THE QUR'AN: LIMITS OF TRANSLATABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

> *"The Qur'an is only the Qur'an when it is in Arabic, in its original wording as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad" (Ali, 2006: 19).*

Translation of the Qur'an has always been and still is an issue for translators in terms of accuracy and translatability. According to Sara (2004: 107), "A translator's objective is to transfer information from one language to another without betraying the former to accommodate the latter." Muslim scholars have traditionally rejected word-for-word translations of the Qur'an. Due to its highly sensitive language, being the word of God, a change in word order may result in a semantic change and therefore ruin the intended meaning. Shakir (1926) states that in "the matter of the lawfulness of translating the holy Qur'an into any foreign language, we can have little confidence in the balance of meaning being preserved" (as cited in Abdul-Raof, 2004: 92). Instead, only exegetical translation is allowed, a translation based on commentaries and explications of the Qur'anic text. Translation in this manner is a choice of interlingual interpretations of meaning (like any book of *tafsīr*, 'exegesis'), but in a foreign language. Muslim scholars assert that translations of the Qur'an should not be fully trusted since they are biased toward the personal view of the translator. In addition, depending on one translation of the Qur'an is advised against especially when referring to issues which have been contested among scholars, let alone the translators background. This reinforces the point of view which gives preference to Muslim translators over non-Muslim ones. Being a Muslim and familiar with Islam and its culture is not enough, however; one who deals with the translation of the Qur'an should acquire enough knowledge of both languages—Arabic and the TL— and related branches of scholarship including Qur'anic sciences.

However, a translation of the Qur'an is, after all, a 'translation' in the sense that it represents an interpretation of the meaning of a text in a SL to produce a text in a TL without distorting the source message. No matter how precise a translation is, it can never make a second original, neither in form nor in content and/or effect. Pickthall (1931) asserts that "no non-Arab Muslims…ever had the least idea of elevating a translation of the Scripture

[i.e. the Qur'an] in their language to the position of the English translation of the Bible among English-speaking Protestant Christians—that is to say, of substituting it for the original" (as cited in Mustapha, 2001: 202). If it is impossible to acquire full equivalence for an ordinary ST, then success is obviously much more difficult to achieve in the translation of a sensitive text such as the Qur'an. According to Steiner, "If a text is 'revealed', if its initial encoding is then transferred into a mundane and fallible sign-system, that of secular and post-Adamic speech, to what truth-functions, to what correspondent faithfulness can any translation aspire?" (Stiener; as cited in Ali, 2006: 19). It is believed that the Qur'an is the word of God revealed for the guidance of all mankind. Translation plays a vital role in conveying the message of the Qur'an to the non-Arabic speaking world, with the ultimate goal of reducing translation limitations.

This paper intends to investigate the concept of translatability, in general. Then it applies the term to Qur'an translation to see whether translators have succeeded to produce an elegant translation of the Qur'an without distorting the source text or not? It aims at examining the translatability of the Qur'an and analyzes the limitations.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

The Qur'an is "considered within the Muslim faith to be the infallible word of God. Passed down in a series of revelations over many years to the [last] Prophet Muḥammad [ﷺ] by the Archangel Gabriel" from Allah (Khalidi, 2008). The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) piecemeal over a period of 23 years, as "continuous contact between heaven and earth was of great importance for the new Message to achieve its goals" (Ali, 2002: 18). The Qur'an consists of 114 *suras* (chapters), varied in length, dealing with issues essential to life and humanity.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is a miracle that occurred during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), and still continues to be so today without a single distortion as the Qur'an states (al-Hijr: 9), ﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ﴾ [Verily We: It is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Qur'an) and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)] (Khan and Hilali, 1996: 712). Although there were Prophets prior to the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) to whom Allah revealed Holy Books, such as Moses (the Torah), Jesus (al-'Injīl), and Daūd (al-Zabūr), it is believed that there are no authentic details on how these Books have reached us and by whom, unlike the Holy Qur'an. However, the main message of all these Holy Books is one: the call to worship one God with no other partners. The Qur'an, revealed last, is a confirmation of and complementary to the previous Books (according to the

Qur'an, al-Mā'idah: 48); it has perfected them and testified the truth that is therein and falsified the deceit that has been added therein (Khan and Hilali, 1996).

