

The Translation of Some Misunderstood Qur'anic Words Into English

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Abstract—This paper aims to investigate some cases where misunderstanding of Qur'anic words takes place on the part of Qur'an translators. In these cases, misunderstanding leads to mistranslation of the Qur'anic verses. Having analyzed nine translations of seventeen Qur'anic sample verses, relying on two well-known Qur'anic interpretations, considerable misunderstanding was detected, leading to mistranslation of the Qur'anic verses. The analysis of the translations shows that mistranslation results from misconception, misreference, homonymy confusion, and inflection confusion. The paper concludes that translators, besides having a good grasp of Arabic source language (SL) in general and Qur'anic language in particular, have to rely on Qur'anic interpretation, *Tafseer*, to overcome any misunderstanding, thus mistranslation might not happen.

Index Terms—translation, Qur'an, misunderstanding, mistranslation

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a unanimous agreement, in the Islamic world, on the fact that the Noble Qur'an cannot be rewritten in the same language, Arabic, with the same accuracy retained. Each inflection mark, letter, word, phrase, etc. has its own unique position which is set through divine precision. This fact explicitly leads to the impossibility of having the Noble Qur'an translated into other languages, conveying its original meanings and keeping the same accuracy. This has led to many shortcomings in the translated versions of the Noble Qur'an, one of which is due to misunderstanding its words properly. Al-Ni'mah (1997) states that there is no translation, whatever, capable of delivering the original meanings of the Noble Qur'an, which are based on Arabic language. Al-Timsamani (2002) describes translating the Noble Qur'an as one of the hardest undertakings in the field of translation.

We can talk about any text using the simple dichotomy of *form* and *content*. The translator has to deal with both. As far as the content, which represents the message of the text, is concerned, the translator tries to do his/her best in comprehending the SL text while reading it, so that he/she can convey the message into the target language (TL) properly. Otherwise, this message will be distorted, as Ali (2007) argues that a communication breakdown takes place between SL and TL when the translator misinterprets the SL text thus distorts the SL message. The translator cannot do the translation without first dealing with the form of the SL text. What frequently constitutes the most difficult part in the process of translation is turning the form of the SL into a new form in the TL, with keeping the same SL content, i.e. the message. The form of the Qur'anic language is a difficult one by nature for native Arabs themselves, so how about non-natives! What increases its difficulty is its sacredness and matchlessness. Since translation competence and performance are two criteria which are relative in degree from one translator to another, based on the translator's experience in both SL and TL, then translation errors may result due to lack of such experience. This lack affects either the translator's ability to understand the message of the SL text or his ability to convey it into the TL. Both could be the case as well. It is worth mentioning that, according to the researcher's readings, the great majority of Quran translators are not originally specialized in translation! This does not mean depreciating their considerable efforts, yet stressing the fact that a specialized translator is, supposedly, more competent than a non-specialized one. Checking their biographies¹, the translators under study, except Dawood, are found to have different professions other than translation. Hilali was a scholar of jurisprudence, Khan was a surgeon, Muhammad Ali was a writer and a researcher, Pickthall was a novelist, a journalist, and a political and religious leader, Khalifa was a biochemist, Sarwar was an Islamic theologian and a philosopher, Shakir was a judge, Sherali was an Islamic thinker, and Yusuf Ali was a lawyer. As for Dawood, although he was an academician, specialized in translation, yet he wasn't successful in translating almost all of the verses under study!

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study sheds some light on one of the important issues that translators in general, and translators of the Noble Qur'an in particular, might face. This issue is *misunderstanding* the SL. The main goal of translation is to bridge the gap between languages and cultures and remove any misunderstanding that might occur due to the inevitable differences between the world's languages in their different levels, let alone differences in cultures. This goes in line with Glaser (2010, as cited in Thomas et al., 2010), who argues that languages play a significant role in facilitating

¹ See for instance Mustafa (2019). Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/47497128-1649-2019-->

human communication, through having two contradictory attributes which are creating misunderstanding and then clarifying it. Investigating the phenomenon of misunderstanding in social life, House et al. (2003) present a nice definition of misunderstanding, stating that “Misunderstanding is a form of understanding which is *partially or totally deviant* from what the speaker intended to communicate” (p. 5). They argue that misunderstandings offer occasions for learning and that they constitute a driving force in learning processes. In discussing some maneuvering strategies in translating legal texts, Akhtar et al. (2019) state that misunderstanding of the ST is one of the main problems that face translators. In their paper that investigates the problems of equivalence in the performance of student translators, Rosa et al. (2020) conclude that one of the causes of misunderstanding of ST is knowledge insufficiency of the SL structure, besides the different features of SL and TL. Trying to design a rubric for translation quality assessment, Samir and Yazdi (2020) state that correct spelling helps in avoiding confusion and misunderstanding, and that mistranslation yields when the translator does not understand or interpret the ST.

