Evaluating the Methods Used in the Arabic to English Translation of Qur'an-specific Cultural Items with Regard to the Concepts of Domestication and Foreignization

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Abstract

Translation has played a crucial role in easing communication between human beings at all times throughout history, so without translation, the complex, interwoven social structures in human life might never have been achieved. It has also made accessing texts of high significance easy and comfortable. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the methods translators used in translating certain cultural contents from the Holy Quran, as well as the degree to which they applied the concepts of domestication and foreignization to their translations of these cultural aspects. The theoretical framework for this research is Baker's method (1992), which offers strategies that translators use when dealing with concepts that lack equivalents at the vocabulary level or higher counterparts. The majority of the Qur'an-specific cultural items have been translated using the first strategy of "translation by a more general word," with a total percentage of 48.85. The second most common strategy is "translation by paraphrase using a related word" (21. 71%). Given that the majority of strategies employed by all translators fall under the category of domestication strategies, it can be concluded that the translators adopted a target-oriented approach rather than a source-oriented approach when translating Qur'an-specific cultural items.

Keywords: Qur'an-Specific Cultural Items, Translation Strategy, Culture, Translation

Introduction

Since the recent development of globalization has increased the frequency with which individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact with one another, translation has taken on a greater role in modern society (Cronin, 2017). Differences in language and culture create impediments to communication and comprehension, which is why translation services are necessary (Gambier & Van Doorslaer, 2016). The ability to translate helps eliminate these obstacles to cross-cultural interaction and comprehension (Bassnett, 2014). Importantly, translation helps people of various languages and cultures communicate with one another and share their knowledge and experiences (Hatim & Mason, 1997). It is also essential for advancing industries like business, diplomacy, and international relations, as well as for fostering more intercultural dialogue and understanding (Schäffner, 2016). The process of translation is intricate and requires much more than just swapping out words from one language for those from another (Munday, 2001). A good translation does more than just transmit the original text's content; it also captures the author's intended tone and style. In addition, a successful translation takes into consideration cultural distinctions between the two different languages and adapts the text to the target audience's cultural context (Hatim & Munday, 2004).

There are idioms and phrases in every language that are specific to the people who know that language. The language of the Qur'an also contains such terms. Translating the Qur'an can be a challenging task because the Qur'an was originally written in Arabic, and the language and cultural context in which it was written can be very different from the languages and cultures of today's readers. Therefore, when translating the Qur'an into other languages, its cultural teachings should be translated in a manner that does not interfere with the readers' correct comprehension of the Qur'an, so that Muslims who do not speak Arabic can also benefit from this heavenly book. Consequently, many translators from around the world have attempted to accurately translate these cultural teachings of the Qur'an into a variety of languages by employing various translation strategies. This research sought to ascertain the methods translators used in translating certain cultural contents from the Holy Quran, as well as the degree to which they applied the concepts of domestication and foreignization to their translations of these cultural aspects.

Literature Review

Translation and culture

The connection between translation and culture is intricate and multidimensional. As stated by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), translation is a sort of revision, and every translation entails a modification of the source text to fit into the cultural setting of the language to be translated. According to them, this cultural change is frequently imperceptible to readers and can lead to a loss of cultural specificity in the primary text (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). Mona Baker (2006) explains that translation is a kind of power, and translators need to be conscious of the power dynamics at play throughout the translation process. She also asserts that hegemonic cultures frequently use translation to reinforce their cultural hegemony, whereas marginalized cultures might employ translation as a form of resistance and empowerment (Baker, 2006). Since, according to Lawrence Venuti (1995), each translation includes a negotiation of cultural differences between the source and target languages, translators have a duty to make this negotiation visible to readers and to resist the tendency of dominant languages to impose their cultural norms on other cultures. As Edwin Gentzler (2001) stated, translators are engaged in a form of intercultural communication that necessitates sensitivity to the cultural contexts of both the source and target languages; in addition, translators need to be cognizant of the underlying cultural assumptions and values of the source text and devise strategies for communicating these to target-language readers.

Translatability or untranslatability of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is known as the Islamic holy book and is regarded as God's revealed word to the Prophet Muhammad (Esposito, 2017). It is written in Arabic and consists of 114 chapters called surahs (Gleave, 2010). There is a wide range in the length of the surahs, from 286 verses in Al-Baqarah to only 3 verses in Al-Kawthar. It was at Mecca and Medina that the Prophet Muhammad received the revelations that make up what are known as the Meccan and Medinan surahs of the Qur'an, respectively (McAuliffe, 2013). The Meccan surahs were revealed at the beginning of Islam, whereas the Medinan surahs were revealed following the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina (Esposito, 2017). Theology, ethics, morality, history, and law are only a few of the many disciplines that are represented in the Qur'an (McAuliffe, 2013). Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains an immutable and universal message that is applicable to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality (Esposito, 2011).