The Qur'an, furthermore, is unique for being not only *a* Book of guidance but *the* Book of guidance. Its *āyahs* (verses) are inimitable and its recital is an act of worship. The Qur'an is the masterpiece of the Arabic language; its linguistic and stylistic features are different from non-Qur'anic Arabic. Many different sciences were dedicated to the study of the aspects of the Qur'an such as abrogation, reasons for revelation, and compilation of the Qur'an. For Muslims, "the strongest argument in favor of the genuineness of their faith" (Hitti, 1970; as cited in Mustapha, 2001: 200) is the miraculous character of the linguistic composition of the Holy Qur'an.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATIONS OF THE QUR'AN

Oriental Translations of the Qur'an

The translation of the Qur'an first took place during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), though it was limited to the purposes of دَعْوَة *daεwa* (propagation of Islam). Zayd bin Ħābit, one of the Prophet's companions, was asked by the Prophet (ﷺ) to learn the Syriac language[1] in order to read and reply to letters sent by Jews to the Prophet (ﷺ). The reply usually involved *āyahs* from the Qur'an. The Roman Emperor Heracles also had a private translator interpreted letters sent to him by the prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ)[2] (Saheeh al-Bukhari, 1980: 7196). Al-Sarkhasi also relates in his book '*al-Mabsoot*' that the Persians asked Salmān al-Fārisy (a companion of the Prophet) to translate surat al-Fatiḥa (The Opening Chapter) into their mother tongue, Persian. It is even said that the first translation of the full text of the Qur'an was made during the times of the Rightly Guided Caliphs by Salmān al-Fārisy (Fatani, 2006: 666).

In the introduction to his book '*An Ancient Syriac Translation of the*

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[1] عن زيد بن ثابت، قال: أمرني رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أن أتعلم السريانية. ويروى: أنه أمرني أن أتعلم كتاب يهود ، وقال: إني ما آمن يهود على كتاب ، قال: فما مر بي نصف شهر حتى تعلمت ، فكان إذا كتب إلى يهود كتبت (، فإذا كتبوا إليه قرأت له كتابهم. (الألباني، تخريج مشكاة المصابيح: 4582

On the authority of Zayd bin Ħābit (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: I was asked by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) to learn the Syriac. It is also related that he said: the Prophet asked me to learn how to read and write in Judaism and told me that he does not trust a Jew to write and read for Him. Zayd then said that he learnt Judaism in less than two weeks. After then I wrote for Him when he lettered the Jews and I read their letters when they sent Him. (Al-Albani, Takhreej Mishkat al-Masabeeh: 4582)

[2] أن هرقل أرسل إليه في ركب من قريش، ثم قال لترجمانه: قل لهم: إني سائل هذا، فإن كذبني فكذبوه، فذكر الحديث. ((صحيح البخاري: 7196

Qur'an: Exhibiting New Verses and Variants' Alphonse Mingana says that Parsalibi (d. 1171) claimed that the Qur'an was translated into the Syriac language during the period of Abdul-Malik bin Marwān (the Umayyad Caliph, 661–750 A.H.), of which the library of Manchester University keeps some copies (as cited in Al-Omari, 2005: 9). According to Barzāk bin Ŝahrayār (as cited in al-Omari, p. 9) the Qur'an was translated in North India upon the request of some kings.

In 956 C.E., a translation of the whole Qur'an was made for the ruler of Transoxiana and Ḱurasān, Manṣūr bin Nūḥ al-Samāny, into Persian and Eastern and Western Turkish after Muslim *Ulama* signed a *fatwa* permitting Qur'anic translations. It is believed that this edict and word-for-word translation paved the way for a new era in the development of translations of the Qur'an and Qur'anic sciences in general. This translation also became the basis for the first Turkish version (Fatani, 2006: 666). Such translations mostly took place when many non-Arabs came into Islam and were eager to know more about its rules and message.