Since the Qur’anic text has a special status that is governed by its uniqueness and sacredness, translators of the Qur’an have to pay more attention when dealing with it. The researcher believes that almost all Qur’an translation problems revolve, in principle, around some misunderstanding taking place here and there. This misunderstanding happens for two general reasons: first, incompetent or non-specialized translators, and second, the difficulty of the text being translated. The first can be overcome through making more practice and the second through gaining more knowledge about the Qur’an, Sunnah, Qur’anic interpretations, and Qur’anic sciences. Another source, which is of great importance for Qur’an translators, is the considerable literature written with the aim of investigating the problems of translating the Noble Qur’an. This includes books, PhD dissertations, MA theses, research papers, and articles. To mention just few, following are some recent books that tackle issues pertinent to the Qur’anic text and its translation.

Al-Ghazi (2012) considers translating the Qur’an an attracting fertile research area for academicians and scholars around the world whose desire is how to achieve an accurate translation of it. Jeet (2015) investigates the semantic and pragmatic implications of irony in the Qur’an with reference to English. Shahpari (2017) studies the cohesive devices in the English translations of the Qur’an in a descriptive-oriented approach. Through using an analytical comparative approach, Fouad (2017) discusses the difficulties that might face translators of the Qur’an when dealing with synonyms. Discussing the reasons behind misunderstanding the Noble Quran, with the issue of puns in focus, Al Aqad and Abu-Alhaj (2018) mention that mistranslation occurs when the Qur’an translator is non-native Arab, having no familiarity in dealing with religious texts, Qur’anic interpretations, and Qur’anic sciences, in addition to the fact that the majority of Qur’an translations are made through individual attempts, a matter that increases the probability of committing translation mistakes. Al-Tarawneh (2019) suggests a new hybrid approach for translating the meaning of the Noble Quran, which he describes as being more communicative for English readers. Alhaj (2019) investigates the translation of metaphoric words in the Qur’an into English. Ahmad (2020) tackles the religion-specific Qur’anic terminology and vocabulary, arguing that about 300 words in the Qur’an make up over 70% of it. Alhaj (2020) dedicates his book for students of linguistics and translation, through bringing together theory and practice and offering strategies for translating the meanings of the Qur’an into different languages. Al-Qazzaz (2020) presents some papers tackling different linguistic and stylistic Qur’anic topics through analyzing the difficulties that face Qur’an translators. Al-Badrany (2020) investigates, in a sociolinguistic study, the existence of old Arabic dialectal words in the Noble Qur’an and analyzes their translation into English. Al-Badrany (2021) tackles the phenomenon of recurring verses in the Noble Qur’an and the translation of such verses into English. Atef (2021) investigates the issue of conceptualization in the Noble Quran with reference to its English translation from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

III. METHODOLOGY

The corpus of the study is the Noble Qur’an. Seventeen sample Qur’anic verses, containing misunderstood words, were selected. Al-Sonaid (2018) talks about 300 Qur’anic words that might be misunderstood by Arabic readers. However, according to a pilot study done by the researcher, it is found that not all of them constitute misunderstanding problems, as far as translation into English is concerned. For space limitations, the present study analyzes and discusses seventeen samples only. After listing the translations of each Qur’anic verse, a separate section is dedicated for explaining the misunderstood words under investigation and analyzing their translations. Nine translations are presented for analysis.² The translators are: Dawood, Hilali & Khan, Muhammad Ali, Pickthall, Khalifa, Sarwar, Shakir, Sherali, and Yusuf Ali. The analysis is supported by consulting two well-known Qur’anic interpretations, viz. Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000). The resulting 153 translations were analyzed aiming to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What is the rate of mistranslating the misunderstood Qur’anic words?
- 2- What is the reason(s) behind misunderstanding?
- 3- Which translation is the most accurate?

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

SL Text (1): Chapter of Al-Baqarah, Verse No. 285

² The Qur’an translations, except for that of Dawood (2006), are taken from Clay Chip Smith’s *Parallel English Qur’an*, available at: http://www.claychipsmith.com/Parallel_Quran.htm

"أَمَّنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ"

Misunderstood Word(s): لَا نُفَرِّقُ

TL Texts:

- 1- Dawood: "We discriminate against none of His apostles".
- 2- Hilali & Khan: "We make no distinction between one another of His Messengers".
- 3- Muhammad Ali: "We make no difference between any of His messengers".
- 4- Pickthall: "We make no distinction between any of His messengers".
- 5- Khalifa: "We make no distinction among any of His messengers".
- 6- Sarwar: "We find no difference among the Messengers of God".
- 7- Shakir: "We make no difference between any of His messengers".
- 8- Sherali: "We make no distinction between any of HIS Messengers".
- 9- Yusuf Ali: "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His messengers".

