SIL Global
Language and Culture Archives

Journal of Translation
ISSN 1558-7282 (online)
https://siljot.org

Translating the Sacred Text: A Polysystem Approach

Abdelhamid Elewa

Journal of Translation 12 (1), 2016: 13–27.
https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT-V5PKK

License

©2016, SIL Global

Made available under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0

More resources available at:
https://sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives

Translating the Sacred Text: A Polysystem Approach

Abdelhamid Elewa

Abdelhamid Elewa has a Ph.D. degree from Manchester University and is currently affiliated with Al-Imam University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He has translated many books including The Bride's Boon, *Ibn Al-Qayyim's* The Way to Patience and Gratitude *and* The Major Sins. *He previously published "Features of Translating Religious Texts" in the* Journal of Translation *(2014).*

Abstract

This paper attempts an extended version of the polysystem theory combined with corpus linguistics techniques in translating the Qur'an. The original version of the theory focuses on the network of relations around the target text, while the extended version includes the network of relations (or systems) of both the source and target text, be they linguistic, social, historical, etc. To explore the systems of both the source and target text, a model was developed for translating the Sacred Text which can serve as a framework for the translators to capture the early and late Arab contributions from linguistic, historical and social perspectives to maintain the original message and present it afresh to the modern generations. The model consists of three stages and each stage involves a number of systems, including the linguistic analysis of the original and target text, the network of relations of the early context, and the network of relations of the modern context. Three verses were selected in this paper to demonstrate the validity of the model. The verses deal with some social, historical, theological and legal debatable issues in the field of Sacred Text exegesis, theology and Islamic jurisprudence. The different readings of the verses are mirrored in the various translations of the Sacred Text.

1. Introduction

As translators of the Qur'an have no direct access to the language of the Sacred Text at the time of revelation, they have to rely on resources from the same era to give the equivalent meaning. The only available resources at that time are Prophetic Traditions, nomad proverbs, poetry and the Sacred Text itself. However, the translators consult interpretations of the Sacred Text which may differ from one exegete to another. They end up translating the exegesis of the Sacred Text rather than the Sacred Text itself. Therefore, the translation of the Sacred Text is mainly based on the same methodological approach as the author of the exegesis. This may be a key element in having different translations of the Sacred Text. For example the most popular translation of the Qur'an sponsored by King Fahd Complex in Madina, Saudi Arabia, is based on the commentaries of Tabari (d. 923 CE), Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE), and Ibn Kathir (d. 1372 CE). Even if someone wanted to give a translation free of exegetical commentaries, he will have no resources that help him know the meaning during the time of revelation and will end up using an exegesis of the Qur'an.

This study is an attempt at explaining the significance of the network of relations or systems, be it linguistic, literary, social, cultural, etc., synchronically and diachronically, that pertain in translating the Sacred Text. In this context, the main framework of the study is the polysystem theory proposed by Even-Zohar (1990). In polysystem theory, the translated text is regarded as a system within many systems or "polysystem;" that is, the translated text constitutes an independent system along with the other systems of the target culture such as literature, social systems, history, etc. However, an extended version of the polysystem theory is proposed to capture the network of relations of both the source text and target text. The original version of the theory deals with the target text only. With the extended version, we can examine the commonalities and/or discrepancies between the source text and the target text.

This implies a need for a fresh look at the translations of the Sacred Text from an exegetical approach, bearing in mind the synchronic and diachronic relations of the sacred text. The new and unexpected findings will raise questions about the credibility of many translations of the Sacred Text. More than that, it can give new

insights and introduce rules and models that have not been previously discussed. It can be a solid ground for the translators of the Sacred Text to draw on rather than relying on one exegetical approach.

Many works have been done in the field of Sacred Text exegesis, and the outcome has been huge. Nonetheless, some verses remain that are either vague or misinterpreted because of the vagueness of some lexemes, as will be discussed throughout this paper. This vagueness of meaning may not be sorted out by a simple study of the word in question; it rather requires an accurate probing of the whole senses of the word in light of the polysystem approach, to pick the most probable meaning that fits well in the entire network of relations.