The belief in the untranslatability of the Qur'an derives from the notion that the Arabic language, as the language of revelation, possesses a unique sanctity and force that cannot be entirely conveyed by any other language (Nasr, 1996). According to Haleem (2010), the Arabic language has a distinct structure and rhythm that are crucial for grasping the content and meaning of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is also written in a highly lyrical and metaphorical form, making it difficult to translate into other languages without watering down the meaning and beauty of the original text (Mir, 2006). Some Muslims contend that the untranslatability of the Qur'an reflects not only linguistic differences but also the fundamental cultural differences between Islamic and Western societies (Ahmed, 2011).

It is essential to note, however, that not all Muslims believe the Qur'an cannot be translated (Sells, 1999). The translatability of the Qur'an has been the subject of scholarly and Muslim debate (Nasr, 1996). There are many who argue that the original meaning of the Qur'an can be preserved in a translation into another language. They point out that the Arabic language has its own distinctive traits but is not fundamentally different from other languages (Esposito, 2011). Some claim that the message of the Qur'an transcends language and cultural barriers and is thus accessible to everyone (Sells, 1999). They also point out that translating the Qur'an into different languages has been done since the first days of Islam. Many Muslims hold the view that translations of the Qur'an may be helpful in conveying the book's essential lessons to those who don't know Arabic (Ahmed, 2011). They concede that certain aspects of the original Arabic may be lost in translation but insist that the core ideas and teachings of the Qur'an may still be communicated (Mir, 2006).

Since the Quran has been translated into so many languages, there are several English translations available. The Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation, the Marmaduke Pickthall translation, and the Muhammad Asad translation are three of the most popular English translations (Haleem, 2010). However, numerous criticisms have been leveled against the Qur'an's English translations, some of which include:

1. Translation Bias: Certain Qur'an translations have been accused of promoting a certain theological or ideological viewpoint, whether this was done on purpose or not (Mir, 2006).

2. Cultural Differences: Arabic and English languages and cultures vary, making it hard for translators to express the text's meaning (Asad, 2003).

3. Interpretation: The translator's own perception of the content may also play a role in how it is rendered into English, leading to a skewed or inadequate comprehension of the Qur'an, which is another common criticism of English translations (Ahmed, 1992).

4. Destruction of Context and Meaning: The Qur'an's English translations frequently lose meaning and context because they don't convey the Arabic language's richness and complexity (Haleem, 2010).

5. Lack of Consistency: Different translations of the Qur'an frequently use varying terminology and expressions to convey the same meaning (Haleem, 2010).

Translatability or untranslatability of the Qur'an
According to Aixela (1996, p.14), culturally special items are "textual elements associated with foreign cultural concepts (history, art, literature) that may be unfamiliar to the target text's readers." Thus, it may be argued that CSIs lead to a linguistic and cultural gap between the two languages involved (Hatim & Mason, 1997). Such a gap occurs when a concept from the source language cannot be found in the target language's culture or when the TL lacks a word for it (Newmark, 1988).

There are a variety of difficulties translators have when attempting to render specific cultural items from the Qur'an into other languages because of the theological and cultural significance they hold in Islam (Schäffner, 2016). Among the most significant obstacles translators confront when translating specific cultural elements from the Qur'an are:

1. Religious significance: Misinterpretation or mistranslation of CSIs in the Qur'an may be considered very insulting or hurtful by Muslims because of their religious importance. Thus, translators must make great efforts to faithfully communicate the original meaning and context of such items (Hatim & Munday, 2000).

2. Cultural differences: CSIs in the Qur'an are frequently intertwined with particular Islamic cultural practices, beliefs, and values. These cultural distinctions can be challenging to convey precisely in a different cultural context, especially when there is no corresponding notion or practice in the culture of the TL (Munday, 2001).

3. Multiple interpretations: In the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is subject to multiple interpretations, and various translators may interpret CSIs differently. This can result in translation inconsistencies or contradictions, as well as scholarly and reader disagreements (Baker, 2006).

4. Linguistic complexity: Classical Arabic, the language in which the Qur'an was originally written, has a grammar, syntax, and vocabulary that make it challenging to translate into modern languages. A thorough familiarity with the Arabic language and its cultural connotations is generally necessary for the accurate translation of CSIs in the Qur'an (Venuti, 1995).

