that differ from the translation methods terminology used among translators. Semantic translation, which is commonly agreed upon, may be prohibited if these criteria are violated.

**Keywords:** *Translation of the Quran, Literal Translation, Translation Terminology, Interlinear Translation, Semantic Translation, Guidelines for Quran Translation.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Translation has existed since ancient times as a human activity that branches out from the diversity of their races and languages. Thus, God created them with a brilliant purpose and noble aims. Allah mentioned in the Quran an aspect of this purpose by saying: "O people, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." [Surah Al-Hujurat: 13]. In the era of diversity and the existence of people as different language-speaking tribes and races with their customs, traditions, and characteristics, they were created to recognize each other and to realize the greatness of God's creation and an aspect of His wisdom.

Communication and interaction cannot take place when languages differ, except through a form of translation. Some individuals make themselves bridges for cultures, civilizations, sciences, customs, beliefs, and all knowledge of nations to other nations. Look at how translation has played a pivotal role in extending these bridges and making it possible for people to understand, recognize, converge, and exchange ideas, even if their languages, colors, or homelands differ. Therefore, translation is a noble task that requires an aware culture. The translator plays the role of the bridge where people's understandings and knowledge meet, despite their different languages and tongues. George Steiner<sup>4</sup> once said, "Without translation, we would live in provinces bordering on silence."

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<sup>4</sup> Francis George Steiner (born April 23, 1929) is an American-born French intellectual, literary critic, essayist, novelist, philosopher, and lecturer. He has written numerous articles on the relationship between language, literature, and society.

In its technical meaning, translation emerged in ancient civilizations, whose roots extend back thousands of years. Since the age of writing, humans have left traces that suggest their knowledge of other nations' languages, as well as attempts at translation and linguistic dictionaries containing more than one language. Examples of bilingual documents include the "Kadesh Treaty" between the ancient Egyptians and the Hittite Empire, which dates back to 1274 BC. It is logical for translation to have emerged even before the age of writing and recording, as it is an activity that humans have never ceased to engage in since God created them and they spread throughout the earth, with their languages and colors. Translation before the age of writing would naturally be closer to oral or symbolic translation, or any other form of non-written translation. The concepts of translation are almost the same among all nations if we consider translation here in its general, broader meaning.

## 2. THE DEFINITION OF TRANSLATION

The term "translation" in the Arabic language has diverse and branching meanings, but they all converge towards providing further clarification, explanation, and interpretation, whether within the same language or between different languages. In *Lisan al-Arab*, the term "al-Tarjuman" - with a damma and an open ta - means the interpreter or the one who explains the language. Ibn Manzur cited a hadith of Hercules saying, "He said to his interpreter," and defined the interpreter as the one who translates speech, that is, he transfers it from one language to another.<sup>5</sup> In the *Munjid* dictionary, translation is defined as the transfer of speech from one language to another, and it also refers to interpretation, explanation, and elucidation.<sup>6</sup> The interpreter or translator, as mentioned by Al-Barakti in his scholarly definitions, is the one who explains the language in another language. Translation is the interpretation in another language and also the biography of a person and the mention of their ethics and lineage.<sup>7</sup>

In contemporary Arabic dictionaries, there are four primary meanings for the term "translation":

1. Translate speech, i.e., clarify, explain, and interpret it.

<sup>5</sup> Mādah rajama. Ibn Manẓūr, Jamāl Al-Dīn. (1988). *Lisān Al-'Arab* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 12). Dār Ṣādir, pp. 66

<sup>6</sup> Mādah Tarjama. Louis Ma'luf. (2001). *Al-Munjid fī Al-Lughah Al-'Arabiyyah Al-Mu'āṣarah* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Dār Al-Mashriq.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Barakātī, Muḥammad 'Amīm Al-Iḥsān Al-Mujaddidī. (2003). *Al-Ta'rīfāt Al-Fiqhiyyah*. Dār Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, pp. 55.

2. Translate a decision into action, i.e., implement it, or express hopes, i.e., reveal and express them.
3. Translate a book, i.e., transfer it from one language to another or interpret it in another language.
4. Biography of someone, i.e., mention their life story and history.

Moreover, the term "translations" (or the translator) is shared by many languages. According to Robert Larose's study on the concept and history of translation, the term originates from the Latin verb "Transferre" in the present participle form, and "Translatus" in the passive participle form. The translator was referred to in Latin as "Interpres", in French as "Interpète", and in English as "Interpreter". This term refers to the solution of text puzzles that are difficult to understand. In Egypt, the person who performed this function was called "Draconian", which is the same term in the Italian language, "Drogmanno". These terms are derived from the Arabic word "Tarjaman", which, in turn, is derived from the Assyrian word "Ragamo", meaning "to speak".<sup>8</sup>

The term "translation" in English has two main meanings<sup>9</sup>:  
Words that have been transferred from one language to another.  
The act or process of translating something into another language.

In English, there is usually a distinction between two words that indicate these meanings: the first being "translation," which refers to written translation or the act of translation in general, whether written or otherwise. The second is "interpretation," which refers to immediate, oral, or auditory translation without being written. This distinction is not present in other languages where one term covers all types of translation, such as in Arabic or French.

In academic terms, translation is the transfer of words, meanings, and styles from one language to another while maintaining "equivalence."<sup>10</sup> One of the first to speak about translation in an academic sense was Al-Jahiz, who said: "Translators must express themselves in the same translation, in the same knowledge, and in the same understanding." He added that the translator should be the most knowledgeable person about both the original and the translated language so that they are equal in their understanding. He also referred to the problematic and pivotal issue of equivalence in current translation studies, saying: "Translators can never fully convey the wise man's words, with all its meanings,

<sup>8</sup> ترجم الدراسة الأستاذ عبد الرحيم حزل على موقع الأنطولوجيا (أنطولوجيا السرد العربي) ونشرت الترجمة في 18 أبريل 2018، وقد نقل صاحب الدراسة الأصلي روبرت لاروز هذا الاقتباس عن الدراسة الفرنسية Les grands traducteurs Français والتي تعني "أعظم المترجمين الفرنسيين".

<sup>9</sup> English Language Learners Dictionary

<sup>10</sup> Kaḥīl, Sa'īdah. (n.d.). *Ta'limiyyah Al-Tarjamah Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Taṭbīqiyyah*. 'Ālam Al-Kutub Al-Ḥadīth, pp. 21.

beliefs, and intricacies, and they cannot do justice to its rights."<sup>11</sup> Roger Bacon also mentioned that if translation is truly to be achieved, the translator must be knowledgeable about both languages as well as the subject matter being translated. Since it is rare for these conditions to be met by translators, the term "translation" and translators themselves are used to refer to all translations.<sup>12</sup>

This is a subtle indication that all the issues raised in contemporary translation studies have been addressed by some scholars even before the emergence of translation as a separate discipline in the last century.

In Western academic studies, many research approaches have emerged in the 20th century regarding translation and its relationship to various linguistic arts. Most translation theorists view translation as a branch of linguistics, whereas others perceive it as an independent cultural or social activity. Some scholars consider translation to be a cognitive process, while others see it as a cultural activity aimed at conveying meanings and ideas, not just words and structures. Additionally, some scholars point out that translation is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and creative factors.

John Connison Catford<sup>13</sup> defined translation as "the replacement of a text in one language by a text in another language, and, therefore, any valid theory of translation must be based on linguistic theories in general."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, one of the most prominent translation theorists, Eugene Albert Nida<sup>15</sup>, stated that the transfer of a message from one language to another can be a scientific subject<sup>16</sup>. He further clarified that translation is "the closest natural equivalent of the message in the source language, both semantically and stylistically<sup>17</sup>." According to Nida, this type of translation is the final product of modern

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<sup>11</sup> Al-Jāhīz, Abū 'Uthmān. (2003). *Kitāb Al-Hayawān* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 1). Dār Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, pp. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Kasparek, Christopher. (1983). The Translator's Endless Toil. *The Polish Review*, 28(2), 83-87.

<sup>13</sup> John Catford (March 26, 1917 - October 6, 2009) was a Scottish linguist and one of the most prominent translation theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>14</sup> Catford, John. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press, pp. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene Nida (November 11, 1914 - August 25, 2011) was a contemporary translator and linguist. He was the originator of the theory of dynamic equivalence in the translation of the Bible.