2. Translation of the Qur'an

Dozens of English translations of the Qur'an are available in bookstores and online. Periodically we hear of a new translation of the Qur'an, drawing on the previous translations and making some changes. In fact every translation is a reflection of how the translator understands the Qur'an based on his subjective reading and sectarian or political orientation. Below we will provide examples of the translations of the Qur'an produced in the twentieth century.

One of the most widely used translations in America is Mohamed Ali's translation titled *The Holy Qur'an*, published in 1917. This translation supports the Ahmadi creed in rejecting miracles and the miraculous birth of Jesus as well as the reference to Prophet Muhammad as the final prophet (Khalil 2005). This translation was adopted by the Nation of Islam led by Louis Farrakhan in America.

Influenced by Mohamed Ali, Pickthall translated the Qur'an to remedy perceived problems of translations that had been produced by Christian missionaries. Although his translation, published in 1930, was almost free of extra commentaries, "[h]e adopted Muhammad Ali's bias against descriptions of miracles and argued, for example, that the Qur'anic description of Muhammad's night voyage to the heavens was just a vision" (Khalil 2005).

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation published in 1934 was the most widely used English translation produced by a Sunni Muslim until 1995 when Alhilali and Khan published their translation. His translation was heavily embellished with exegetical glosses and footnotes derived from early exegetical works. In addition, "some of his copious notes, particularly on hell and heaven, angels, jinn and polygamy, etc., are informed with the pseudo-rationalist spirit of his times" (Kidwai 1988).

In an attempt to avoid exegetical explanations, Mohamed Asad drew on his own modern thinking in translating the Qur'an. He ended up denying some Islamic miracles. "Asad denies the occurrence of such events as the throwing of Abraham into the fire, Jesus speaking in the cradle, etc. He also regards Luqman, Khizr and Zulqarnain as 'mythical figures' and holds unorthodox views on the abrogation of verses" (Khalil 2005).

Al-Hilali and Khan (1993) adopted the Sunni worldview in translating the Qur'an by heavily relying on three works of exegesis: Tabari, Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir. Their translation, which is called *The Noble Qur'an*, is widely distributed among Sunni Muslims for adopting an orthodox approach to Allah's attributes, confirming all the literal readings of miracles and incorporating explanatory notes. However, the extensive glosses derived from the exegetical works may exclude other possible interpretations.

Lalah Bakhtiar presented a new translation of the Qur'an that considers the gender of the speaker (Said 2004:132). She attached the feminine marker (f) to all gender-neutral words in English which have animate feminine references in the source text throughout the Qur'an. She noted,

> Just as I found a lack of internal consistency in previous English translations, I also found that little attention had been given to the woman's point of view. So when words in a verse refer directly to a woman or women or wife or wives and the corresponding pronouns such as (they, them, those), I have placed an (f) after the word to indicate the word refers to the feminine gender specifically. Otherwise,

> in the Arabic language (as in Spanish), the masculine pronoun may be used generically to include both male and female human beings.[1]

Bakhtiar adopted a feminine approach in translating the Qur'an to give more presence to women and ensure equality between the two genders. She even translated some verses that are seen today by some Westerners as an injustice and encroachment of the woman's rights, such as the issue of beating a rebellious wife. Let us have a look at the following Qur'anic verse:

> Men are supporters of wives because God has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend of their wealth. So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality are the ones (f) who are morally obligated, the ones (f) who guard the unseen of what God has kept safe. But those (f) whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping place, then go away from them (f); and if they (f) obey you, surely look not for any way against them (f); truly God is Lofty, Great.[2]

The word *idribuhnna* "beat them," which is understood by the majority of Muslims as symbolic beating, i.e. beating which does not break a bone or leave a mark, is rendered as "go away from them".