Discussion and Analysis:

The denotation of not making distinctions between one messenger of God and another, which is mentioned in verse no. 285, was misunderstood by all translators under study due to misconception, since differentiation among messengers of God does exist. God distinguishes five messengers, according to Al-Tabari (2000), describing them as having *strong determination*; namely: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. This is mentioned in the chapter of Al-Ahqaf, verse no. 35: "فَأَصْنَبْزُ كَمَا صَنَبْزُ أَوْلَا الْعَزْمِ مِنَ الرُّسُلِ...".

According to Ibn Kathir (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the meaning of the Quranic verse is that differentiation among the messengers of God should not be made on the basis of belief in them, since all messengers have brought one message from God, which is to believe in Him, yet on the basis of what God Himself has told us about them, i.e. *having strong determination*.

Thus, the translation has to be revised to be: "We make no distinction between one another of His Messengers (in belief)".

SL Text (2): Chapter of Al-Imran, Verse No. 55

"إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَرَافِعَكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرَكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ"

Misunderstood Word: مَرْيَمَ

TL Texts:

- 1- Dawood: "God said: Jesus, I am about to claim you back".
- 2- Hilali & Khan: "And (remember) when Allah said: "O 'Isa (Jesus)! I will take you".
- 3- Muhammad Ali: "When Allah said: O Jesus, I will cause thee to die".
- 4- Pickthall: "(And remember) when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee".
- 5- Khalifa: "Thus, GOD said, "O Jesus, I am terminating your life".
- 6- Sarwar: "He told Jesus, "I will save you from your enemies".
- 7- Shakir: "And when Allah said: O Isa, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth)".
- 8- Sherali: "Remember the time when ALLAH said' `O Jesus, I will cause thee to die a natural death".
- 9- Yusuf Ali: "Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take thee".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to the Islamic doctrine, there is a unanimous agreement that Jesus was not killed or crucified. According to Ibn Kathir (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), Jesus was lifted by God to the heavens.

Having a look at the translations, we can find that Muhammad Ali, Khalifa, and Sherali misunderstood the word *مَرْيَمَ* due to their misconception. Consequently, they mistranslated it in a way which shows that Jesus's life was terminated by God. As for the rest of the translators, they translated the word in different ways, all of which give an impression for the reader that Jesus was not killed.

SL Text (3): Chapter of Al-Nisaa, Verse No. 17

"إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا"

Misunderstood Word(s): مِنْ قَرِيبٍ

TL Texts:

- 1- Dawood: "quickly turn to Him in penitence".
- 2- Khan: "repent soon afterwards".
- 3- Muhammad Ali: "turn (to Allah) soon".
- 4- Pickthall: "turn quickly (in repentance) to Allah".
- 5- Khalifa: "repent immediately thereafter".
- 6- Sarwar: "repent immediately".
- 7- Shakir: "turn (to Allah) soon".
- 8- Sherali: "repent soon after".
- 9- Yusuf Ali: "repent soon afterwards".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to the Islamic doctrine, God keeps forgiving people's sins as they keep repenting. Thus, forgiveness is a continuous act by God and not restricted to be granted only within short periods, after which people, committing sins, have to repent. There are two moments in life time at which God's forgiveness ceases. The first moment is when one reaches his final stage shortly before death, when the soul leaves the body. The second one is when the sun rises from the west at the end of the world. The first one is relative and individual, whereas the second one is absolute and collective.

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the phrase *من قريب* does not mean *soon* or *shortly afterwards*, yet it refers to a period that lasts till shortly before one's final moments towards death. This is supported by the prophetic hadith (Al-Asbahani, 1999).