<sup>16</sup> Nida, Eugene. (1964). *Toward a Science of Translating*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, pp. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12.

linguistics, which is a relatively successful and variable process in terms of the levels of communication achieved<sup>18</sup>.

In the same context, Newmark, one of the prominent scholars in the field of translation, defined the process of translation as "translating the meaning of the text into another language in the way that the author of the original text intended<sup>19</sup>." Similarly, Roger presented a similar definition stating that translation is "expressing in another language (or target language) what has been expressed in another language (source language), while maintaining semantic and stylistic equivalency<sup>20</sup>."

In contrast, some researchers, especially those influenced by multilingual environments, view translation as a social activity. Susan Bassnett<sup>21</sup> argues that translation is the transfer of "meanings" from one language to another by using dictionaries and rules of that language. This process involves a complete set of standards that go beyond linguistic standards, as opposed to Catford's and Nida's definitions<sup>22</sup>. In this regard, The Oxford Companion to the English Language defines translation as "communication between the 'meaning' in the source language and its equivalent in the target language<sup>23</sup>."

Another group of researchers suggests that translation is a cultural or social activity that represents transformations in cultural history, clarifies the boundaries of cultural exchange, or increases its pace<sup>24</sup>. Canadian translation professor, Sherry Simon, presents a new definition of translation as "writing

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<sup>18</sup> Nida, E. (1959). Principles of Translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating. In R. Brower (Ed.), *On Translation* (pp. 11-31). Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674731615.c3>.

<sup>19</sup> Newmark, Peter. (2000). *A Textbook of Translation*. Pearson Education Limited, pp. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Bell, Roger. (1998). *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice*. Long Man, pp. 5.

<sup>21</sup> A scholar and professor of Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick. She has written more than twenty books and has had a significant impact on the field of translation studies.

<sup>22</sup> Bassnett, Suzan. (1980-1993). *Translation Studies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, pp. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Bhatia, Namit. (1992). *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. n.p., pp. 51-54.

<sup>24</sup> Simon, Sherry. (2006). *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 16.

inspired by encounters with other linguistic communities, including the effects of creative intervention<sup>25</sup>."

Regarding translation assessment and evaluation, "House" attempted to combine these variables, stating that translation is a cognitive process that occurs in the human mind and is also a common linguistic and cultural practice between languages and cultures. Therefore, any valid translation theory must incorporate both of these components. To achieve this, we need a multidisciplinary perspective on translation theory that unifies these aspects in a credible manner. Although considering translation as a social, cultural, political, ethical, or purely intellectual subject is necessary and valuable, we should not forget that translation is essentially a linguistic activity<sup>26</sup>.

Translation, as a cognitive process, has been studied for over 30 years, with recent interest in the cognitive aspects of translation. As O'Brien correctly points out, research into the process of translation "borrows heavily" from a number of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, reading and writing research, and language technology<sup>27</sup>. House argues that, if we consider both perspectives, translation must be viewed from two perspectives: a social perspective, which takes into account the overall and partial contextual restrictions that affect translation and the translator, and a cognitive perspective that focuses on the "internal" way in which the translator carries out his or her task in translation. Both perspectives are integrated and can be divided into different fields and research areas.

Roman Jakobson, the American linguist, outlines three major directions of (written) translation:

- 1) intra-lingual translation, which may include rephrasing or paraphrasing and is sometimes referred to as a linguistic aspect of the Arabic term (translation);
- 2) inter-lingual translation, which involves transferring a text from one language to another; and
- 3) inter-semiotic translation, which involves translating non-written visual or gestural signs into written form. Only the second type is considered "translation" by Jakobson, as noted by Bassel Hatem and Jeremy Munday in their study, *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*<sup>28</sup>. For this type, many methods for

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17.

<sup>26</sup> House, Juliane. (2015). *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*. Routledge Tylor and Francis Group, pp. 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> O' Brien, Sharon. (March 2013). The Borrowers: Researching the Cognitive Aspects of Translation. *Target*, 25(1), 6. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1075/target.25.1.02obr>.

<sup>28</sup> Hatim, Basil and Jeremy Munday. (2005). *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*. Routledge.

translating a text from one language to another have emerged in recent translation studies, but these methods can be broadly categorized into two main approaches: on the one hand, there is the "localization" approach, also called "dynamic equivalence," advocated by Nida, and on the other hand, there is the "foreignization" approach, favored by Venuti, which preserves the culture of the main language in the translation process, while the former does not consider this issue important.<sup>29</sup>

House presents a list of influential factors that should be considered when studying the nature of translation, including: the structural features and expressive possibilities and restrictions of the languages to be translated from and into; non-linguistic factors that can be variously categorized in the source and target languages; the original text's stylistic and artistic linguistic features according to its linguistic and cultural norms; the stylistic and artistic linguistic features of the target text according to its linguistic and cultural norms; the accepted or known rules of the target language by the translator; the intertextuality<sup>30</sup> that governs the text as a whole in the target culture; the translation traditions, principles, history, and ideologies in the target linguistic community; the translation brief given to the translator by the person(s) or body responsible for translation; the translator's knowledge, experience, ethical stance, and behavioural stance, as well as the translation theory he or she adopts; and the reader of the translation's knowledge, experience, ethical stance, behavioural stance, and the translation theory he or she adopts<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSLATING THE QURAN

The possibility of translating the Quran and its ruling has been a widely debated topic in academic circles, particularly in the early 20th century when the secular Turkish Republic, which had abolished the Ottoman Caliphate, translated the Quran into Turkish in an attempt to erase the Islamic identity of the Turkish people and replace it with a national identity. Although the matter was already a scientific issue before this time, it is important to depict the issue accurately so that partial or incorrect diagnoses do not lead us to obscure it or some of its

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<sup>29</sup> El-Khatib, Abdallah. (2006). A Critical Study for the Proper Methodology of Translating Islamic Terms in the Holy Qur'an into English with Special Reference to Some Qur'anic Terms. *Dirasat, Shari'a and Law Sciences*, 33(2).

<sup>30</sup> Tanas (intertextuality) in Arabic literature is a critical term that refers to the existence of similarities between one text and another or between several texts. It is a term coined by Julia Kristeva to refer to the reciprocal relationships between a particular text and other texts.

<sup>31</sup> House (2015). *Translation Quality Assessment*, pp. 13-14



aspects. The possibility of translating the Holy Quran relates to three aspects: the practical aspect related to translation methods, the historical aspect, and the scientific and legal aspect.

Many Sharia scholars who had no expertise in translation studies lacked a significant part of the accurate depiction of this issue, whether they agreed or disagreed on the matter. The distinction should be made between translating the Quran in prayer and translating the Quran in general, as well as between literal or even figurative translation of the entire Quran as a book, and whether this translation is possible or not. The motive behind the translation should be considered, whether it is to clarify the meanings while retaining the original Arabic text or an attempt to convert non-Arabs away from the Arabic wording and marginalize it.

It is important to differentiate between whether the translation is considered an ordinary book with right and wrong and does not take the place of the Quran, or whether the translation is intended to be a Quran for non-Arabs with the same sanctity and rulings. Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish whether the translation is literal or figurative, and whether the translation, as a figurative one, is considered an explanatory book or not. There are many other interrelated issues that require a careful investigation and description of the issue before expressing an opinion, especially since they require additional fields of knowledge and do not relate only to Sharia sciences.

#### *a. The practical possibility of translating the Quran*

As previously clarified, the Quran is the miraculous speech of God in both its wording and meaning. Practical translation pertains either to conveying meanings, styles, and structures (literal translation and its derivatives) or to conveying meanings from one language to another (functional and interpretive translation and their derivatives). Considering that the Quran is a text containing meanings, albeit numerous, it is possible to transfer its meanings to any other language, whether through literal or functional translation or both, or through interpretation. This ruling is based on the determination that the translation of the Quran aims to convey some of its meanings rather than all of them. The issue of possibility here goes beyond the matters of legitimacy, validity, reliability, or any other standards, because any text can be understood in a language, and its basic meaning can be expressed in other languages.