European Translations of the Qur'an

The first European translation of the Qur'an was in Latin in 1143 C.E., by two monks, an Englishman and a German, at the behest of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny Abbey, with the aim of refuting the beliefs of Islam (Hitti 1937/1990; as cited in Mustapha, 2001: 203). This Latin translation later influenced André de Ryer's translation of the Qur'an into French, which in turn influenced the first translations of the Qur'an into Italian, Dutch, German, English, and Russian, as most of the translators did not speak Arabic and were merely paraphrasing the Latin version rather than translating the original text (Fatani, 2006: 666). Such translations may be referred to as 'second-hand' translations (i.e., translations of a translation). In addition, many translators (e.g., George Sale, 1734) who translated the Qur'an directly from Arabic did not have sufficient knowledge of the language.

In 1698, a second Latin translation was issued by Ludovico Marracci, a confessor to Pope Innocent XI. This version included the original text with selected Arabic quotations commenting on the source text, but still gave a bad impression of Islam and Muslims to Europe (Fatani, 2006: 667). Many European translations were based on this version such as Savory's (1751, in French) and Nerreter's (in German). The first German translation appeared in 1616 by Nuremberg preacher Solomon Schweigger using Arrivabene's Italian version. In turn, Schweigger's version formed the basis for the first translation into Dutch, made anonymously and released in 1641. English translations first took place in 1649 by the chaplain of King Charles I,

Alexander Ross, and were derived from Ryer's French translation. Ross's translation, which he named *The Alcoran of Mahomet*, describes the Qur'an as "the heresy of Mahomet" (Fatani, 2006: 668) and is full of distortions and omissions.

The most famous translations of the Qur'an which appeared in the eighteenth century are those by Sale (1734, in English), Savory (1751, in French), and Boysen (1773, in German). These translations were the main three versions that almost all translations of the Qur'an were derived from in the nineteenth century (e.g., Rodwell, 1861 and Palmer, 1880) but were also not free of hostility and bias. The twentieth century up to the present day has witnessed the appearance of translations of the Qur'an by well-known Arabists and Muslim scholars such as Yusuf Ali (*The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 1934) and M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (*The Qur'an*, 2004).

After studying European translations of the Qur'an, Yakhluf (2009: 45–46) states:

1. Well-known orientalists (e.g., German, French, English, Italian, and Dutch) were interested in Qur'anic studies and had an important role in Qur'an translation.

2. Some translations were kept anonymous while others were issued under pen-names. One example is the Spanish translation whose first edition was written by 'OBB,' whereas the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions were written respectively by 'JBB' and 'JBBO.'

3. Most European translations had an introduction about the history of the Qur'an that included its source, themes, and a description of the life of the Prophet Mohammad (ﷺ).

4. Most translators lacked subtle knowledge of the ST language (Arabic) or vice versa.

The Qur'an has been translated into all languages spoken by Muslims. Hamidullah's *Qur'an in Every Language* contains a list of translations into 102 languages. Victor Chauvin, on the other hand, lists in his 1913 *Bibliographie des Ouvrages Arabes Ou Relatifs Aux Arabes Publies Dans l'Europe Chretienne De 1810 a 1885* every edition, whether complete or selective, of every Western and Oriental translation from 1810 to 1885.

THE CONCEPT OF TRANSLATABILITY

Translatability is defined as "the capacity for some kind of meaning to be transferred from one language to another without undergoing radical change"

(Pym & Turk, 2001: 273). However, very few theories claim that all meanings are always translatable. Pym & Turk (2001: 273) believe that translatability is negatively impacted by the fact that 'meaning' that are "somehow held in the source language and are potentially subject to mediation with the help of reasoning or understanding." The concept of translatability varies according to three views based on the relationship between thinking (i.e., meanings as ideas) and speaking (i.e., the representation of meanings) (Pym & Turk, 2001: 273–274):

Meanings are universal and are translatable into their language-specific representations. Hence, the relation between thinking and speaking is loose.

1. Thinking and speaking are tightly bound together. Translation is seen as "an attempt at solving an impossible task" where translators would always have to "run aground on one of two rocks, either clinging too closely to the original at the expense of the taste and the language of their nation, or clinging too closely to the specificity of their nation at the expense of the original" (Humboldt 1868; as cited in Pym & Turk, 2001: 274).

2. Meanings are accessible with the help of modes of understanding referred to as 'sense.' Translators and interpreters do not only express the 'sense' but also their 'understanding' of it (Schleiermacher 1963; as cited in Pym & Turk, 2001: 274). The product indicates that the submitted text is a translation. This approach is mostly related to the translatability of religious, philosophical, and literary texts.