Translatability or untranslatability of the Qur'an
Translators use two distinct approaches, known as domestication and foreignization, when translating one language into another. The process of domesticating a text involves changing it so that it complies with the linguistic and cultural norms of the audience. Domestication attempts to create a translation that reads naturally and fluently in the target language and may entail modifying the text's structure or style to make it easier to understand for the target audience (Venuti, 1995). As part of this process, cultural references, idioms, and other components of the text must be translated so that they are readily understood by the target audience. The goal of domestication is to make the translation seem to have been written in the target language from the beginning rather than in a foreign language (Venuti, 1995 as cited in Munday, 2001).

In contrast, foreignization means preserving the original text as much as possible, even if doing so makes the translation more challenging to understand for the target audience. The goal of foreignization is to preserve not only the original text's style and tone but also the cultural and linguistic differences between the source and target languages (Venuti, 1995). In doing so, it may be necessary to keep idioms, cultural allusions, and other characteristics that are specific to the original language and culture but may be unfamiliar to the target readers (Munday, 2001).

It is important to remember that translators may and do utilize a mix of domestication and foreignization tactics depending on the objectives of a given translation project (Hatim & Munday,

2000). The goal of the translation, the target audience, and the cultural and linguistic distance between the two languages all play a role in determining the best strategy to take (Munday, 2001). In the end, every translation should result in a work that is not only comprehensible and interesting to the intended readers but also faithful to the original's content and aim (Schäffner, 2016).

Methodology

This research investigates the challenge of translating the Quran's culturally specific items, so the correctness of the English translations of the Holy Quran is not assessed since this research is a descriptive study. The goal of this study was to determine what strategies translators utilized to translate certain cultural items from the Holy Quran, as well as how extensively they applied the notions of domestication and foreignization in their translations of these cultural aspects. The theoretical framework for this research is Baker's method (1992), which offers strategies that translators use when dealing with concepts that lack equivalents at the vocabulary level or higher counterparts. In Baker's method (1992), specific cultural terms are among the first items that lack a lexical counterpart; hence, using this theoretical framework may assist us in achieving our research aim. The translation techniques will be divided into eight categories based on Baker's model (1992): translation by a more general word (superordinate); translation by a more neutral or less expressive word; translation by cultural substitution; translation by using a loan word or loan word plus explanation; translation by paraphrase using a related word; translation by paraphrase using unrelated words; translation by omission; and translation by illustration. The body of the study includes a list of 50 special cultural terms from the Qur'an (Table 1), along with their translations into English. Therefore, the translations of the Qur'an by seven prominent translators, by the names of Muhammad and Samira Ahmed, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Habib Shakir, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Tahereh Saffarzadeh, Arthur John Arberry, and Ali Quli Qara'i, were investigated.

Table 1: Culturally Specific Items of the Qur'an

No.	Culturally specific items	No.	Culturally specific items
1	وَ اتَّقُوا	26	نَذَرْتُ
2	بِكُفْرِهِمْ	27	تَوْبَةَ
3	بِالْإِيمانِ	28	يَتَوَكَّلِ
4	أَشْرَكُوا	29	مُؤْمِنينَ
5	أَلْحَقّ	30	كافِرُونَ
6	بِالْباطِلِ	31	أَلرِّبَوا
7	بِالْمَعْرُوفِ	32	إِسْرافاً
8	أَلْمُنْكَر	33	أَلْمُطَّهَّرينَ
9	فِتْنَةٌ	34	بِالْقِسْطِ
10	أَلْغَيْب	35	وَلِيّ
11	نُوحيهِ	36	نَصِير
12	ظَلَمْتُمْ	37	مَسْجِداً
13	يُذْكَرَ	38	لَكاذِبُونَ
14	فَضْلُ	39	بِالصَّبْرِ

15	لِيُفْسِدُوا	40	يَظُنُّونَ
16	صَدَقَةٍ	41	فِدْيَةٌ
17	حجّ	42	اَلْمَحِيضِ
18	صَوْماً	43	شَهِيداً
19	اَلصَّلَاة	44	اَلْفَحْشَاء
20	اَلزَّكَاةَ	45	قِصَاصٌ
21	طُغْيَانِهِمْ	46	عَاهَدَ
22	يُنْفِقُونَ	47	نِكَاحاً
23	مُخْلِصِينَ	48	شَعَائِر
24	حَلَالاً	49	مَكْرُوهاً
25	حَرَامٌ	50	قِبْلَة

The data for the study came from the "Jami' al-Tafasir" software, which has all the surahs of the Holy Quran and their translations into many different languages around the world. This software has been used to search for specific cultural terms in the Holy Quran among the verses and translate them. After examining the Holy Quran verses containing these culturally significant elements, a verse and its English translation were selected at random for each of them. In the subsequent phase, the collected data were analyzed in accordance with Baker's (1992) model in order to determine what strategies each translator used to translate each of the specific cultural terms from the Quran, as well as the extent to which they applied the concepts of domestication and foreignization to their translations of these cultural aspects. The number and percentage of each technique were computed, and the resulting data were presented in categorized tables so that each translator's work could be evaluated both individually and in comparison to that of other translators. Finally, 50 verses and a total of 350 translations by seven translators were evaluated.