This is also related to the opinion of translation theorists that the translated text does not replace the original text, and all styles and structures of the original texts cannot be transferred to the translated texts. The difficulty of this task increases when we consider that the text or speech to be translated is divine and not human. Goldenberg wonders: If it is difficult to translate the human word, how can one translate the divine word? He also wonders how one

can translate words that have distinct connotations in one language and do not exist in another language<sup>32</sup>? Some translation theorists have concluded that the translation of meanings from one language to another is a controversial matter because the meaning itself is considered the property of the source language, and it cannot be translated except partially into another language. This is the ultimate goal and intention of translating the Quran<sup>33</sup>.

If one intends for the translated text to completely replace the original text or to transfer all styles and structures from the original texts to the translated texts, then the ruling in this case is that it is impossible to translate the Quran. Although the Quran is practically translatable, this translation will not be the Quran, and it will not fully reflect the intended meaning, even if it reflects the overall meaning or the original meaning. The Quran was revealed in Arabic, and it cannot be the Quran in a non-Arabic language, as Muslims have unanimously agreed.

Therefore, it is better to make the title of the translation suggest or establish this meaning in its introduction, as Arthur Arberry did, who wrote in the introduction to his translation: "I have called my translation an interpretation, maintaining the claim that the Quran (like all other literary masterpieces) is untranslatable<sup>34</sup>." Similarly, the British Muslim translator Marmaduke Pickthall affirmed in the introduction to his translation of the Quran that he believed the Quran could not be translated because it was God's miraculous message that affected the hearts of those who heard it, and brought tears to their eyes every time its high rhetorical themes were recited to them — how can these effects be replicated in any translation<sup>35</sup>? Shellabear also acknowledged in 1969 that the Quran cannot be translated, as no translation will be capable of doing justice to the source text<sup>36</sup>.

The translators have approached the translation of the Quran by adapting their methods to the issue of the possibility of dividing the meanings derived from the Quran, and other speech in general, into original meanings that are directly perceived, and secondary or subsidiary meanings that vary in eloquence, including the eloquence of the Quran, which has reached the level of inimitability. Some have gone so far as to suggest that translation is possible in

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<sup>32</sup> Abdul-Raof, Hussein. (2001). *Qur'an Translation Discourse, Texture And Exegesis*. Routledge Tylor and Francis Group, pp. 180.

<sup>33</sup> El-Khatib. (2006). *A Critical Study*, 525.

<sup>34</sup> Arberry, A. J. (1998). *The Koran Interpreted*. Oxford University Press, pp. xii.

<sup>35</sup> Pickthall, Muhammad Marmaduke William. (1996). *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*. Cagri Yayinlari, pp. xiii.

<sup>36</sup> El-Khatib. (2006). *A Critical Study*, 525.

practice, as in the case of Ash-Shatibi in *Al-Muwafaqat*, who stated that "Arabic language, in terms of expressions that refer to meanings, has two aspects: one is absolute expressions and phrases, which are the original reference; and the other is restricted expressions and phrases that refer to servant meanings, which are the subsidiary reference. The first aspect is common to all languages, and it serves the purposes of the speakers, and it is not specific to one nation over another. Therefore, if an action occurs in existence, such as Zaid standing up, and each speaker wants to report on Zaid standing up, he will achieve his goal without difficulty, and from this aspect, in the Arabic language, it is possible to report on the sayings of the earlier generations - who were not Arabic speakers - and to narrate their words, and the same is possible in the non-Arabic language<sup>37</sup>."

It is argued that there are several pieces of evidence that indicate the possibility - and even the obligation - of translating the Quran entirely or partially. Above all, the Quran itself affirms this in the verse, "And I have revealed this Qur'an to warn you and whoever it reaches..." [6:19]. If the address was only to the Arabs, then there would be no problem, and the verse would not indicate the possibility of translation. However, the scholars of interpretation have agreed that the address here includes all humans, including jinn. At-Tabari reported from Mujahid that he said about the verse, "And I have revealed this Qur'an to warn you," meaning the Arabs, "and whoever it reaches," meaning the non-Arabs<sup>38</sup>. Then, At-Tabari added after citing several evidence, "To warn you, O polytheists, and to warn anyone who has received the Qur'an from among all people<sup>39</sup>." Al-Zamakhshari added, "And whoever it reaches" refers to the people of Mecca, that is, to warn you - people of Mecca - and to warn anyone who has received the Qur'an, whether Arab or non-Arab. Some said it refers to the two heavy things (i.e., the Quran and the Sunnah), and some said it refers to whoever has received it - that is, the Quran - until the Day of Resurrection<sup>40</sup>." However, Al-Razi attributed the statement about the eloquence of the Quran to the majority of scholars<sup>41</sup>. Sheikh Al-Shinqiti, in his interpretation of the verse, said, "It is stated in this noble verse that he - peace be upon him - is a warner for

<sup>37</sup> Al-Shātībī, Ibrāhīm. (1997). *Al-Muwafaqāt fī Uṣūl Al-Sharī'ah* (Vol. 2). Dār Ibn 'Affān, pp. 105.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr. (2000). *Jāmi' Al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl Al-Qur'ān* (Aḥmad Shākir, Ed.). (Vol. 11). Mu'assasah Al-Risālah, pp. 291.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Ṭabarī. (2000). *Jāmi' Al-Bayān* (Vol. 11), pp. 292.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū Al-Qāsim Jār Allāh. (1987). *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ Al-Tanzīl* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 2). Dār Al-Kitāb Al-'Arabī, pp. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin 'Umar. (1999). *Mafātīh Al-Ghayb: Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 12). Dār Iḥyā' Al-Turāth Al-'Arabī, pp. 499.

everyone who has received this great Quran, whoever they may be, and it is understood from the verse that the warning is general for everyone who has received it, and whoever has received it and does not believe in it will be in the Fire, and it is also true. As for the general warning to everyone who has received it, other verses have also indicated this, such as His saying, "Say, 'O people, I am the Messenger of Allah to all of you..." [7:158], His saying, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a bringer of good tidings and a warner to all the people..." [34:28], and His saying, "Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion upon His servant to be a warner to the worlds..." [25:1]."<sup>42</sup>

Al-Zamakhshari noted the occurrence of translations in his interpretation of Allah's saying: "And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them, and Allah sends astray [thereby] whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise" (Quran 14:4). He said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was not sent only to the Arabs, but to all people. Allah says: "Say, [O Muhammad], 'O mankind, indeed I am the Messenger of Allah to you all'" (Quran 7:158). Al-Zamakhshari added that the Messenger was sent to both humans and jinn, who spoke different languages. Therefore, if the Arabs did not have a proof (hujjah) [to believe in the message], then other people did not have a proof either, meaning that if the Quran had been revealed in a non-Arabic language, the Arabs would not have had proof [of its authenticity]. He further added that it is not necessary for the Quran to be revealed in all languages, as translations can fulfill this purpose and avoid prolonging it. Thus, it is better for the Quran to be revealed in one language, and the most appropriate language is that of the Messenger's people, because they are closest to him. When they understand it, clarify it, and spread it, translations will explain and interpret it, as we see in translations in every nation of non-Arabs<sup>43</sup>.

Another indication is the hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and others from Abdullah bin Amr that the Prophet ﷺ said: "Convey from me, even if it is one verse"<sup>44</sup>. If the message of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was for both Arabs and non-Arabs, it is certain that conveying the Quran to non-Arabs can only be done through translating its meanings into their languages. If we know that translation is the expression of a meaning found in one language in another language, this

<sup>42</sup> Al-Shinqīṭī, Muḥammad Al-Amīn bin Muḥammad. (1995). *Aḍwā' Al-Bayān fī Ḍāḥ Al-Qur'ān bi Al-Qur'ān* (Vol. 1). Dār Al-Fikr li Al-Ṭibā'ah wa Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzī', pp. 475.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Zamakhshari. (1987). *Al-Kashshāf* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 2), pp. 539.