3. Issues of reference and sense usually raise objections with the notion of translatability. Coseriu (1978) believes that the task of translation is to recreate the same 'reference' and the same 'sense' through the means of another language (as cited in Pym & Turk, 2001: 274). On the other hand, Burge (1978) believes that a "translation preserves self-reference if and only if it does not preserve reference" (as cited in Pym & Turk, 2001: 274). In this manner, not everything is translatable and the translation would therefore have to adopt a "principle of necessary sacrifice" (Pym & Turk, 2001: 274). Quine (1960) categorizes four types of sentences according to their translatability. The first type, *occasion sentences* (sentences produced under the same situational conditions without collateral information) are translatable with relative reliability; on the other hand, *standing sentences* (sentences embedded depending on a specific situation) seem translatable only because of the contingent

historical circumstances of filiations and contact between languages. *Observation sentences*, the third type according to Quine, mediate the two extremes, while the fourth type, *logical connectives*, is with confidently translatable (as cited in Pym & Turk, 2001: 275).

LIMITATIONS OF THE TRANSLATABILITY OF THE QUR'AN

Issues concerning the untranslatability of the Qur'an are usually heavily raised by Muslim scholars. This is due to the fact that "the difference between the Qur'an and any of its translations [whether authorized or not] is ultimately the difference between God as the Author, Authority and Source on the one hand, and man as a mere translator/interpreter on the other" (Mustapha, 2001: 202). The link between the Qur'an and the type of Arabic in which it was revealed is strong. Guillaume (1990) rightly claims that "the Qur'an…cannot be translated without grave loss. It has a rhythm of peculiar beauty and a cadence that charms the ear" (as cited in Abdul-Raof, 2004: 93). It is believed that the Qur'an demonstrates and employs all the superior features of the Arabic language and hence may not be rendered into any other language, unlike the Gospel which was translated from Syriac into Ethiopic and Latin (Leemhuis, 2006: 155). Muhammad al-Zurqani (d. 1710) concludes in his 1943 handbook for students of al-Azhar University that a rendering of *all* the meanings and intentions of the Qur'an is impossible (as cited in Leemhuis, 2006: 156).

Indeed, it seems that translations of the Qur'an maintain quite a high degree of translatability restrictions. Limitations in lexicon, semantics, structure, rhetoric, and culture are briefly discussed in the next section.

Lexical and Semantic Limitations

Some lexical items are Qur'an-specific; they are strongly connected to the ST culture and therefore have no equivalence in the TL. Such items are usually rendered through componential analysis. For example, the term 'تَيَمُّمْ' *tayammum*, in *fatayammumū* 'فَـتَيَمَّمُوا' (al-Nisā': 43) lacks equivalence in the English but may be defined as "an act in which you strike your hands on the earth and pass (rub) them on your face and pass the palm of each hand on the back of the other" (cf. Khan and Hilali, 1996: 223). It is a kind of ablution that is adopted when someone is spiritually unclean and there is no water with which to cleanse. Some Qur'anic terms reflect sensitive meanings related to the core of the Islamic faith, such as the word 'الصَّمَد' *Aṣṣamad* ('āl ɛimrān: 2) which signifies the notion of الصمدية *Aṣṣamadiyyah* that designates the total perfection of might, power, wisdom, knowledge, honour, and lordship of Almighty Allah, the need of others for Him, while

the reverse is not true (Ibn Kathir 1993; as cited in Abdul-Raof, 2004: 94). Translators have failed to find one-word equivalent for this expression. Khan and Hilali (1996: 2028) say that it is difficult to translate it with one word (as well as Ali, 1983); instead they use two words to refer to its meaning: '*Eternal*' and '*Absolute*.' Asad, on the other hand, acknowledges that his translation gives no more than an approximate meaning of the word (as cited in Abdul-Raof, 2004: 94).