Although we have many translations of the Qur'an, there is still room for modification and revision, as the Qur'an itself is inimitable linguistically, scientifically and legislatively according to the Islamic point of view. Also, Muslims believe that the Qur'an is unique in style and unexcelled in beauty, and has incessantly renewable meanings. In this sense, the Qur'an should be translated by every generation to make it discernible to the new audience because the network of relations according to the polysystem theory changes from time to time and from one community to another.

3. Polysystem theory

Before the 20th century closed, we heard some voices in translation that called for a more integrated approach to the source and target texts, considering both of them as part of a much wider social and cultural context. Proposed by Even-Zohar, polysystem theory addresses the translated text as a system in its own that should be described within other network of relations that interact with each other, be it literary, social, historical, cultural, etc. Here translation studies moves from prescriptive approaches to a less prescriptive scope. Even-Zohar (1990:27) defined a system as "the network of relations that can be hypothesized for a certain set of assumed observables 'occurrences'/'phenomena')."

For instance a novel cannot be studied apart from other literary genres, and literary work in general is part of a wider framework that is informed by social, historical, cultural and literary practices and perspectives. The translated literary work is a system in its own right that has an interrelated network of relations. Authors, translators, publishers, readers and so forth are unpredictable variables who do not write, translate, publish, read or buy books in a social, cultural or historical vacuum. The source texts and translations are informed and influenced by a set of interrelated systems or factors that interact with one another to shape the final form of the work at play, be it original or translation. Therefore, polysystem theory proposes that a polysystem of an original text or a translation consists of a number of systems (literary, social, cultural, historical, etc.). For example, children's literature is a system and is linked to other literary systems as well as social, cultural, and historical systems.

To sum up, "Even-Zohar's polysystem theory moves the study of translations out of a static linguistic analysis of shifts and obsession with one-to-one equivalence and into investigation of the position of translated literature as a whole in the historical and literary systems of the target culture" (Munday 2001:124).

---

[1] From www.sublimequran.org, accessed on 20 October 2008.
[2] Laleh Bakhtiar (2007) *The Sublime Qur'an* (trans.), Chicago: Kazi Publications. Translated samples are posted on www.sublimequran.org, accessed 20 October 2008.

4. Methodology

4.1. Data

The use of commentaries of specific authors in understanding the meaning of the Qur'an will exclude other literary and non-literary systems, i.e., other linguistic and extra-linguistic contributions made by their contemporary authors in all scholarly fields like theology, hadith, medicine, physics, literature, and so forth. Therefore, to analyze the verses selected for this study, we will use more representative data produced at the early and late periods of Islam. This list includes a number of controversial verses that have different readings within the community of the source language. The controversy is mirrored subsequently on the choices of the translators of the Qur'an later on. Because the list is long and cannot be adequately analysed in this paper, three verses are selected to show the implications of three contextual settings: social, theological and legal.

وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِن دُبُرٍ (القرآن الكريم، سورة يوسف: 25).

Pickthall: And they raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind. (Qur'an 12:25)

"لا يمسه إلا المطهرون "سورة الواقعة: 79

Pickthall: which none toucheth save the purified. (Qur'an 56:79)

نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ.

Pickthall: They forget Allah, so He hath forgotten them. (Qur'an 9:67)

Between the early and late periods of Islam is a very long lapse of time that spans over ten centuries from the first/seventh century until the present time. Although the Classical Arabic remains understandable throughout that course of time, yet the social and cultural context has changed dramatically. The practices, concerns and needs of people have been colored by the different religious, political and social powers that controlled Muslim lands. Therefore, we need to understand the network of relations in the early period and then how the text is received by later generations.

To study the early context, I collected a corpus of the early Classical Arabic extending over the first four centuries of Islam, that is until the early eleventh century (Gregorian calendar). The works I included are mainly books. I also gathered some short poems written by one poet into a collection and I treated them as a text. The time span of these writings starts as early as the advent of Islam up to the end of the eleventh century. This five million word Classical Arabic corpus was assembled by Elewa (2004) and has the following features:

1. It is an electronic corpus; this makes investigating Arabic a more accurate and faster process.
2. It is balanced; it covers a wide scope of written Arabic texts to be used for more than one purpose.
3. More importantly, this corpus is synchronic, dealing with only one variety of Arabic along a particular span of time, i.e. early Classical Arabic. This can make the study based on it more consistent and more methodical.