All translators misunderstood the phrase *من قريب* due to misconception, hence, mistranslated it. It is suggested to translate it as "repent afterwards (before death or sunrise from the west)"

SL Text (4): Chapter of Al-Maeda, Verse No. 15

"يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ"

Misunderstood Word: *يَعْفُو*

TL Texts:

- 1- Dawood: "and to forgive you much".
- 2- Hilali & Khan: "and pass over (i.e. leaving out without explaining) much".
- 3- Muhammad Ali: "and passing over much".
- 4- Pickthall: "and forgiving much".
- 5- Khalifa: "pardon many other transgressions you have committed".
- 6- Sarwar: "and forgives you much".
- 7- Shakir: "and passing over much".
- 8- Sherali: "and forgives many of your faults".
- 9- Yusuf Ali: "and passing *over* much (that is now unnecessary)".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word *يَعْفُو* means "not mentioning and passing over" and not "forgive". Looking at the translations we find that Hilali & Khan, Muhammad Ali, Shakir, and Yusuf Ali translated it properly, while the other four mistranslated it. It is believed that the reason behind this mistranslation is that the word is homonymically confused with the one that carries the meaning of "forgiveness".

SL Text (5): Chapter of Al-Araf, Verse No. 133

"فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الطُّوفَانَ وَالْجَرَادَ وَالْقُمَّلَ وَالضَّفَادِعَ وَالْدَّمَ آيَاتٍ مُفَصَّلَاتٍ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا مُجْرِمِينَ"

Misunderstood Word: *الْقُمَّلَ*

TL Texts:

- 1- Dawood: "plagued them ... with lice".
- 2- Khan: "the lice".
- 3- Muhammad Ali: "the lice".
- 4- Pickthall: "the vermin".
- 5- Khalifa: "the lice".
- 6- Sarwar: "lice".
- 7- Shakir: "the lice".
- 8- Sherali: "the lice".
- 9- Yusuf Ali: "Lice".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) the word *الْقُمَّلَ* refers to the vermin which infects the grains of wheat. As for Al-Tabari (2000), it refers to fleas, small locusts, or small black pests. In both cases the word *الْقُمَّلَ* has nothing to do with "lice". This word was misunderstood by seven translators who then mistranslated it into "lice". The reason behind this misunderstanding is that the translators mistook the word *قُمَّلَ*, with the inflection mark *fatha* فتحة on the first letter and *sukoon* سكون on the second letter, for *قُمَّلَ*, with *dhamma* ضمة on the first letter and *shadda+fatha* شدة+فتحة on the second letter. This is related to the phenomenon of inflection, which is regarded as one of the attributes that characterizes Arabic language. Inflection marks in Arabic change the meaning of words in a way similar to the one in English where changing one sound in a word leads to changing its meaning, e.g. sit = /sit/ and seat = /si:t/. Pickthall alone used the word "vermin" which is closer to the meaning given by Al-Tabari and Ibn Katheer.

SL Text (6): Chapter of Al-Tawba, Verse No. 67

"الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمُنْكَرِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَقْبِضُونَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ"

Misunderstood Word: *فَنَسِيَهُمْ*

TL Texts:

- 1- Dawood: "so God forgot them".
- 2- Hilali & Khan: "so He has forgotten them".
- 3- Muhammad Ali: "so He has forsaken them".
- 4- Pickthall: "so He hath forgotten them".

5. Khalifa: "so He forgot them".
6. Sarwar: "who also has ignored them".
7. Shakir: "so He has forsaken them".
8. Sherali: "So HE has forgotten them".
9. Yusuf Ali: "so He hath forgotten them".

Discussion and Analysis:

God does not forget! This is an unquestionable fact. Ibn Katheer (1999) states that nothing could escape God's knowledge and nothing could be forgotten by Him, and that the meaning is that since hypocrites, who are the ones referred to in this verse, forgot about God, then He abandoned them as if He forgot about them in the same way they did. Al-Tabari (2000) states that the word نَسِيَهُمْ means "left them".

This word was misunderstood by six translators who then mistranslated it into "forgot" and "forgotten". The reason behind this misunderstanding is due to misconception. Muhammad Ali, Sarwar and Shakir translated the word نَسِيَهُمْ properly into "forsaken", "ignored", and "forsaken" respectively.

SL Text (7): Chapter of Hud, Verse No. 17

"أَفَمَنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ نِبْيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ وَيَتْلُوهُ شَاهِدًا مِّنْهُ"

Misunderstood Word: يَتْلُوهُ

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: "recited by".
2. Hilali & Khan: "recites (follows) it".
3. Muhammad Ali: "recites it".
4. Pickthall: "reciteth it".
5. Khalifa: "reported by".
6. Sarwar: "testified by".
7. Shakir: "recites it".
8. Sherali: "follow him".
9. Yusuf Ali: "teach".