Semantically, languages differ, as one is sometimes more specific in naming or describing objects than the other. These differences are usually achieved either through the lexical or morphological system of the language. For example, the two words 'نَزَّلَ' *nazzala* and 'أَنْزَلَ' *'anzala* in the Qur'anic verse ('āl ɛimrān: 3), ﴿ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ وَٱلْإِنجِيلَ ﴾ (*nazzala* ɛalaika al-kitāba bi-lḥaqi muṣaddiqan limā bayna yadayhi wa *'anzala* at-tawrata wa-linjūl') have two different semantic meanings. *Nazzala* points out the piecemeal revelation of the Qur'an over 23 years, whereas *'anzala* signifies the singular revelation of the Torah and the Gospel (Abdul-Raof, 2004: 95–96).

Structural Limitations

The syntactic structure of a language usually represents its linguistic pattern. The word order of a certain language is often fixed in ordinary situations following framed grammatical patterns. However, these fixed patterns may undergo some *shifts* (called in Arabic 'إلتفات' *iltifat*) in their word order or in their grammatical use to produce a more remarkable or sublime effect. Such shifts in word order usually produce a semantic change so that sentences which have undergone hold distinct meanings from those with normal word order. In other words, the selection of certain grammatical forms (e.g., shifts from one personal pronoun to another) creates semantic subtlety which may be quite difficult to capture in translation. Abdel Haleem (٢٠٠٥: xxxv) suggests breaking up some Qur'anic *āyahs* which have traditionally been kept together in order to solve problems of pronoun shifts in Arabic. Abdel Haleem would even start a new paragraph in the middle of a verse to solve what he considers to be stylistic difficulties.

Qur'anic discourse is distinguished by using highly specific lexical items and elegant syntactic structures, which are both semantically oriented. For example, 'foregrounding' and 'backgrounding' of certain items in the Qur'an have a special communicative function (Abdul-Raof, 2004: 96–97), as illustrated by the following example (the first is an *āyah* in Arabic from the Quran, the second and third are my own transliteration of it into English, and the third is a translation of the *āyah* into English):

Source:	﴿ رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَآ أَنزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ ﴾ (al-Qasas: 24).
Transliteration:	Rabbī 'innī limā 'anzalta 'ilayya min ḱayrin *faqīrun*.
Transliteration (ordinary word order):	Rabbī 'innī *faqīrun* limā 'anzalta 'ilayya min ḱayrin.
Target:	"My lord, I am in *dire need* of whatever good thing You may send me" (italics added) (Abdel Haleem, 2005:246).

The word *faqīrun* in the source text is backgrounded to produce an 'oxymoron,' a rhetorical device in which contradicting terms are combined, as in *mournful optimist*. This is achieved through the accompaniment of two antonyms next to each other, '*faqīrun*' and '*ḱayrin*,' so that their contradicting meanings stand out. This feature is missing in the English translation and the word is foregrounded rather than being placed at the end of the *āyah*.

One more example that reflects the specificity of the Qur'anic discourse is the insertion of the third person singular pronoun *huwa* (He) twice:

Source:	﴿ أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ يَقْبَلُ ٱلتَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَأْخُذُ ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴾ (al-Tawbah: 104).
Transliteration:	'Alam yaɛlamū 'anna-llaha *huwa* yaqbalu-ttawbata ɛan ɛibādihi wa ya'ḱużu-ṣṣadaqati wa 'anna-llaha *huwa*-ttawwabu –rrahīm.
Target:	"Do they not know that it is God *Himself* who accepts repentance from His servants and receives what is given freely for His sake? He is always ready to accept repentance, most merciful" (italics added) (Abdel Haleem, 2005:125).

This style achieves specificity and affirmation and indicates that only God, rather than the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), has the authority to accept or reject repentance (al-Zamakhshari 1995; as cited in Abdul-Raof, 2004: 102). Obviously, the deletion of the pronoun *huwa* in the translation would not reflect the same sense as that in the source.

Rhetorical Limitations

Qur'anic discourse is characterized by numerous rhetorical features such as alliteration, antithesis, metaphor, oxymoron, and repetition. *Alliteration* is the "repetition of the same sounds or of the same kinds of sounds at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables" (Mifflin, 2000), as illustrated in this *āyah* where the sound of the letter *m-* is repeated but distorted in the English translation:

Source:	﴿ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن مَّنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ ٱللَّهِ أَن يُذْكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسْمُهُ ﴾ (al-Baqarah: 114).
Transliteration:	Wa man 'aẓlamu mimman manaεa masājida-llahi 'an yużkara fīha-smuhu.
Target:	"And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in places for the worship of Allah, His name should be celebrated?" (Khan & Hillali, 1996:46–47).