This corpus provides the translators of the Qur'an with a balanced account of the Arabic language. In other words, instead of relying on one source (exegesis) or one author (exegete), they will have access to the way the language is understood and used in most genres, including the Qur'an and its exegesis.

Table 1: Structure of the corpus.

Subgenre	Texts	Text Size	Perc.
Genre: Thought and Belief			
The Holy Qur'an	The Holy Qur'an	88,622	1.8
Prophetic Tradition (Hadith)	1. Sahih Al-Bukhari 2. Sahih Muslim	683,970	13.6
Biography	1. seerah of Ibn Hisham 2. Al-Akhbar Al-Tiwal	393,933	7.8
Philosophy	1. Ara' Ahl Al-Madinah Al-Fadilah by Farabi 2. Logic by Ibn Sina 3. Al-Falsafa Al-Ula by Al-Kindi	478,141	9.5
Theology	1. Exegesis of the Qur'an (Tafseer) by Al-Tabari) 2. Jurisprudence (fiqh): Al-Risalah by Al-Shafi'i 3. Dogmatics (al-'Aqeedah): Al-Ibanah by Al-Ash'ari	1,037,387	20.7
Literature			
Poetry	1. Al-Mucallakt 2. Al-Mutanabbi collected poems	69,385	1.3
Fiction	1. Arabian Nights 2. The Misers	579,223	11.5
Linguistics			
Proverbs	1. Majmac Al-Amthaal 2. Jamharat Al-Mthaal	362,054	7.2
Lexicons	1. Al-'Ayn (Al-Khalil) 2. Fiqh al-Lughah (Al-Tha'alibi)	404,080	8.0
Science			
Geography	Ahsan al-Taqaseem fi ma'rifat al-Aqaleem by Al-Maqdisi	82,499	1.46
Physics	Al-Jamaher Fi Ma'rifat al-Jawahir by Albiruni	57,553	1.15
Medicine	Al-Qanun fi Al-Tib by ibn Sina	736,469	14.72
Mathematics	Mafatih Al-'Ulum by Al-Khawarizmi	26,684	.53

The modern corpus "ArabiCorpus" is a freely-accessed 173,600,000 word corpus with a user-friendly interface posted online, developed and maintained by Dilworth Parkinson at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.[3] This corpus allows users to search large raw corpora for words, structures and grammatical patterns. Information about word frequency, collocation, regular expressions and lexical behavior of words and phrases can also be extracted.

4.2. Method

To examine the network of relations of the Qur'an using the extended version of the polysystem theory, corpus linguistics techniques were used and a model was designed to meet the different systems of the early and late generations. The model consists of three stages and each stage involves a number of systems.

Stage I: The linguistic analysis

The first stage involves a linguistic analysis of the case under investigation. This would include the different linguistic levels, starting from the lowest in the linguistic hierarchy, the individual units of sound. Then we move up the linguistic cline to deal with words, phrases, sentences, and discourse. Hence, the translator may become more proficient in approximating the source language patterns and styles to the target language audience. The linguistic analysis also includes the ways of reciting the Qur'an, because some words in the Qur'an that are uttered differently by scholars of Qur'an recitations might inform the overall meaning. The context should also be considered to understand the linguistic relationship that holds between a word, expression or sentence and the entire text. Accordingly, what comes before and after a given a word or a phrase is vital in drawing up the overall meaning. Also, texts of similar characteristics or describing the same value or issue or recounting the same story or parable should be aggregated with each other. Firth (1957:19) argues that "meaning… is to be regarded as a complex of contextual relations, and phonetics, grammar, lexicology, and semantics each handles its own components of the complex in its appropriate context." The importance of context in translation is illustrated by Hatim and Mason (1990:57), who propose three dimensions of context: (1) the communicative dimension which involves the user (idiolect, dialect, etc.) and the use (field, mode, tenor, etc.); (2) the pragmatic dimension comprising "the study of the relations between language and its context of utterance" (Hatim and Mason 1990:59) and is determined by speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions, etc.; and (3) the semiotic dimension involving aspects such as word, text, discourse and genre—such aspects constitute signs, as well as intertextuality.