Discussion and Analysis:

Ibn Katheer (1999) states that the meaning of the word يَتْلُو is "to come". Al-Tabari (2000) states that its meaning is "to follow". This word was misunderstood by Dawood, Muhammad Ali, Pickthall and Shakir who then mistranslated it into "recited", "recites", "reciteth" and "recites" respectively. Khalifa, Sarwar and Yusuf Ali mistranslated the word too into "reported", "testified" and "teach" respectively. The reason behind this misunderstanding is due to homonymic confusion with the other meaning of the word يَتْلُو, which is "recite". Sherali alone translated the word properly into "follow". As for Hilali & Khan, they used "recites" followed by "(follows)" as an explanation!

SL Text (8): Chapter of Hud, Verse No. 77

"وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا ..."

Misunderstood Word: بِهِمْ ... بِهِمْ (the second بِهِمْ)

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: "And when Our messengers came to Lot, he grew anxious about them, for he was powerless to offer them protection".
2. Hilali & Khan: "And when Our Messengers came to Lut (Lot), he was grieved on account of them and felt himself straitened for *them* (lest the town people should approach them to commit sodomy with them)".
3. Muhammad Ali: "And when our messengers came to Lot, he was grieved for *them*, and he was unable to protect *them*".
4. Pickthall: "And when Our messengers came unto Lot, he was distressed and knew not how to protect *them*".
5. Khalifa: "When our messengers went to Lot, *they* were mistreated, and he was embarrassed by *their* presence".
6. Sarwar: "When Our Messengers came to Lot, he became sorrowful and felt totally helpless".
7. Shakir: "And when Our messengers came to Lut, he was grieved for *them*, and he lacked strength to protect *them*".
8. Sherali: "And when Our Messengers came to Lot, he was grieved on *their account* and felt helpless for *them*".
9. Yusuf Ali: "When Our messengers came to Lut, he was grieved on *their account* and felt himself powerless (to protect) *them*".

Discussion and Analysis:

In this verse the word under discussion is the separate pronoun هُمْ preceded by the preposition بِ. We have two occurrences of the pronoun in بِهِمْ, each of which has a different referent. According to Al-Tabari (2000), the first pronoun refers to the people of Lot and the second one to Lot's guests, i.e. the angel messengers who were sent by God to punish Lot's bad people. As for Ibn Katheer (1999), he states that Lot was worried about his guests lest his people should try to commit pederasty with them.

It seems that all translators failed to understand that the second pronoun has a different referent. They regarded them as referring to one same referent, i.e. the messengers. As for Sarwar, he didn't even use pronouns in his translation of this chunk of the verse. The reason behind mistranslation in this verse is misreference.

It is suggested to translate the verse as follows: “And when Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed (for his people) and experienced hardship (with the messengers)”.

SL Text (9): Chapter of Al-Anfal, Verse No. 61

"وَإِنْ جُنْحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْتَبِحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ"

Misunderstood Word: السَّلَامِ

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: “peace”.
2. Hilali & Khan: “peace”.
3. Muhammad Ali: “peace”.
4. Pickthall: “peace”.
5. Khalifa: “peace”.
6. Sarwar: “peace”.
7. Shakir: “peace”.
8. Sherali: “peace”.
9. Yusuf Ali: “peace”.

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word السَّلَامِ means “reconciliation”. This word was misunderstood by all translators who then mistranslated it into “peace”. The reason behind this misunderstanding is that the translators have mistaken the word السَّلَامِ with السَّلَامِ, the first with the inflection marks *shadda+fatha* شدة+فتحة on the first letter after the definite article and the second with *shadda+kasra* شدة+كسرة. This is related to the different uses of inflection marks.

SL Text (10): Chapter of Taha, Verse No. 96

"قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا بِهِ فَقَبَضْتُ قَبْضَةً مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ فَنَبَذْتُهَا وَكَذَلِكَ سَوَّلْتُ لِي نَفْسِي"

Misunderstood Word: الرَّسُولِ

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: “the Messenger”.
2. Hilali & Khan: “the messenger [Jibrael's (Gabriel) horse]”.
3. Muhammad Ali: “the messenger”.
4. Pickthall: “the messenger”.
5. Khalifa: “the messenger”.
6. Sarwar: “the Messengers' (Moses) tradition”.
7. Shakir: “the messenger”.
8. Sherali: “the Messenger (Moses)”.
9. Yusuf Ali: “the Messenger”.

Discussion and Analysis:

In this verse the word الرَّسُولِ is the one to be investigated. This word, which means “messenger”, is not misunderstood in its denotation, yet in its referent. According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), it refers to the angel Gabriel. Sarwar and Sherali mistakenly referred to Moses in their translation. Hilali & Khan properly referred to Gabriel. The other translators all used “messenger”, keeping the SL text ambiguity as to whom the word الرَّسُولِ is referring.