<sup>44</sup> Rawāhu Al-Bukhārī (no.hadith: 3461). Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad bin Ismā'il. (2001). *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Vol. 4). Dār Ṭawq Al-Najāh, pp. 170.

indicates the possibility of translating the Quran, whether in part or in whole. Other issues related to the uniqueness of the position of the Quran from the linguistic or legal perspective should be considered from these aspects and will be discussed, God willing.

In fact, the Quran or some of it has already been translated during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and after him. There is certain evidence of the translation of the Quran in the time of the Prophet ﷺ, as mentioned in the Sahihain and other books. It is reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent letters to non-Arabs inviting them to Islam, and included some verses of the Quran in these letters. For example, the letter sent to Heraclius, the king of the Romans, included some verses from the Quran. Al-Bukhari narrated from Ibn Abbas that the story of Heraclius and Sufyan, known as the Hadith of Heraclius, includes the following: "So he (Heraclius) said to his translator, 'Ask him (Sufyan) what he says.' So he (the translator) asked him, and he informed him. So he (Heraclius) said, 'Ask him if there are any of his people who have accepted his call.' So he (the translator) asked him, and he informed him. So he (Heraclius) said, 'Ask him what he orders them to do.' So he (the translator) asked him, and he informed him. So he (Heraclius) said, 'I have asked him about everything that I needed to ask him. So bring me his letter.' So it was brought, and he (Heraclius) read it, and in it was written: 'From Muhammad, the slave of Allah and His Messenger, to Heraclius, the king of the Romans. Peace be upon those who follow guidance. After this, I invite you to Islam. Accept Islam, and you will be safe; and Allah will give you a double reward. But if you refuse, then upon you is [the sin of] the peasants (Arisiyin).' And, 'O people of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah.' (Quran 3:64)... [end of the hadith]."<sup>45</sup>

In light of the above, it can be inferred that the possibility of translating the Quran is achievable, taking into account the possibility of translating its original meanings rather than its subsidiary meanings. The question remains whether this translation is for the Quran itself, its meanings, or its interpretation. This issue requires further discussion and consideration, and its other dimensions will be discussed, God willing.

#### 4. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE ISSUE OF TRANSLATING THE QURAN

<sup>45</sup> Rawāhu Al-Bukhārī (no.hadith: 2941). Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl. (2001). *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Vol. 4). Dār Ṭawq Al-Najāh, pp. 45.

The historical context of the issue of translating the Quran has been discussed throughout Islamic history, but its adaptation and considerations have varied among historical contexts in the early Islamic period and in the present era during the past century. Understanding the historical context of issues related to the translation of the Quran provides us with a greater and broader understanding, as well as a historical perspective, as will be explained in the next point from a legal perspective. The issue of translating the Quran was not methodically present in the discussions of the ancient scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, but the issue at that time was the permissibility of reading the translation in prayer for non-Arabs who were unable or incapable of reading Arabic. The majority concluded that it is not permissible to read the translation during prayer, whereas Abu Hanifa concluded that it is permissible for those who are unable to read Arabic. Despite the slight remarks from scholars regarding the existence or obligation of translating the Quran, they unanimously agreed that the translation is not considered a Quran. This remained the case until the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate and the seizure of power by the Turkish nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who attempted to erase the features of Islam, including the Quran, by attempting to translate it into Turkish, replacing the Arabic Quran with the translated version. At that time, sincere individuals from this nation, such as Sheikh Mustafa Sabri and Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida, the owner of the Al-Manar magazine, and other scholars stood up to defend the issue, especially since the distorted translations of the Ahmadiyya had also invaded the nation before that. In explaining the context of events that led Sheikh Rashid Rida to take this stance on Quran translations, he clarified by saying, "The most important events that occurred regarding the Islamic world: the announcement of the Turkish Angora government's assistance in translating the Noble Quran into Turkish and publishing it in the Turkish language. They had been planning this act of atheism for many years in order to divert religious people from the Arabic Quran, which was revealed to Muhammad the Arab in clear Arabic language {in a clear Arabic tongue} (Ash-Shu'ara: 195). This would make it easier for them to distort the translation and manipulate it however they wished...". He added, "Also, the Qadiani Christian sect in India had published an English translation of the Noble Quran in which they distorted some of its verses morally to prove their Qadiani innovation, and they printed it with the Arabic Quran. The preachers of this new sect have been active in the past two years in spreading it in Arab countries... They sent some copies of the printed Noble Quran with their distorted translation to Egypt, so the Customs Authority sent them to the Al-Azhar authority to take their opinion on the legality of importing them into the country according to the applicable regulations. However, Al-Azhar did not allow this, so the stray sect began to attack and publish letters criticizing the Al-

Azhar authority, claiming that this was a hindrance to the publication of the Quran and a restriction on the freedom of understanding it. However, this was not the case. Al-Azhar has never interfered with the freedom of understanding and interpretation, nor the publication of books containing opinions and statements that contradict the narrations of the Salaf, nor the support of some sects that oppose the Sunnah, old and modern. However, Islamic law does not allow it to officially permit the publication of a distorted translation of the Quran, which its publishers use to invite people to a new innovation that contradicts the consensus on the principles of Islamic beliefs, such as the Qadiani innovation, which claims the continuation of revelation and that the Dajjal Christ is Ahmad Qadiani, the awaited Christ, and that he abrogated some of the provisions of the Quran<sup>46</sup>...".

This historical context also highlights the reasons behind the majority of those who opposed the translation of the Quran, such as Sheikh Mustafa Sabri, who, at the beginning of his book "The Issue of Translating the Quran," responded to those who advocated for the permissibility of translation during that time and instead declared it forbidden due to various considerations stemming from the events surrounding him. He stated, "Some people may assume that the issue of translating the Quran and allowing translators to lead the prayer in Turkey was aimed at naturalizing the Quran with Turkish nationality, which is not the case. It is strange that some Arab voices in Egypt raised objections to changing the language of the Quran, which went beyond tolerance in national matters, and demanded evidence from Islamic jurisprudence books. Thus, Arab volunteers are aiding Turkish extremists, even if it is against the center of the Arab Quran and the satisfaction of the Turkish Muslim people. These volunteers do not realize that the Ottoman government and the Turks are separate entities, and the Turks still submit to the Arab Quranic Sultan, who is the supreme authority over all Muslim nations and is not to be tampered with." Therefore, he aimed to counter those voices by defending the supremacy of the universal Quran and preserving the Turkish nation's unity with Islam<sup>47</sup>.

The historical context that prevailed in Turkey during the early 20th century was not different from that of Egypt, where most of the opposition to the translation of the Quran was rooted. At that time, Egypt was under British colonization, and orientalist were trying to attack many aspects of Islam,

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<sup>46</sup> Riḍā, Muḥammad Rashīd bin 'Alī. (n.d.). *Majallah Al-Manār* (Majmū'ah min Al-Mu'allifin, Eds.). (Vol. 25). n.p., pp. 794.

<sup>47</sup> Şabrî, Muşţafâ. (1932). *Mas'alah Tarjamah Al-Qur'an*. Al-Maţba'ah Al-Salafiyyah, pp. 3.

including the Quran's distorted translation. Considering this context, it becomes very likely that the strict fatwas prohibiting the translation of the Quran and insisting on preserving the original Arabic text were aimed at protecting it from the planned distortion.

Moreover, the historical context contributed to the controversy, although other factors were also present. Many of those who opposed the translation of the Quran did not object to its spiritual translation or a translation that did not replace the original Arabic text. For instance, Sheikh Rashid Rida, in his report on the prohibition of literal translation, argued that spiritual translation was sufficient and listed several benefits of it, such as converting many people to Islam when reading it and refuting the doubts raised by critics against Islam. He concluded his argument by stating, "Some of the French scholars translated the Quran into their scientific languages, such as French, English, German, and Italian, and some Muslims translated it into their Eastern languages and also into English. However, in each of these translations, there are many mistakes that contradict the linguistic and legal meanings of its expressions. They opened the door for criticism and opposition to Islam, and they also opened another door for independent thinkers who learned many of the correct Islamic beliefs, high judgments, and wise purposes of human reform. Many of them praised Islam and adhered to it, and they were enlightened by its light. Almost every year, some of these independent thinkers enter Islam by reading some of these translations or by knowing some Muslims who follow it. The consequences of these translations, whether beneficial or harmful, compel Muslims to increase their strengths and support for the good and refute the harm. However, this can only be achieved by rendering these translations into correct spiritual translations, since literal translation is difficult and unhelpful, as we will prove with evidence and proofs that cannot be refuted or countered, in accordance with what we have already decided. This translation, which is necessary due to the reasons we mentioned, is an obligation for Muslims, and it is not called the Quran nor is it worshipped by reciting it. Rather, it is a summary interpretation of it that falls under the category of defending Islam on the one hand and calling to it on the other hand<sup>48</sup>."