Stage II: The network of relations of the early context

The early context of an utterance refers to the way the early generation of Muslims received and understood it. The context in the previous stage refers to the linguistic context. Here, the context is related to extra-linguistic relationships, socially, culturally, temporally, spatially, and so forth. Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995:15) defined the term "context" as "the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance, … a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world." They point out that "a context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation" Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995:15). Accordingly, the translator of the Qur'an should examine the socio-historical context, worldviews of the early generations, and the narrative, ethical, legal and theological purposes of the intended message. This also involves whether the message is ultimately addressing a specific issue that took place in the early period upon which a Divine utterance was revealed, or whether the utterance is general, fitting all times and places.

Stage III: The network of relations of the modern context

An analysis of the modern context brings to light the contemporary practices, concerns and needs of the later generation of Muslims. In this stage, one can replicate the contextual analysis employed in the previous stage

[3] http://arabicorpus.byu.edu.

for the modern era. In other words, this stage addresses the extra-linguistic relationships, socially, culturally, temporally, and spatially. Then it involves an analysis of the present context vis-à-vis the socio-historical context.

5. Discussion

An analysis of the selected verses in eighteen translations of the Qur'an reveals the systems relating to the modern context and those relating to the early context. The consideration of both types of systems may help the translator of the Qur'an have an overall picture of the situation in both eras and may come up with an approach that more or less fits both contexts.

To show the validity of the model proposed in this paper, three verses are selected for analysis. These verses relate to extra-linguistic and socio-historical factors in both eras, involving social, theological and legal factors.

The first verse

وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِن دُبُرٍ (القرآن الكريم، سورة يوسف: 25).

Pickthall: And they raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind. (Qur'an 12:25)

Shakir: And they both hastened to the door, and she rent his shirt from behind.

Yusuf Ali (Saudi rev. 1985): So they both raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back.

Yusuf Ali (orig. 1938): So they both raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back.

Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar: So they raced to the door and she tore his long shirt from behind.

T.B. Irving: They both raced for the door, and she ripped his shirt from behind.

Muhammad Asad: And they both rushed to the door; and she [grasped and] rent his tunic from behind.

[Al-Muntakhab]: To escape the threatened evil he ran to the door: as she chased him she could only reach the hack of his garment, and in his struggle to advance forward, the back of his garment was torn.

Abdel Haleem: They raced for the door—she tore his shirt from behind.

Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali: And they raced with one another to the door, and she ripped his shirt from the rear.

Sahih International: And they both raced to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back.

Farook Malik: They both rushed to the door. In order to stop him she caught his shirt, and as a result she ripped his shirt from behind.

Muhsin Khan & Muhammad al-Hilali: So they raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back.

Dr. Munir Munshey: He ran towards the door. She followed him, grabbed the back of his shirt and tore it.

Arberry: They raced to the door; and she tore his shirt from behind.

Palmer: And they raced to the door and she rent his shirt from behind.

Sale: And they ran to get one before the other to the door; and she rent his inner garment behind.

Rodwell: And they both made for the door, and she rent his shirt behind.

The word قميص, which is commonly translated as "shirt" in Egyptian Arabic and has a more general meaning in Saudi Arabia where it is used as a sleeping garment, was translated as "shirt" in most translations of the Qur'an. To probe the intended meaning of the word under investigation, let us look it up in Arabic dictionaries to identify the early meaning of the word and how it can be rendered to the modern generation. The meanings of the word was examined in three Arabic dictionaries: Al-Fayruzabadi's (1952) *Qaamuus Al-Muheet*, Ibn Manzhur's (d. 1311 CE) *Lisan Al-ᶜArab*, and Al-Jawhri's (d. 1002 CE) *Alsihah fi Allhugh*.