These are examples of the translation of specific cultural items from verses of the Holy Quran. The verses and their translations have been underlined to draw attention to culturally specific elements.

وَ اعْلَمُوا أَنَّما أَمْوالُكُمْ وَ أَوْلادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَ أَنَّ اَللهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ (الأنفال، 28)

M. and S. Ahmed: And know that your properties/possessions/wealths and your children (are a) test, and that God at Him (is) a great reward/wage.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

M.M. Pickthall: And know that your possessions and your children are a test, and that with Allah is immense reward.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

M.H. Shakir: And know that your property and your children are a temptation, and that Allah is He with Whom there is a mighty reward.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

A. Yusuf Ali: And know ye that you're possessions and your progeny are but a trial; and that it is Allah with whom lies your highest reward.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word

T. Saffarzadeh: And know ye that you're possessions and your progeny are but a <u>trial</u>; and that it is Allah with whom lies your highest reward.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word

A.J. Arberry: And know that your wealth and your children are a <u>trial</u>, and that with God is a mighty wage.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word

A. Quli Qara'i: Know that your possessions and children are only a <u>test</u>, and that Allah with Him is a great reward.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

وَ لْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى اَلْخَيْرِ وَ يَأْمُرُونَ <u>بِالْمَعْرُوفِ</u> وَ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ اَلْمُنْكَرِ وَ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ اَلْمُفْلِحُونَ (آل‌عمران، 104)

M. and S. Ahmed: And to be (should be) from you a nation, (who) call to the good, and they order/command with the <u>kindness/known</u>, and they forbid/prevent from the awfulness/obscenity, and those, they are the successful/winners.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

M.M. Pickthall: And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin <u>right conduct</u> and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

M.H. Shakir: And from among you, there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin <u>what is right</u> and forbid the wrong And these it is that shall be successful

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

A. Yusuf Ali: Let their arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining <u>what is right</u>, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

T. Saffarzadeh: There should be from among you a Group who call [mankind] to virtue And enjoin <u>what is good</u> and forbid what is wrong; and they are those who shall receive salvation;

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

A.J. Arberry: Let there be one nation of you, calling to good, and <u>bidding to honour</u>, and forbidding dishonour those are the prosperers

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrasing using unrelated word

A. Quli Qara'i: There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding <u>what is right</u>, and forbidding what is wrong. It is they who are the felicitous.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

وَ لَوْ لاَ <u>فَضْلُ</u> اَللهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَتُهُ وَ أَنَّ اَللهَ رَؤُفٌ رَحِيمٌ (النور، 20)

M. and S. Ahmed: And where it not for God's <u>grace/favour/blessing</u> on you and His mercy, and that God (is) compassionate/ merciful, merciful.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by paraphrase using a related word

M.M. Pickthall: Had it not been for the <u>grace</u> of Allah and His mercy unto you, and that Allah is Clement, Merciful, (ye had been undone).

The strategy used in translation: Translation by cultural substitution

M.H. Shakir: And were it not for Allah's Grace on you and His mercy, and that Allah is Compassionate, Merciful

The strategy used in translation: Translation by cultural substitution

A. Yusuf Ali: Were it not for the grace and mercy of Allah on you, and that Allah is full of kindness and mercy, (ye would be ruined indeed).

The strategy used in translation: Translation by cultural substitution

T. Saffarzadeh: And were it not for Allah's Favour and Mercy upon you; and that Allah is The Merciful Compassionate, a grave Disaster would have fallen upon you;

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

A.J. Arberry: But for God's Bounty to you and His mercy, and that God is All gentle, All compassionate

The strategy used in translation: Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

A. Quli Qara'i: Were it not for Allah's grace and His mercy upon you, and that Allah is all-kind, all-merciful.

The strategy used in translation: Translation by cultural substitution

4. Result and discussion

At first, each of Baker's strategies is listed in alphabetical order in Table 2 to avoid multiple repetitions of strategy names. The number and percentage of different translation strategies used by different translators are shown in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. In the first column, each translator's name is mentioned. The translation strategies are listed in the first row. Eventually, the following rows will show the number or percentage of each strategy that each translator uses.