Similarly, Sheikh Mustafa Sabri argues in his book, which he wrote to prove the prohibition of translating the Quran, "There is no issue with a spiritual translation, but rather the issue is with a translation that replaces the Quran in prayer and other aspects<sup>49</sup>." This was in response to Sheikh al-Maraghi, who

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<sup>48</sup> Riḍā, (n.d.). *Majallah Al-Manār* (Vol. 32). n.p., pp. 184-190.

<sup>49</sup> Şabrî. (1932). *Mas'alah Tarjamah Al-Qur'ân*, pp. 8.



permitted the literal translation of the Quran in prayer, following the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifa, may Allah have mercy on him.

Prior to this difficult period in the history of the Muslim ummah, translations of the Quran were not controversial, at least as far as we have been informed. Indeed, the Quran had been translated into many languages before this period, as noted by the author Ibrahim al-Jarmi in his book "Dictionary of Quranic Sciences." He writes, "There are translations of the Quran in Persian, Eastern and Western Turkish, which were translated in the fourth century AH... Buzurk ibn Shahriyar said that the Quran was translated into one of the languages of northern India in the year 345 AH. And Khwaja Abdullah al-Ansari translated and interpreted the Quran in the year 520 AH<sup>50</sup>."

This introduces the reader to the concept of translation in its academic sense, and the possibility of translating the Quran in light of this meaning, as it is a text with a comprehensible meaning, although there are numerous secondary meanings that can be derived from it. The historical context was the primary reason for the wide-ranging controversy surrounding translation, starting with the appearance of the translation of the Qadianis to spread their heresy among non-Arabs, and the Turkish translation to erase the Arabic identity of Islam by the Turkish government during this period. Now, we turn to the calm statement of the legal ruling on the translation of the Quran.

## 5. TRANSLATING THE QUR'AN FROM A SHARIA PERSPECTIVE

The first thing we should discuss regarding this issue is the eloquent statement made by Sheikh Abdul Azim al-Zarqani at the beginning of his study on the same subject, "Translating the Quran," when he said, "Determining the meanings of words and understanding their intended meanings is an important and useful effort, especially in areas of disagreement like this one. Our investigation has revealed that defining the meanings of contentious issues or resolving areas of conflict through technical Azhari expressions has often brought the differing viewpoints closer together. It has been shown that the disagreements among scholars are often verbal rather than substantive, because their affirmations and negations do not pertain to the same issue. What one scholar affirms, no one else contradicts in the sense he intended, and what another scholar negates, no one else contradicts in the same sense. Ultimately, the issue comes down to a mere difference in wording, not in considerations. If they had agreed on these

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<sup>50</sup> Al-Jarmī, Ibrāhīm Muḥammad. (2001). *Mu'jam 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*. Dār Al-Qalam, pp. 91.

considerations from the outset, their wordings would not have differed, and there would have been no need for reconciliation<sup>51</sup>."

Given the numerous issues involved in this matter, the researcher will adopt a gradual approach in its discussion, as opinions and rulings differ from one issue to another, moving from those on which there is consensus to those on which there is disagreement.

The first issue on which there is consensus is that it should be known that the Quran is divine speech, miraculous in its meanings and structures, and that there is no speech that is comparable to it, whether in its original Arabic language or any other language, neither in the past nor in the present, nor will there ever be such a speech in the future. This is something that Muslims have unanimously agreed upon, generation after generation. Imam al-Nawawi, may Allah have mercy on him, reported the statement of Imam al-Haramayn, who said: "The translation of the Quran is not the Quran, by unanimous agreement of the Muslims, and attempting to prove otherwise is futile. No one disagrees that speaking the meaning of the Quran in Hindi is not the Quran, and what is expressed in it is not the Quran. Whoever disagrees with this is a denier, like al-Maraghi who permitted it. The interpretation of the poetry of Imru' al-Qays is not his poetry, so how can the interpretation of the Quran be the Quran<sup>52</sup>?" This is also a subtle indication from Imam al-Nawawi that speaking the meaning of the Quran in a language other than Arabic is a form of interpretation.

Another issue on which scholars have unanimously agreed in this context is the matter of "writing" the Quran in another language, whether that writing uses the same Arabic phonetic letters but with the letters of another language (transliteration), such as writing "Bismillahi Arrahmani Arrahimi" instead of "بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ", or whether it means writing the Quran in another language, i.e. replacing the Arabic Quran with a non-Arabic Quran. These two issues are far from the issue of translating the Quran, whether a literal or a spiritual translation, and attributing this translation to a specific author, and not considering it as the Quran, and not deriving rulings from the Arabic Quran or the Quran written in Arabic from it, and not worshipping it, are among the criteria that distinguish the Quran from other speech. When a question was presented to the Fatwa Committee in Al-Azhar Al-Sharif about writing the Quran with Latin letters, they answered: "Undoubtedly, the known Latin letters lack several Arabic letters, so they do not convey everything that the Arabic letters convey. If the Holy

<sup>51</sup> Al-Zarqānī, Muḥammad ‘Abd Al-‘Azīm. (n.d.). *Manāhil Al-‘Irfān fī ‘Ulūm Al-Qur’ān* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 2). Matba‘ah ‘Īsā Al-Bābī Al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakāhu, pp. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Nawawī, Muḥyī Al-Dīn Yaḥyā bin Sharaf. (n.d.). *Al-Majmū‘ Sharḥ Al-Muhadhdhab*. Dār Al-Fikr, pp. 342.

Quran were written with them in the Arabic style, as understood from the question, distortion and corruption would occur in its pronunciation, followed by a change in its meaning. The texts of the Shariah have decreed that the Holy Quran be protected from everything that would subject it to replacement or distortion. Muslim scholars, past and present, have unanimously agreed that any action taken with respect to the Quran that leads to a distortion in its pronunciation or a change in its meaning is absolutely prohibited and forbidden. The Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, and those who followed them until our time have all adhered to writing the Quran with Arabic letters<sup>53</sup>."

Those who attempt to write the Quran in any language other than Arabic, using what is known as transliteration or writing the Quran according to its phonetic pronunciation in other non-Arabic languages, are motivated by good intentions based on ignorance of the rules of Islamic law and a narrow perspective of the long-term and even short-term consequences of this act. This error has been fueled by a large publishing industry with significant weight in printing and disseminating books. Such an act contradicts the consensus of the Muslim community that writing the Quran in languages other than Arabic is not permissible, as stated in the fatwa of the Fatwa Committee of Al-Azhar and as is evident to anyone familiar with the differences between languages.

Arabic is distinguished by certain sounds and letters that do not exist in other languages, and creating new phonetic letters to fill this gap is not sufficient, as errors are still possible in every sentence, and in most words of the sentence, despite extreme caution. Furthermore, this practice ignores the greater benefit of enabling non-Arabs to earn the reward of reading the Quran in Arabic. As is known, avoiding harm takes precedence over bringing benefit. Distorting the words of the Quran and replacing the Arabic pronunciation with a non-Arabic pronunciation undermines the pronunciation and does not establish the meaning. Additionally, Allah does not burden anyone beyond their capacity. Thus, a non-Arab who cannot read the Quran in Arabic is not obligated to do so, so how can they take the risk of distorting the Quran's pronunciation into hybrid words?

In this regard, it is worth noting that Imam Al-Shafi'i commented on the incident where Al-Miswar bin Makhrama prevented a non-Arab from leading prayer, saying: "And I like what Al-Miswar did<sup>54</sup>."