Almuheet

القَميصُ: الجلبابُ؛ اكتفى بلُبس القميص ولم يرتد فوقه معطفًا لشدة الحرّ.-: لباسٌ رقيقٌ يُرتدى تحت السترة غالبًا؛.

Al-qamees: a piece of clothing: "He only put on a *qamees* and nothing above because it was very hot." It is a thin clothing to wear under a garment.

Lisan Alarab

القميص الذي يلبس معروف مذكر، وقد يُعْنى به الدرع فيؤنث؛

Qamees (masc.) is a well known cothing, (fem.: "shield").

Alsihah fi allughah

القَميصُ الذي يُلْبَس. والجمع القُمْصانُ والأقْمِصَة

Qamees is what is worn, pl. *Qumsan* and *aqmisah.*

The modern Arabic corpus yields a more specific sense of the word. The word is less frequently used in the modern corpus, as the total count of the search term قميص *qamees* reaches 2774 times with a lexical density of 1.6 per 100.000. However, searching the collocations of the word in the corpus with a minimum frequency of 5, we capture some interesting results.

Table 2: Left collocates of the word *qamees* with a minimum frequency of 5.

X & Y	freq
قميص عثمان 'Uthman's qamees'	88
قميص رقم 'shirt number'	72
قميص المنتخب 'the national team shirt'	40
قميص النوم 'sleeping qamees'	31
قميص يوسف 'Joseph qamees'	24
قميص الفريق 'the team shirt'	21
قميص برشلونة 'Barcelona shirt'	12
قميص وبنطلون 'shirt and trousers'	12
قميص وسراويل 'shirt and pants'	12
قميص أسود 'black shirt'	10
قميص وعمامة 'qamees and a turban'	8
قميص قصير 'short qamees'	7
قميص طويل 'long qamees'	6
قميص أبيض 'white shirt'	5

Grouping together the collocates of similar meanings, the list of collocates from the Modern Arabic Corpus can be divided into three senses: (1) The original historical sense used in fixed expressions like "qamees

Othman" and "qamees Yousuf." The former expression alludes to the famous historical incident when Uthman Ibn Affan, the third Muslim Caliph after the death of the Prophet, was assassinated. A group of Muslims kept a piece of clothing he was wearing at the time of his assassination at home. They showed this piece of clothing which was stained with his blood to the public in order to incite the emotions of Muslims and urge them for vengeance. Henceforth, "Uthman's qamees" became an aphorism used in expressions for agitating the sentiments of people with an object or plea. (2) The second modern sense refers to the piece of clothing with short or long sleeves covering the upper part of the body. It could be a uniform worn by members of a sports team. (3) The neutral third sense refers to a simple garment worn at home like pyjamas.

On the other hand, in the Classical Arabic Corpus, the search term occurs 160 times with a lexical density of 3.2 hits per 100.000 words. Although the word occurs more frequently than in the modern corpus, the range of meanings is narrower. The list of collocates has only one sense: a simple clothing to wear separately or under a garment, as it mainly collocates with informal clothing that is worn at home or under another piece of clothing outdoors.

Table 3: Left collocates of the word qamees with a minimum frequency of 34.

left collocate	freq
القميص واللباس 'qamees and clothing'	7
قميص عثمان 'Uthman's qamees'	5
قميص وسراويل 'qamees and pants'	5
قميص رفيع 'thin qamees'	5
قميص المرأة 'women's qamees'	4
قميص يوسف 'Joseph qamees'	3
قميص ورداء 'qamees and garment'	3
قميص أصفر 'yellow qamees'	3
قميص وثوب 'qamees and dress'	3

In light of these senses derived from the late and early corpora, one can conclude that the word قميص *qamees* means any garment that covers the upper part of one's body irrespective of how long it is or the purpose of wearing it, namely formal/casual clothing, uniform, or pyjamas. The different types of clothing can be portrayed in the following graph that lists the superordinates of "clothing" where one can find that the word "qamees" is the inner outfit for the upper part of the body.