Table 2: Strategies Proposed by Baker (1992)

A	Translation by a more general word (superordinate)
B	translation by a more neutral/less expressive word
C	Translation by cultural substitution
D	Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation
E	Translation by paraphrase using a related word
F	Translation by paraphrase using an unrelated word
G	Translation by omission
H	Translation by illustration

Table 3: The Number of Strategies

Strategies / Translators	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H

M. and S. Ahmed	20	0	0	0	30	0	0	0
M.M. Pickthall	21	9	10	1	9	0	0	0
M.H. Shakir	28	7	8	2	5	0	0	0
A. Yusuf Ali	19	7	9	1	12	2	0	0
T. Saffarzadeh	18	5	13	4	10	0	0	0
A.J. Arberry	24	4	15	2	3	2	0	0
A. Quli Qara'i	41	0	1	1	7	0	0	0

The most frequently employed strategy by translators is the first one, or translation by a more general word (superordinate), as shown in Table 3. Another interesting fact in this table is that none of the translators used the strategies of translation by omission or translation by illustration. Only two translators, Yusuf Ali and Arberry, have used translation by paraphrase using unrelated words; other translators have not employed this strategy. Compared to other translators, M. and S. Ahmed used only two strategies in translating specific cultural aspects of the Qur'an, while other translators used at least five different strategies in their translations.

Table 4: The Percentage of Strategies

Strategies / Translators	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
M. and S. Ahmed	40%	0%	0%	0%	60%	0%	0%	0%
M.M. Pickthall	42%	18%	20%	2%	18%	0%	0%	0%
M.H. Shakir	56%	14%	16%	4%	10%	0%	0%	0%
A. Yusuf Ali	38%	14%	18%	2%	24%	4%	0%	0%
T. Saffarzadeh	36%	10%	26%	8%	20%	0%	0%	0%
A.J. Arberry	48%	8%	30%	4%	6%	4%	0%	0%
A. Quli Qara'i	82%	0%	4%	4%	14%	0%	0%	0%

The percentages of using each strategy by different translators are shown in Table 4. Everything that is stated in Table 3 is also relevant for Table 4. In addition, we can also determine which of the translators has employed each strategy most frequently. Among the strategies used by the translators, Shakir has made the most use of translation by a more general word (superordinate) with 56%. Pickthall has employed translation by a more neutral/less expressive word 18% of the time, the highest percentage among the translators. The majority (30%) of translation by a more general word (superordinate) were performed by Arberry. Saffarzadeh has made the greatest use of translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation, with 8%. M. and S. Ahmed have associated the most use of translation by paraphrase using a related word with 60%. Yusuf Ali and Arberry have both accounted for 4% of all instances of translation by paraphrase using unrelated words.

Table 5: The total number and Percentage of strategies

No.	Translation Strategies	Number	Percentage

1	Translation by a more general word (superordinate)	171	48.85%
2	Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word	32	9.14%
3	Translation by cultural substitution	56	16%
4	Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation	11	3.14%
5	Translation by paraphrase using a related word	76	21.71%
6	Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words	4	1.14%
7	Translation by omission	0	0%
8	Translation by illustration	0	0%

In Table 5, the total number and percentage of strategies used by all translators for the translation of culturally specific content are listed. The majority of the culturally specific elements of the Qur'an have been translated using the first strategy of "translation by a more general word," with a total percentage of 48.85. The second most common strategy is "translation by paraphrase using a related word" (21.71%). If we exclude the two strategies that are not used at all, translation by paraphrase using unrelated words has the lowest usage rate at 1.14%.

Conclusion

Due to the fact that previous research on the work of Qur'an translators in the translation of specific cultural items has only examined a small number of translators, particularly male translators, in this research, an attempt has been made to reach broad and comprehensive results by examining the work of a large number of male and female translators both individually and in comparison to each other's work. In the current study, emphasis has been placed on the evaluation of the strategies employed in the translation of specific cultural elements of the Qur'an by seven translators, as well as the application of the concepts of domestication and foreignization. The following is a concise summary of the analysis of the data presented in this study.

Translation by a more general word (superordinate) is the most frequently employed strategy in the translation of culturally specific terms of the Qur'an, both in the work of each translator individually and in the work of all translators in general. Translation by paraphrase using a related word is the second most prevalent method in translations of these items. None of the translators used the translation by omission or translation by illustration techniques for their translations. Among the strategies used, the lowest usage percentage was found for translation by paraphrase using unrelated words. On the other hand, given that the majority of strategies employed by all translators fall under the category of domestication strategies, it can be concluded that the translators adopted a target-oriented approach rather than a source-oriented approach when translating the specific cultural terms of the Qur'an.

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