SL Text (11): Chapter of Al-Shu'ara, Verses No. 224 & 225

"وَالشُّعْرَاءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْغَاوُونَ" # "أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ يَّهيمُونَ"

Misunderstood Word: وَادٍ

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: “valley”.
2. Hilali & Khan: “they speak about every subject (praising people - right or wrong) in their poetry”?
3. Muhammad Ali: “valley”.
4. Pickthall: “valley”.
5. Khalifa: “their loyalty shifts according to the situation”?
6. Sarwar: “valley”.
7. Shakir: “valley”?
8. Sherali: “valley”.
9. Yusuf Ali: “valley”?

Discussion and Analysis:

The misunderstood word in this verse is وَادٍ, which does not literally refer to the physical “valley”. According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word refers to the different subjects and speech arts which poets employ in their writings, including “absurdity” and “nonsense”. Through these subjects, poets praise or defame people. Hilali & Khan alone translated this word properly into “subject”. Khalifa gave one of the bad attributes of poets who seek rewards as he wrote: “their loyalty shifts according to the situation”. The reason behind this misunderstanding is misreference, through taking the meaning of the word وَادٍ literally.

SL Text (12): Chapter of Al-Qasas, Verse No. 51

"وَلَقَدْ وَصَّلْنَا لَهُمُ الْقَوْلَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ"

Misunderstood Word: وَصَّلْنَا

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: "We have caused the Word to reach them".
2. Hilali & Khan: "We have conveyed the Word (this Qur'an in which is the news of everything) to them".
3. Muhammad Ali: "And certainly We have made the Word to have many connections for their sake".
4. Pickthall: "And now verily We have caused the Word to reach them".
5. Khalifa: "We have delivered the message to them".
6. Sarwar: "We sent Our guidance to them".
7. Shakir: "And certainly We have made the word to reach them".
8. Sherali: "And WE have, indeed, sent revelation to them continuously".
9. Yusuf Ali: "Now have We caused the Word to reach them themselves".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word وَصَّلْنَا refers to "connecting things", not "delivering things". In this verse, God is addressing prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, telling him that He has connected the events which happened to the ancient people, who disbelieved in Him, with those happening to the current ones, so that they may take heed of the consequences of not believing in Him.

Looking at the translations of the word وَصَّلْنَا we find that Dawood, Hilali & Khan, Pickthall, Khalifa, Sarwar, Shakir, and Yusuf Ali all mistranslated it, using "reach", "conveyed", "reach", "delivered", "sent", "reach", and "reach" respectively. Sherali also used "sent" yet he added "continuously", showing the issue of connectedness, which is the main point here. As for Muhammad Ali, he translated it as: "We have made the Word to have many connections", which diverted from the correct meaning.

The reason behind mistranslating the word وَصَّلْنَا is its homonymic confusion with the one that carries the meaning of "delivering".

SL Text (13): Chapter of Al-Sajda, Verse No. 10

"وَقَالُوا أَنَدَاءُ صَاحِنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ بَلْ هُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ كَافِرُونَ"

Misunderstood Word: صَاحِنَا

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: "They say: Once lost into the earth".
2. Hilali & Khan: "we are (dead and become) lost in the earth".
3. Muhammad Ali: "we are lost in the earth".
4. Pickthall: "we are lost in the earth".
5. Khalifa: "After we vanish into the earth".
6. Sarwar: "we have been lost in the earth".
7. Shakir: "we have become lost in the earth".
8. Sherali: "we are lost in the earth".
9. Yusuf Ali: "we lie, hidden and lost, in the earth".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word صَاحِنَا refers to vanishing in earth after death. Six translators misunderstood the word, and then mistranslated it as *being lost*. Hilali & Khan properly referred to *being lost in the earth after death*. Khalifa referred to *vanishing* in his in his translation.

The reason behind mistranslating the word صَاحِنَا is its homonymic confusion with the one that carries the meaning of being lost.

SL Text (14): Chapter of Al-Safaat, Verse No. 22

"احْشُرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ"

Misunderstood Word: أَزْوَاجَهُمْ

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: "their spouses".
2. Hilali & Khan: "their companions (from the devils)".
3. Muhammad Ali: "their associates".
4. Pickthall: "their wives".
5. Khalifa: "their spouses".
6. Sarwar: "their spouses".
7. Shakir: "their associates".
8. Sherali: "their companions".
9. Yusuf Ali: "their wives".