[4] The minimum frequency was reduced to only three because in Classical Arabic Corpus there are far fewer hits than in the modern one.

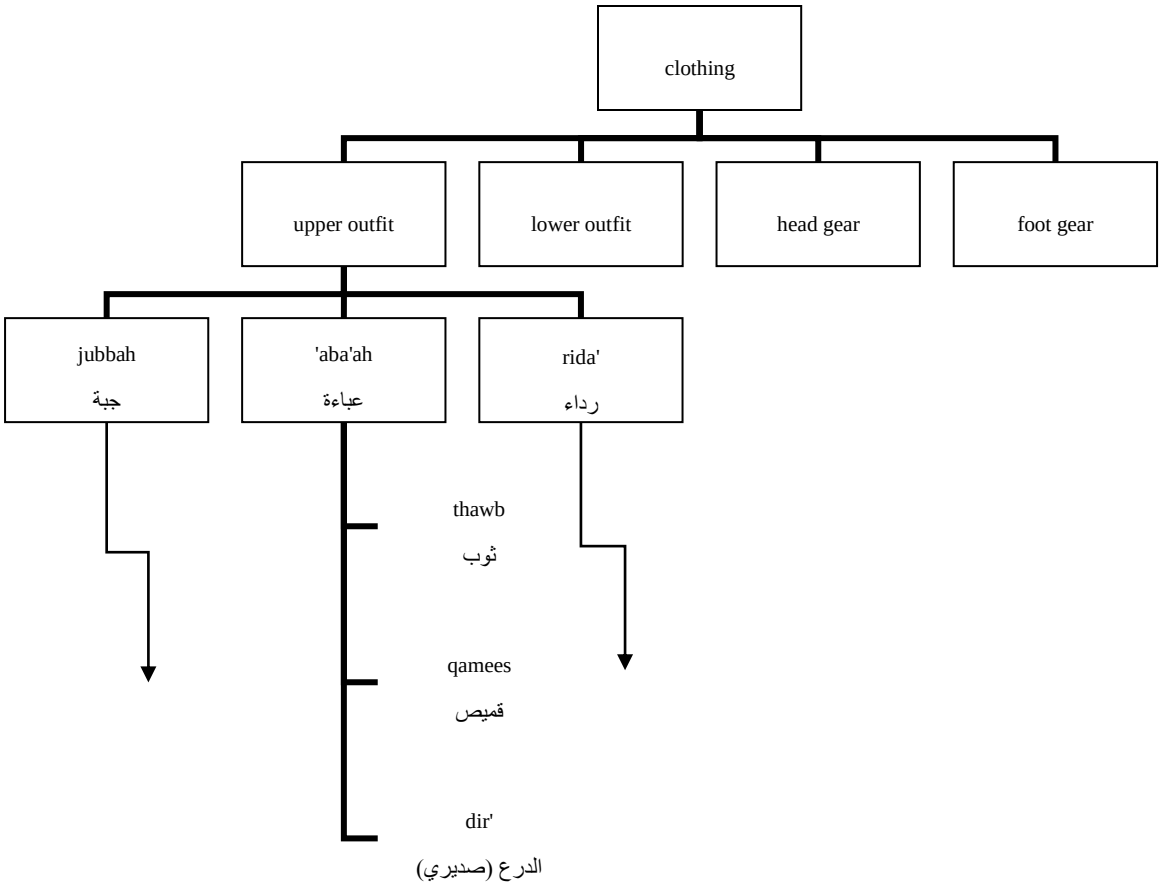

Figure 1: Superordinates of the word *qamees* in Arabic.

Today, the vestments for the upper part of the body include "coat, suit, shirt, vest, etc." The older clothing include types that may be similar to the Arab traditions of wearing like a cloak, garment and tunic. The latter is a type of garment that is casual and simple in style. It was the traditional simple clothing of men and women in the Roman and Greek empires. This could be the closest piece of clothing to the word *qamees* mentioned in the verse under examination.

The second verse

"لا يمسه إلا المطهرون "سورة الواقعة: 79

Pickthall: which none toucheth save the purified. (Qur'an 56:79)

Shakir: None shall touch it save the purified ones.