Antithesis, on the other hand, is marked by parallelistic structures (i.e., synonyms and antonyms) that may not be easily rendered into the target language.

Source:	(al-Infiṭār: 13–14). ﴿ إِنَّ ٱلْأَبْرَارَ لَفِى نَعِيمٍ ۝ وَإِنَّ ٱلْفُجَّارَ لَفِى جَحِيمٍ ۝ ﴾
Transliteration:	'Inna *l-abrāra* lafī *naεīmin* * wa 'inna *l-fujjāra* lafī *jaḥīmin*.
Target:	"As for the *righteous*, they will be in *Bliss*; and the *wicked*, they will be in the *fire*" (italics added) (Ali, 1983).

Al-'abrāra and *al-fujjāra*; *naεīm* and *jaḥīm* are two parallelistic sets of words serving more than one rhetorical function (antithesis and isocolon). The translation failed to render both features and resulted also in expected phonic loss.

As for *repetition*, it is widely used in Arabic and hence found in Qur'anic discourse. *Ḱalaq* is one example of repetition in the Qur'an which is, unfortunately, lost in the English translation.

Source:	﴿ ٱقْرَأْ بِٱسْمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ۝ خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ ﴾ (al-'Alaq: 1-2).
Transliteration:	'Iqra' bismi rabbika l-lażī *ḱalaqa* * *ḱalaqa* l-'insāna min εalaqin.

| Target: | "Read! In the name of your Lord who *created* * He *created* man from a clinging form" (italics added) (Abdel Haleem, 2005:428). |

In this example, the word *ḱalaqa* (created) is separated from its repetition by the subject *He* to accommodate the English norm. The Arabic norm does not require an apparent subject; indeed ﴿ خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴾ forms a complete meaningful sentence whereas it sounds awkward in English (Ali, 2006: 23).

Cultural Limitations

Cultural references are oftentimes language-specific. Some cultural expressions may be rendered into the TL such as the Arabic بُخُور "*bukhuur*," (Abdul-Raof, 2004: 104) which may be translated into English as *air freshener*, although the translation is not an absolute synonym. On the other hand, many cultural expressions lack equivalence in the TL and are either borrowed, transliterated, or explained. In Qur'anic discourse translators deal with a considerable number of cultural references as illustrated below:

Source:	﴿ وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِن يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعْ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ خُشُبٌ مُّسَنَّدَةٌ ﴾ (al-Munāfiqūn: 4).
Transliteration:	Wa 'iżā ra'aytahum tuɛjibuka ajsāmuhum wa 'iy-yaqūlū tasmaɛ liqawlihim ka'annahum *ḱuŝubun musannadah*.
Target:	"And when thou seest them their figures please thee: and if they speak out givest ear unto their speech. (They are) as though they were *blocks of wood in striped cloaks*" (italics added) (Pikthall, 1988/1997:547).

In this example, *ḱuŝubun musannada* refers to the hypocrites. The Arabs used to engage in the cultural practice of putting planks of wood against the back wall of their houses when they were not used (Abdul-Raof, 2004: 105), and so such planks of wood were mostly useless. This expression refers to a person who is worthless and useless in the community. However, translation renders neither the 'sense' nor the intended meaning of *ḱuŝubun musannada*. The translator, as one possible solution, could have substituted the source cultural reference with another target cultural reference such as "*being useless as an old rag*" (Abdul-Raof, 2004: 105).

CONCLUSION

At a practical level, there is no unified technique used in translation of the Qur'an. The nature of Qur'anic discourse, in addition to other aspects of sensitivity, raises several issues of untranslatability. Nevertheless, translators are working hard on this point; they have succeeded in solving some problematic areas, though they have failed in many cases. However, the work in this area of translation (i.e., sensitive texts) keeps going, and coming years may witness the appearance of new approaches for tackling other problems. To what extent can translations of the Qur'an be accurate and convey the message the Qur'an was revealed for?

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