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word *أَزْوَاجَهُمْ* means “their counterparts”. About half of the translators misunderstood this word, and then mistranslated it into “wives” or “spouses”. The other half properly translated it into “companions” or “associates”.

The reason behind mistranslating the word *أَزْوَاجَهُمْ* is its homonymic confusion with the one that carries the meaning of *wives*.

SL Text (15): Chapter of Ghafir, Verse No. 55

"فَأَصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَأَسْتَعْفِرُ لَدُنْكَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ بِالْعِشِيِّ وَالْإِبْتِكَارِ"

Misunderstood Word: *العِشِيِّ*

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: “evening”.
2. Hilali & Khan: “the Ashi (i.e. the time period after the midnoon till sunset)”.
3. Muhammad Ali: “the evening”.
4. Pickthall: “at fall of night”.
5. Khalifa: “night”.
6. Sarwar: “the evenings”.
7. Shakir: “the evening”.
8. Sherali: “the evening”.
9. Yusuf Ali: “the evening”.

Discussion and Analysis:

The word *العِشِيِّ* was misunderstood as *العِشاء*. According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word *العِشِيِّ* refers to the period of time from midday to nightfall.

Having a look at the translations, we find that all translators, except Hilali & Khan, misunderstood this word. They consequently mistranslated it into “evening”, “night”, or “fall of night”. As for Hilali & Khan, they transliterated it into “Ashi” and explained it into two brackets as “the time period after the midnoon till sunset”. The reason behind this misunderstanding is misreference.

SL Text (16): Chapter of Al-Takweer, Verse No. 21

"مُطَاعٍ نَّعَىٰ أَمِينٍ"

Misunderstood Word: *نَّعَىٰ*

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: “in heaven”.
2. Hilali & Khan: “(by the angels in the heavens)”.
3. Muhammad Ali: “and”.
4. Pickthall: “and”.
5. Khalifa: “and”.
6. Sarwar: “and”.
7. Shakir: “and”.
8. Sherali: “and”.
9. Yusuf Ali: “and”.

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word *نَّعَىٰ* means “their” and not “and”. This word was misunderstood by all translators except Dawood and Hilali & Khan. The translators mistranslated it into “and”. As for Dawood and Hilali & Khan, they referred in their translations to the heaven(s), as the place where Gabriel is obeyed by the angels.

The reason behind this misunderstanding is that the translators mistook the word *نَّعَىٰ* with *نُتْمٌ*, the first with *fathah* فتحة on the first letter and the second with *dhammah* ضمة. This is related to the different uses of inflection marks.

SL Text (17): Chapter of Al-Furqan, Verse No. 54

"وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ مِنَ الْمَاءِ بَشَرًا فَجَعَلَهُ نَسَبًا وَصِهْرًا وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ قَدِيرًا"

Misunderstood Word: *الماء*

TL Texts:

1. Dawood: “water”.
2. Hilali & Khan: “water”.
3. Muhammad Ali: “water”.
4. Pickthall: “water”.
5. Khalifa: “water”.
6. Sarwar: “water”.
7. Shakir: “the water”.
8. Sherali: “water”.
9. Yusuf Ali: “water”.

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Ibn Katheer (1999) and Al-Tabari (2000), the word الماء refers to man's semen. All translators misunderstood the word, and then mistranslated it into "water".

The reason behind mistranslating this word is its homonymic confusion with the one that carries the meaning of "water".

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing 9 translations of 17 Qur'anic sample verses, through relying on two well-known Qur'anic interpretations, it is found that, apart from the translation of Hilali & Khan, there are big rates of mistranslation, ranging from 76% to 94%. Compared to the other translators, Hilali & Khan were more accurate in their translation, despite scoring a mistranslation rate of 47% ! The following table shows the mistranslation frequency:

TABLE 1
MISTRANSLATION FREQUENCY OF THE MISUNDERSTOOD QUR'ANIC WORDS

Translators	Mistranslation Frequency
Dawood	15
Hilali & Khan	8
Muhammad Ali	14
Pickthall	15
Khalifa	16
Sarwar	15
Shakir	13
Sherali	14
Yusuf Ali	14

The table is graphically represented as follows:

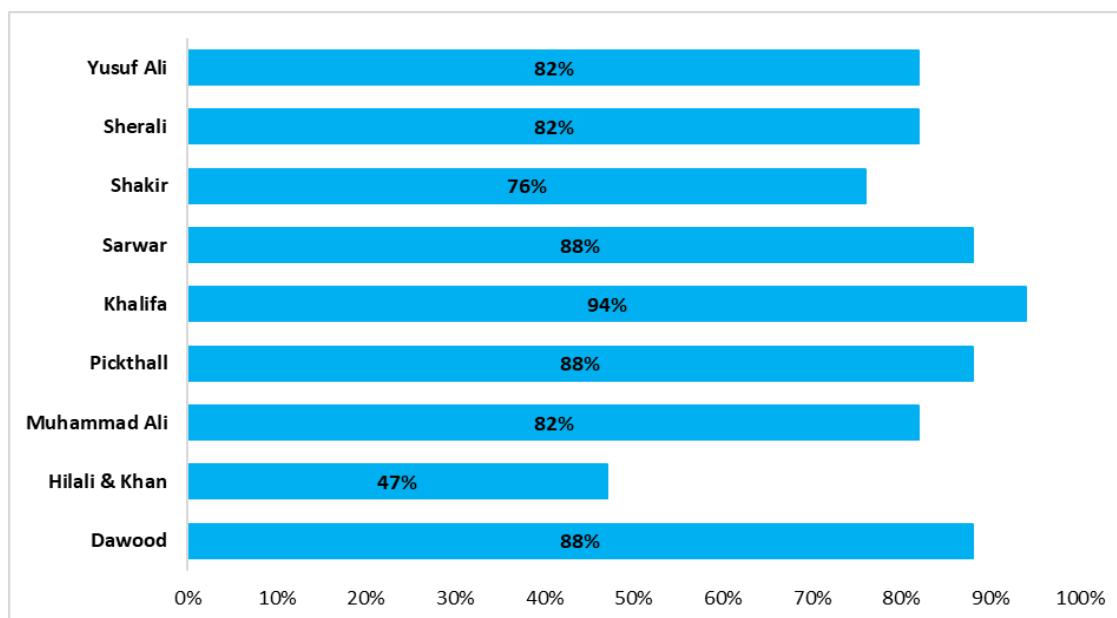


Figure 1. Mistranslation Rates of the Misunderstood Qur'anic Words

As for the reasons behind mistranslation, it is found that homonym confusion, inflection confusion, misreference, and misconception may seriously cause mistranslation of the Qur'anic verses. Homonym confusion comes first. This is shown in the following table:

TABLE 2
MISTRANSLATION REASONS AND THEIR FREQUENCIES

Mistranslation Reason	Frequency
Homonymy Confusion	6
Inflection Confusion	3
Misreference	4
Misconception	4
Total	17

The table is graphically represented as follows:

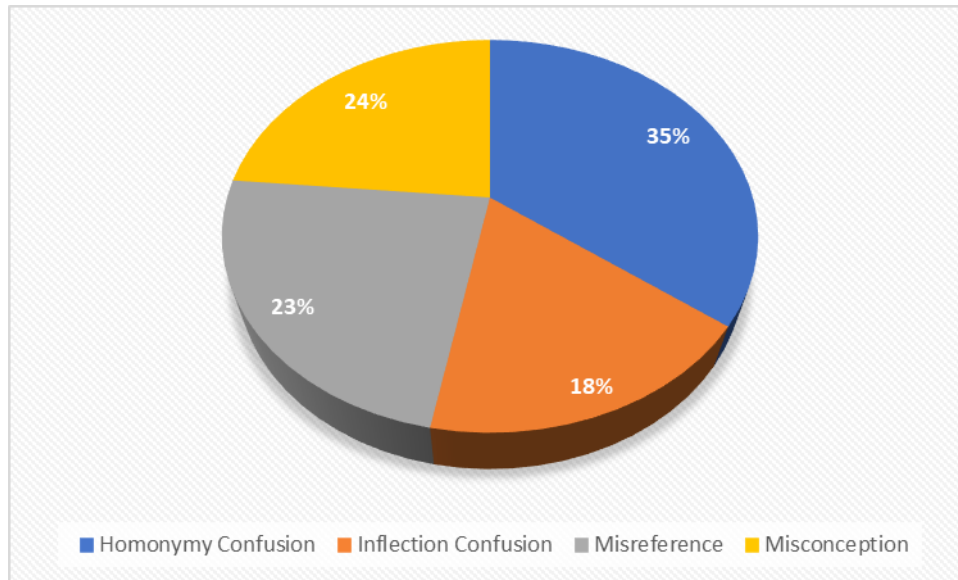


Figure 2. Mistranslation Reasons Rates of the Misunderstood Qur'anic Words

The paper concludes that translators of the Qur'an, besides requiring a good grasp of the Arabic SL, need a good account of familiarity with the Qur'anic language, moreover, they have to rely on the Qur'anic interpretations in order to overcome any misunderstanding, thus mistranslation might not happen.

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