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## Translations of the noble Qur'an

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### ABSTRACT

*The Qur'an is the book of Allah the mighty, sent for the entire humanity. It is a miracle that has no match, the words of which has the depth of countless oceans and immensity of skies. Sent word by word with utmost sophistication and eloquence to our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through the leader of angels Hazrat Jibreel AS. The Qur'an has in total 114 Surat (chapters) with each chapter consisting few too many Ayats (verses). About the authenticity of the miraculous Qur'an Allah says in Surat 17 (Bani Israel) Ayat 88: Say, "If mankind and the jinn gathered in order to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were to each other assistants". (17:88) The Qur'an is the constitution revealed by Allah to regulate and govern human life. It has the essence and knowledge of the entire conception by its creator. The Qur'an is the perfect and the only complete guide. We have witnessed changes and revisions in the sacred texts of other faiths but the inimitable quality of the Qur'an has reserved its place as it had in the days of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.*

**Keywords**— Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Qur'an, Surat, Ayat

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the book of Allah the mighty, sent for the entire humanity. It is a miracle that has no match, the words of which has the depth of countless oceans and immensity of skies. Sent word by word with utmost sophistication and eloquence to our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through the leader of angels Hazrat Jibreel AS. The Qur'an has in total 114 Surat (chapters) with each chapter consisting few to many Ayats (verses). About the authenticity of the miraculous Qur'an Allah says in Surat 17 (Bani Israel) Ayat 88:

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The Qur'an was revealed in one style at the beginning, but the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ kept asking Jibreel AS until he taught him the seven styles, all of which were complete. It is necessary here to quote one of the Hadith (Prophets' Saying) of Ibn Abbas RA who narrated that the prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

*"Jibreel taught me one style and I reviewed it until he taught me more, and I kept asking him for more and he gave me more until finally there were seven styles."*

(Al-Bukhaari, 3047; Muslim, 819)

What we learn from the above Hadith is that the linguistic styles of Qur'an vary as different sections of the society speak the same language in different dialects. The basic motto behind reciting the Qur'an in different styles is to make its recitation easy and comfortable. Arabic is one of the beautiful and complete languages has various styles and one aspect of the literary style being the speakers of this language (Arabs) may refer to himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural. This variation is the part of eloquence and good style. Arabic is rich not only in vocabulary but also in grammatical potentials, English and other languages are hardly analogous in this respect. Limitations found in other languages have no place in Arabic grammar, which has made its wide expression easy and lucid. It is for this reason, undoubtedly, it was the aptest of human tongues for the conveyance of the Creator's message to mankind.

The literal meaning of the word translation in itself attests the lacuna part of translating any text into another language. The Qur'an is the words of Allah the mighty has no equivalence in style and language. What we as humans could do except mere interpretation or translation of the Qur'an revealed in the plain Arabic language. "The task of translation of the Qur'an is not an easy one; some

native Arab speakers will confirm that some Qur'anic passages are difficult to understand even in the original Arabic script. A part of this the innate difficulty of any translation in Arabic, as in other languages, a single word can have a variety of meanings.” (Ruthven, 2006).

## 2. HISTORY

Salman al-Farsi<sup>RA</sup> (Salman the Persian) is considered to be the first translator of the Qur'an, he was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the first Persian to convert to Islam. He translated Surah al-Fatihah into the Persian language during the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. (An-Nawawi, p.380). As per the scholar's opinion, the second translation was into Greek used by the scholar from Constantinople (the capital city of the Roman/Byzantine Empire). Since then many attempts have been made to translate the Qur'an into many languages. “The first ever complete translation of the Qur'an was done between the 10th and 12th centuries in the Persian language. In 1936, translations in 102 languages were known.” (Fatani, 2006). The translation of the book of Allah is one of the sincere deeds which have benefited people who could not either learn Arabic or find it too difficult. Initially, the translation was limited to some language but gradually the words of Allah spread and reached almost every single person in its own language. It has been translated into more than 100 European, Asian and African languages including, Latin, Spanish, and English while in Asian languages the translations have been done in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Turkish and many more. Talking about its translation into the English language the fact is that the Qur'an has been translated into English many times. Seventeenth and nineteenth century witness the first few translations, but the majority of the translations is the product of the twenty century. Prof. Reima Al-Jarf very aptly discusses the translations of the Qur'an:

There have even been numerous translations in each language: English translations by George Sale in 1734, by Richard Bell in 1937, and Arthur John Arberry in 1955. The Quran was translated by orientalists and non-Arab and Arab Muslims. Consequently, English translations vary in style and accuracy. Some translators favored archaic English words and constructions; some used simple modern English; others added commentary. Some translated the meaning of the verses; others gave a word-for-word translation. There are occasional misinterpretations, mistranslations and even distortions. The Translation of the Quran has always been problematic and difficult, as the Quran possesses an exoteric and an esoteric meaning. The Quran uses “rhymed prose”. The Quranic message is conveyed with various literary structures and devices. In addition, a Quranic word may have a range of versatile and plausible meanings, making an accurate translation even more difficult. (Al-Jarf, 2014)

In order to widen the scope of this paper it is necessary to throw some light on the chronology of the Qur'anic translations right from the 7<sup>th</sup> century:

| Language    | Translator(s)                                                                                                                                                                             | Time period                    |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| In Persian: | The first translation of the Qur'an<br>First translation in Alwar (Sindh, India now Pakistan) by the order of Abdullah bin Umar bin Abdul Aziz upon the request of the Hindu Raja Mehruk. | 7 <sup>th</sup> Century<br>884 |
|             | First translation by Obert of Ketton's for Peter the Venerable, Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete.                                                                                               | 1143                           |
| In French:  | L'Alcoran de Mahomet by Ander du Ryer                                                                                                                                                     | 1647                           |
| In English: | First translation by Alexander Ross from the French translation of (1647) by Ander du Ryer, George Sale, Richard Bell & Arthur John Arberry.                                              | 1649, 1734,<br>1937 & 1955     |

The Qur'an has been translated in four stages, in stage 1 it was translated directly from the Arabic into Latin. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, it was translated from Latin into other European languages. During stage 3 the Orientalists directly translated from the Arabic text into European languages and in the 4<sup>th</sup> stage, Muslims started to translate the Qur'an into European languages. In the early stages, the exegesis of the Qur'an formed a part of the science of the Hadith since it was generally thought that the divine revelation could be understood only in the light of holy Prophet's traditions, especially those handed down by 'Abdullah bin Abbas'. But the exegesis of the Qur'an became an independent science with the *Tafsir Tabir* of Abu J'afar Muhammad (310 A.H.) and it has ever since been strongly cultivated by the Muslim scholars. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Arabs and Orientalists stated translating the Noble Qur'an into almost all the European languages. Focusing on the translation of the Qur'an in English we come across both non-Muslim Orientalists and Muslim allies of the West. The names include Shaikh Muhammad Abduh of Egypt, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan of India and Muhammad Asad of Austria; however, their translations never met the approval of the Muslims. Muslim writers like M.M. Pickthal and Abdullah Yousuf Ali also contributed in this noble cause and among them the translation by Abdullah Yousuf Ali received popularity. Since then many English translations have been done and the process is still going on (Nadwi, 1981). The fact of the matter is that any translation of the Qur'an can never reach to its real essence and explanation so as it is very difficult to get fully familiar with the Arabic lexicon and rules of its grammar. It would be in place to quote one of the Ayats of the Qur'an (Surat Yousuf, Ayat 2) which attests the superiority of the Arabic language:

*“Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand.” (12:2)*

The translation by the writers like Noldake Theodor, Friedrich Schatty, Charles Francis Potter, Philip K. Hitti and various other orientalists, none of whom is known for his sympathetic approach to Islam, had to acknowledge the fact that the Qur'an was “the most widely read book in existence,” (Potter, 1953) and the Prophet to whom it was revealed was “the most successful of all the Prophets.” (Lamertine, 1922). The fact is that any of the European scholars of Islam, whether they be Prof. Sergeant or George Sale

or contributors to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, cannot be expected to express anything beyond their own impressions of the Nobel Qur'an. The preserving of essence and purity of the Qur'an is the responsibility Allah has taken for himself, He says in Surat-ul-Hijir, Ayat 9:

*"Verily We, it is We who have revealed the Admonition, and verily We are its Guardians."* (15: 9)

The Quran has been translated into more than 100 European, Asian and African languages.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The Quranic text cannot be reproduced in another language or form, its word may have a range of meanings depending on the context making an accurate translation even more difficult. Thus in order to come out with the translation of the Qur'an, it becomes necessary for any writer to adhere to the translation standards and principles which will surely help to reduce misinterpretations, mistranslations, and distortions of the meaning.

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