The issue is not limited to Latin letters. Sheikh Rashid Rida narrated that Sheikh Abu Hassan Al-Marghinani, a Hanafi scholar, prohibited writing the

<sup>53</sup> Al-Zarqānī. (n.d.). *Manāhil Al-'Irfān* (Vol. 2), pp. 134.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad bin Idrīs. (1990). *Kitāb Al-Umm* (Vol. 1). Dār Al-Ma'rifah, pp. 193.

Quran in Persian by consensus, as it leads to neglecting the Quran's preservation. We are commanded to preserve both the wording and the meaning since they are evidence of prophethood. Moreover, it leads to indifference to the Quranic text<sup>55</sup>.

It should be noted that there is a difference between the two issues of reciting the translation in prayer, which was a historical issue, and translating the Quran, which is a modern issue. They are separate issues that are independent from each other in many aspects of their evidence and results. However, this is not the place to elaborate on this matter.

To clarify the issue, there is no disagreement that if the intention of the literal or even the figurative translation is to make it equivalent to the Quran or to treat it as the Quran, it becomes prohibited, not because of the principle of translation itself or its method, but rather because of its intended purpose. Similarly, if the intention is to mislead people from the Quran and Islam, as the Orientalists did, then it is prohibited. However, the difference among scholars on the existence of a figurative or literal translation of the Quran is not intended to replace the original text, but to convey its meanings to other languages through known translation methods and techniques. This difference is due to differences in the concept of literal, figurative, or interpretive translation, or the failure to consider the basis or the intended meanings of the translation, or the possibility of conveying the meanings of the Quran or other considerations, as will be evident from the statements of the scholars who permit or prohibit translation as a translation.

**a. *The Opinion of those who Prohibit Quran Translation:***

A group of scholars, some of whom have been mentioned, believe that it is not permissible to translate the Quran and have presented a number of arguments in support of this view, including:

Allowing translation is considered an innovation that can lead to harm or corruption as it would cause non-Arab Muslims to neglect learning the Arabic language and to rely on translations that do not constitute the Quran for learning, studying, and reciting the Quran.

No translator can encompass the multiple meanings of the Quran, and therefore, accurate translation that reaches the level of the Quran's linguistic and semantic inimitability is impossible.

Translation of the Quran was not done by the Companions or the pious generations, and therefore, attempting to do so would be a dangerous audacity.

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<sup>55</sup> Riḍā, (n.d.). *Majallah Al-Manār* (Vol. 26). n.p., pp. 481-495.

If non-Arabic speaking people who embraced Islam limited themselves to translating the meanings of the Quran into their own languages, the languages of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco would not have become Arabic.

Supporters of the view that translating the meanings of the Quran is not permissible include Ibn Juzayy - the author of *Al-Qawanin Al-Fiqhiyyah* -, Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida, Sheikh Mustafa Sabri, and others. The researcher has mentioned some historical contexts that contributed to the prohibition of Quranic translation. Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida mentioned approximately fifteen reasons for preventing the translation of the Quran, then said: "This is what appears to us to be the reasons that prevent Muslims from translating it so that they have a non-Arabic Quran instead of the Arabic Quran<sup>56</sup>."

The opinions of these scholars have a significant basis, and they are sound opinions in light of the evidence they relied on and the historical and scientific contexts in which they developed. Although the researcher permits Quranic translation, as will be discussed, he agrees with these opinions that prohibit it based on the guidance of scholars who arrived at these opinions and on the different vision that these scholars have regarding translation as it is in reality when considering the theoretical and methodological aspects of translation as an independent field with specific features and regulations.

**b. *The opinion of those who permit translation:***

Most scholars allow the translation of the "meanings" of the Quran, including Imam Al-Shatibi, Ibn Qutaybah, Imam Al-Bukhari, Ibn Hajar, and Sheikh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, may God have mercy on them all. The Hanafi scholars also permit the translation of the meanings of the Quran for those who are proficient in them. They state that if the Quran is translated, then those who are unable to read it in Arabic must be allowed to read it in the foreign words into which it has been translated. This is the strongest opinion among them. The Hanafis have detailed branches of opinions on this matter, but they all agree on the permissibility of translating the meanings of the Quran into foreign languages. The majority of contemporary scientific and jurisprudential councils, whether in Al-Azhar, the Hijaz, Europe, India, or elsewhere, have also approved the translation of the Quran. However, their opinions are subject to some "necessary" conditions that must be taken into consideration when considering the translator's work, the translator, and the translation method.

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<sup>56</sup> Riḍā, (n.d.). *Majallah Al-Manār* (Vol. 11). n.p., pp. 268.

Imam Al-Bukhari, in his Sahih, used the translation of the Torah into Arabic by the Prophet, peace be upon him, as a precedent for allowing the translation of the meanings of the Quran into non-Arabic languages. He narrated, in the chapter "What is permissible in the interpretation of the Torah and the Books of Allah in Arabic and other languages," this opinion based on the verse: "Bring the Torah and recite it, if you are truthful." He cited the reason for the revelation of this verse in the story of the Jewish man and woman who committed adultery, and mentioned what Ibn Abbas had reported from Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, that Heraclius had summoned his translator to read the Prophet's book and translate it for him. Bukhari also narrated what Muhammad ibn Bashar had transmitted to Abu Hurairah, who said: "The People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and explain it in Arabic to the Muslims. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, 'Do not believe the People of the Book, nor disbelieve them.'" Bukhari deduced from all of this the permissibility of translating the meanings of the Quran into foreign languages, taking the translation of the Torah as an analogy.

Ibn Hajar, may God have mercy on him, commented on what was mentioned in the noble hadith about the verse: "Bring the Torah and recite it." He said: "The implication according to Imam Al-Bukhari is that the Torah is in Hebrew, so the issue of permission to express it in Arabic arises, and the opposite is also permissible by analogy, so it is permissible to express the Arabic Quran in Hebrew and other languages, as there is no difference. Moreover, it may be said that the Quran is more deserving of this because its message is universal, so it is necessary to translate its meanings, unlike the Torah, which was translated out of need or completeness, not out of necessity, due to the lack of universality in Moses' message, peace be upon him<sup>57</sup>." Ibn Hajar also commented on the hadith reported by Bukhari from Ibn Abbas from Abu Sufyan, saying: "The implication is that the Prophet, peace be upon him, wrote to Heraclius in the Arabic language, and Heraclius' language was Roman. This indicates that the Prophet relied on the one who translated for him in order to understand what was in the book, and the mentioned translator is the interpreter. The same is true for the aforementioned incident. The hadith is clear in permitting the translation of the meanings of the Quran into languages other than Arabic, because the Quran contains a Quranic verse that says: 'O People of the Book, come to a common word between us and you.' The Prophet also wrote it to Najashi, the king of Ethiopia, and to the king of Persia. All three were non-Arabs who did not know Arabic. It is clear that this implicitly permits the translation of the meaning of

<sup>57</sup> Al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad bin Ḥajar. (1996). *Fatḥ Al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Vol. 13). Dār Al-Ma'rifah, pp. 516.

this verse into all of these languages. It was also reported in Sahih that when Heraclius received the book, he ordered his translator to translate it for him. What is allowed in one verse is allowed in all of the Quran absolutely<sup>58</sup>."

Ibn Hajar also commented on the hadith mentioned by Bukhari from Abu Hurairah, where some used it as evidence for the permissibility of reading the Quran in Persian. He endorsed this with another evidence that Allah spoke in the Quran with the words of the prophets, such as Noah, Moses, Jesus, Joseph, and all the prophets, in the Arabic language, even though their languages were not Arabic. He concluded that this implies the permissibility of translating the meanings of the Quran, or even its recitation, into foreign languages, because the warning is only effective if it is understood in their language<sup>59</sup>.

Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, also supported the permissibility of translating the Arabic words of the Qur'an into other languages. In his book "The Correct Response to Those Who Have Changed the Religion of Christ," he stated: "The Arabic words of the Qur'an are arranged in the order of the verses, so no one has the right to change them from the Arabic language according to the consensus of Muslims. However, it is permissible to interpret them in the Arabic language and to translate them into other non-Arabic languages<sup>60</sup>." Indeed, Al-Shatibi, may Allah have mercy on him, believed that the translation of the Qur'an was a communal obligation (*fard kifayah*) and not just permissible, as it has been understood. He equated translation with interpretation and considered the consensus on interpretation to also be a consensus on translation if its purpose was to convey the original or fundamental meanings. After dividing the meanings of speech into primary meanings shared by all languages and secondary meanings that involve differentiation and perfection, he stated: "If this is established, it is not possible for anyone who considers this second aspect - meaning the secondary meanings - to translate Arabic speech into non-Arabic speech as is, let alone translate the Qur'an and transfer it to a non-Arabic language, except by assuming equal linguistic competence... Ibn Qutaybah denied the possibility of translation in the Qur'an - meaning in this second aspect - but as for the first aspect - meaning the primary meanings - it is possible, and it is permissible according to the consensus of the people of Islam to explain the Qur'an and clarify its meanings to the general public. This agreement has become an argument for the validity of translation of the original

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 516.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 517.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqī Al-Dīn Abū Al-‘Abbās Aḥmad bin ‘Abd Al-Ḥalīm. (1999). *Al-Jawāb Al-Ṣaḥīḥ li Man Badala Din Al-Masīḥ* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Dār Al-‘Āṣimah.

meaning<sup>61</sup>." Dr. Abdullah Al-Khatib also argued that when we talk about the permissibility of semantic translation of the Qur'an (i.e., transferring ideas and meanings from one language to another), we base this on a certain strong argument. It is that semantic translation reveals meaning, and therefore, in this context, it is synonymous with interpretation because interpretation involves explanation, which is the knowledge that enables a person, as far as human ability allows, to discover what the Qur'an reveals about the will of Allah. This interpretation is considered correct even if it presents only one meaning<sup>62</sup>. The Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Fatwa issued a ruling stating that translating the meanings of the Qur'an is permissible if the meaning is correctly understood and expressed accurately in another language by someone who is proficient in both languages, as this fulfills the obligation of conveying the message to those who do not know Arabic. Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "As for addressing the people of a particular field using their terminology and language, it is not disliked if there is a need for it and the meanings are correct, such as addressing non-Arabs of the Romans, Persians, and Turks in their language and customs. This is permissible and good for the necessity. However, the imams disapproved of it if there was no need for it... Therefore, the Qur'an and Hadith are translated for those who need to understand them through translation, and the teacher also reads what he needs from the books of other nations and their words in their language and translates them into Arabic, as the Prophet, peace be upon him, ordered Zaid ibn Thabit to learn the Book of the Jews so that he could read it and write it for him, since the Jews were not trusted<sup>63</sup>."

The majority of the respected scholars who allowed translation have only considered it from the perspective of interpretation and conveying the original or some of its meanings, rather than all the primary and secondary meanings. Therefore, many of them have stipulated that the translation must be specified as a translation of the "meanings of the Qur'an" in English (or any other language), rather than being called a "translation of the Qur'an." This is because naming such a product "translation of the Qur'an" implies that most of the possible meanings of the original text are presented to the reader, which is not the case in reality. Another advantage of adding the word "meanings" to the title of any translation of the Qur'an is that it keeps in the minds of those who read this translation the fact that what is being presented is not the miraculous text of

<sup>61</sup> Al-Shāṭibī. (1997). *Al-Muwafaqāt* (Vol. 2), pp. 106-107.

<sup>62</sup> El-Khatib. (2006). *A Critical Study*, 526.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Ri'āṣah Al-Āmah li Idārāt Al-Buḥūth Al-Īlmiyyah wa Al-Ifā' wa Al-Da'wah wa Al-Irshād. (n.d.). *Majallah Al-Buḥūth Al-Islāmiyyah*, 6, pp. 274-275.



the Qur'an itself, but only an interpretation of its meaning, a human expression of the divine miraculous original text. While the original text can move souls, other expressions are less powerful in terms of their impact. And while the former is loaded with different shades of meaning, interpretation conveys only limited meanings<sup>64</sup>.

However, it should be noted here that some who allowed - or even required - translation belong to a group whose approach in granting permission for translation and expansion is not acceptable, as they consider it a substitute for the Qur'an, such as Sheikh Maraghi, Professor Muhammad Farid Judi, and others who supported the Turkish Republic that was established on the ruins of the Ottoman caliphate. They attempted at a certain point in the nation's history to strip the identity of the Qur'an and Islam in the Turkish Republic. Although the researcher allows the translation of the Qur'an, the prohibition of translation is closer to the truth, according to Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida and Sheikh Zakariya al-Ansari, who opposed attempts to convey the Qur'anic word into various languages and feed the racism of peoples by encouraging the adoption of translations of the Qur'an and rejecting the original Arabic text, which does not receive falsehood from it, neither in front of it nor behind it.

### *c. A Reconciling Approach*

Therefore, after a quick review of the opinions of opponents and supporters, we come to the "substance of the matter," as Sheikh al-Zarqani concluded in his book "Manahil al-Irfan" after a long foundation of the issue. However, this matter will be elaborated in another way that is required by the context of clarifying some aspects of the translation field due to specialization.

If we consider adapting the concept or concepts of translation according to the terminology of the experts in this field, we will find that the opinions of opponents of translation are based on a misunderstanding, namely, considering translation as equivalent to the Quran. However, the view of the majority of scholars who have permitted the translation of the Quran is that it is a moral or interpretive translation of the literal translation of the concept of translation, which differs from the terminology of translators. Literal translation, like moral translation, aims to convey the meanings of the source to the target language, but there is a preference for adhering to the official text over the general meaning obtained without restriction in literal translation, and the opposite in moral translation. However, Al-Zarkani, and those who followed him among the scholars of Sharia who agreed or disagreed with him, believed that the word

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<sup>64</sup> El-Khatib. (2006). A Critical Study, 525.

"translation" means "transferring speech from one language to another. And the meaning of transferring speech from one language to another is to express its meaning in other words from another language, while fulfilling all its meanings and purposes, as if you transferred the speech itself from its original language to the second language<sup>65</sup>." Here, "all meanings" means all denotative meanings in addition to the more accurate meanings, such as connotative, emotive, and expressive meanings, and other pragmatic meanings<sup>66</sup>. Based on this definition, translation is divided into two types: literal and interpretive. Although the typical translation of this term "literal translation" into English will be "literal translation," Al-Zarkani's "literal" translation is actually consistent with "interlinear translation" in Western translation studies, as evidenced by these identical definitions:

Literal translation according to Al-Zarkani: It is the one in which the original speech is mimicked in its structure and arrangement. It is like putting a synonym in place of its synonym<sup>67</sup>.

Interlinear translation according to Dyk: "A method of translation in which the target text presents a literal rendering of each successive unit of meaning in the source text (including suffixes and prefixes), and arranges these units in the order in which they occur in the source text, regardless of the traditional grammatical order of the units in the target language<sup>68</sup>."

The second division of translation, which Al-Zarkani coined and those who followed him adopted, was "interpretive translation," which was luckier in its concept than literal translation. It defines interpretive translation as one in which the original speech is not mimicked in its structure and arrangement, but the important thing is to portray the meanings and purposes completely, and therefore it is also called moral translation<sup>69</sup>. Thus, in order to be an interpretive translation, according to Al-Zarkani's definition, this type of translation must preserve the full functions, meanings, and purposes of the Quran. There is no doubt that this "translation" of the Quran is impossible to achieve and forbidden to attempt. This is also what Al-Zarkani went to, which is a very idealistic and unrealistic concept, so that none of the theorists of translation in its literal and

<sup>65</sup> Al-Zarqānī. (n.d.). *Manāhil Al-'Irfān* (Vol. 2), pp. 110.

<sup>66</sup> Ahmed, Adam. (n.d.). *Towards a Structured Theory on Qur'an Translation: Testing House's Model for Theoretical Relevance and Practical Adequacy to Qur'an Translation*. University of Westminster, pp. 15-17.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Zarqānī. (n.d.). *Manāhil Al-'Irfān* (Vol. 2), pp. 111.

<sup>68</sup> Dickins, J., Herveý Sándor G. J., and Ian Higgins. (2002). *Thinking Arabic Translation: A Course in Translation Method*. Routledge, pp. 273.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Zarqānī. (n.d.). *Manāhil Al-'Irfān* (Vol. 2), pp. 111.

moral aspects aspire to it. Newmark, one of the most important translation theorists, clearly states that the ideal translation is just an illusion. He says: "Since the concept of ideal translation is an illusion, the concept of equivalent translation can only be approximate<sup>70</sup>." Baker also expresses the same meaning, saying: Although equivalence can usually be achieved to a certain extent, it is always relative due to a variety of linguistic and cultural factors<sup>71</sup>. Similarly, Simms (1997: 6) emphasizes that translation between languages is impossible in a pure form, since, just as there is no absolute synonym from all aspects between two words in the same language, there is no such thing as pure linguistic equivalence between languages<sup>72</sup>. Larson indicates that often the words of the source language are translated by a completely different set of words. In other words, the translator should not expect a literal equivalent<sup>73</sup>. The issue of equivalence will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, God willing, but the purpose here is to elaborate on the opinions of translation theorists and specialists regarding the possibility of an interpretive translation as the one referred to by Sheikh Al-Zarkani.

The following table shows the difference between the literal translation that Al-Zarkashi arrived at, which is represented by the intermediary translation, and the literal translation that translation theorists have agreed upon.

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<sup>70</sup> New Mark, Peter. (1991). *About Translation*. Multilingual Matters Ltd, pp. 101.

<sup>71</sup> Baker, Mona. (1992). *In Other Words*. Roudedge, pp. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Simms, Karl. (1997). *Translating Sensitive Texts: Linguistic Aspects*. Rodopi, pp. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Larson, Mildred L. (1998). *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*. University Press of America.

*Interlinear translation 1:*

عفت الديار محلها فمقامها بمنى تأبد غولها فرجامها

Disappeared the camping ~ grounds alighting ~ places-their and-  
stopping ~ places-their // in-Mina became ~ deserted Ghaul-its  
and-Rijam-its

*Literal translation 1:*

عفت الديار محلها فمقامها بمنى تأبد غولها فرجامها

The camping grounds have disappeared – their alighting places  
and their stopping places // at Mina; its Ghaul and its Rijam have  
become deserted

*Interlinear translation 2:*

مثل هذه الأشياء عليها إقبال كثير الآن.

Like these things to them demand much now.

*Literal translation 2:*

مثل هذه الأشياء عليها إقبال كثير الآن.

Things like these are in great demand now.

Adapted from Dickens, 2002, 15-16.

If we look at the literal translation from an academic point of view, we find that it is not intended to dispense with the original or to convey the original meanings and structures, as most objectors have claimed. Moreover, if we look at all the translations of the Quran, even those adopted by the highest religious authorities, we find that the concept of literal translation applies to them much more than the concept of semantic or interpretive translation. The translations of Al-Hilali, Mohsin and Khan, Sahih International, Abd Al-Haleem, and other translations adopted by the Sunni and Jama'ah, and most translations of the Quran in general, apply - except in rare cases - the concept of literal translation from an academic perspective, not semantic or interpretive translation.

Hence, the non-founded dispute over the considerations arises, as Sheikh Al-Zarkashi mentioned in his quote at the beginning of the chapter. This

variation in the concept of "literal translation" between the translation workers' perception and the scholars' perception of Sharia left behind these long pages of verbal conflict, with each interpreting literal translation in their way without considering the other party's concept. If we asked those who permit literal translation about all the objections raised against it, we would find them saying that these objections do not concern them because they do not say the opposite, but they agree with them. If we approached the concept of literal translation with its academic meaning in the science of Sharia, we would accept it with the same controls that we accepted for semantic or interpretive translation.

If none of the scholars had said that an interpretation of the meanings of the Quran collected all the meanings of the Quran or that it was a complete interpretation, there would never be an interpretation of this kind. This is due to the miraculous nature of the Quranic statement that cannot be encompassed by a single interpretation, but preference is from one perspective or another. The same applies when looking at translations of the Quran, as there is no translation that can be said to be a complete or comprehensive translation of all the meanings of the Quran. There will never be such a semantic or literal translation. Instead, the preference is also a specific preference, either linguistically, or in terms of ease of style, or in terms of explanatory marginal comments and other shades of preference.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS: CRITERIA OF TRANSLATION OF THE GLORIOUS QURAN

Regardless of the controversy over whether the translation is literal or conceptual or a translation of interpretation, there must be some rules available in any type of translation so that the translations of the Holy Quran are free of methodological errors and religious prohibitions and to acquire its methodological authenticity and formal and substantial quality. These rules were mentioned by Sheikh Rashid Rida, Sheikh Al-Zarqani, the Fatwa Committee at Al-Azhar, the Permanent Committee, and others of the people of knowledge, and these rules must be established at the beginning of each translation:

- 1- It must be established among Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, that the translation is not considered Quran and is not treated as such, but rather it is intended to convey the original or subsidiary meanings of the Quran as much as the translator's ability allows, so that people of other languages can access it and be guided by its teachings.
- 2- It must be established among Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, that the translation does not derive legal rulings from it, and is not the basis for

- the legal or interpretive authority, nor is it suitable as a ladder to reach *ijtihad*, as it is no more than a book of interpretation, and does not replace the original Arabic source in all of that.
- 3- The translation must indicate that it is limited in containing all the meanings of the Quran in its original language, and that this is impossible due to the miraculous nature of the Quran in terms of linguistic structure and semantic connotations.
  - 4- The translation should emphasize that it is a personal understanding or understanding of a group of individuals, and does not include all the meanings of the Quran, but only includes what the translator or translators have understood.
  - 5- It is preferable and safer - and this is what the Al-Azhar Committee stated in its rules, but it is not binding - that there should be a commentary on the margin of the Quran, and that the translation should be for this overall simplified interpretation and not for the verses directly. If the researcher believes that this rule is not necessary, there is no doubt that attempting to translate the Quran itself is not a matter of controversy.
  - 6- The translation should state at the beginning if it relies on a particular school of jurisprudence in interpreting the rulings of the verses, as it is difficult if not impossible, for example, to find a word in the target language that is equivalent in its linguistic connotations to the phrase "or touched women" and therefore the translator must choose between the word that conveys the meaning that the Hanafi school understood or the meaning that the public understood, and it is best to indicate such issues in the margin.
  - 7- It is best to support the margin with evidence and effects that clarify the context of the verses and demonstrate the intended meaning, such as the reasons for revelation or interpretive narratives.
  - 8- If there is a need to expand on explaining or clarifying some issues, the translator or translation team should put it in the margin, presenting the issue briefly and without being tedious or boring.
  - 9- The translation should not refer to scientific theories; the verse should not be interpreted in light of scientific theories, nor should the opinion of astronomers be mentioned regarding the sky and the stars when there is a verse that refers to them, but the intent is to explain the verse according to what the Arabic language indicates.
  - 10- The translation should not be restricted to a particular school of theological thought or others, and should not be arbitrary in interpreting verses of attributes or verses of miracles, matters of the hereafter, and other unseen events.

- 11- The Quran should be translated according to the recitation of Hafṣ, and the translator should not refer to other recitations unless necessary, except if the translator or translation team states at the beginning that this translation relies on the recitation of Waṣṣ or other reliable recitations, not the recitation of Hafṣ.
- 12- Avoid complexity and verbosity except when necessary, and keep it to the minimum level required.
- 13- The most appropriate names for such translations are "Translation of the Meanings of the Quran" or "Interpretation of the Quran in such a language," and they should not be called "Translation of the Quran" in any way - to avoid linguistic disputes. The titles should be chosen carefully because many people tend to only read the title and may overlook the introduction containing the rigorous methodological guidelines, and they may start reading the translation directly.
- 14- The translation must reflect the complete and true understanding of the message of the original language text, and it should be conveyed with the greatest possible accuracy and objectivity to the target language text. Sheikh Al-Zarqani emphasized this point well when he said, after listing several guidelines: "Whoever knows the value of the Quran will not hesitate to exercise this caution." The service of the Holy Quran through its interpretation, translation, and spreading the light of its sublime teachings in all languages of the world is still a significant and sacred duty that can only be fulfilled by those who carry the responsibility of disseminating this upright religion and the straight path, and who combine scientific strength with religious and ethical integrity.

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