Yusuf Ali (Saudi rev. 1985): Which none shall touch but those who are clean.

Yusuf Ali (orig. 1938): Which none shall touch but those who are clean.

Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar: None touches it but the ones who are purified.

T.B. Irving: which none but the purified may touch.

Muhammad Asad: which none but the pure [of heart] can touch.

[Al-Muntakhab]: A Quran that is not to be touched or taken in the hands which are not free from dirt or filth or not free from ceremonial or sanitary defilement, nor in the hands of anyone who has had sexual congress until he or she has bathed.

Abdel Haleem: that only the purified can touch.

Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali: which none shall touch except the purified.

Umm Muhammad (Sahih International): None touch it except the purified.

Farook Malik: which none can touch except the purified (angels).

Dr. Munir Munshey: Only those who are (physically and ritually) clean, (are allowed to) touch it.

Muhsin Khan & Muhammad al-Hilali: Which (that Book with Allah) none can touch but the purified (i.e. the angels).

Arberry: none but the purified shall touch.

Palmer: Let none touch it but the purified!

Sale: except those who are clean.

Rodwell: Let none touch it but the purified.

The above translations of verse 79 of *Surah Alwaqi'ah* contain two content words and two function words. The first content word *yamassuhu* was rendered "to touch" in all translations, but the second one was rendered differently. The different meanings of the word *almutahharoun* include "the purified," "the purified ones," "those who are clean," "the ones who are purified," "the pure [of heart]," "the purified (angels)," and "those who are (physically and ritually) clean." These meanings revolve around purity and cleanliness either physically, ritually, or spiritually. Some scholars of Islamic jurisprudence cite this verse to support their argument regarding the prohibition of touching the Holy Book without having ablution. However, the referential pronoun *hu* meaning 'it' attached to the word *yamassu* modifies the closest previous noun, which is *kitabun maknun* 'the protected/preserved Book'.

[إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ لا يَمَسُّهُ إِلا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ] الواقعة: 77-79.

Pickthall: That (this) is indeed a noble Qur'an. In a Book kept hidden…

Shakir: Most surely it is an honored Quran, in a book that is protected.

The Preserved Book is placed in heaven and handled by angels. Therefore, the word *almutahharoun* refers to the angels, who are pure by nature. It is noteworthy to mention that the word *mutahharun* is a static adjective, i.e. none can become مطهَّر *mutahhar* 'purified' forever; s/he may purify himself/herself from impurities, be it physical, ritual, or spiritual. In this case, a dynamic adjective would be appropriate for human beings, who constantly undergo situations of cleanliness and impurity as in the following verse.

فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَّهِّرِينَ (التوبة: 108)

Pickthall: Wherein are men who love to purify themselves. Allah loveth the purifiers. (Qur'an 9:108)

Shakir: in it are men who love that they should be purified; and Allah loves those who purify themselves.

Yusuf Ali (Saudi rev. 1985): In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure.

T.B. Irving: in which there are men who love to be purified, God loves those who cleanse themselves.

Muhammad Asad: wherein there are men desirous of growing in purity: for God loves all who purify themselves.

Muhsin Khan & Muhammad al-Hilali: In it are men who love to clean and to purify themselves. And Allah loves those who make themselves clean and pure (i.e. who clean their private parts with dust (i.e. to be considered as soap) and water from urine and stools, after answering the call of nature).

The word *almuttahrin* الْمُطَّهِّرِينَ in the verse above refers to men who must clean themselves, unlike the verse under examination which is related to extraterrestrial beings who are pure in nature.

The function word لا *la* 'not' is recited by Ibn Mas'ud as ما *ma* 'not'. The main difference between both negative suffixes is that the latter is used to negate the tense for the present time, while the former negates

the tense for the present and future (Sibawayh, d. 796:4/221). This could indicate that the commonly adopted reading of the verse, namely the version with the negative suffix *la* implies a constant situation of purity in the present and the future, which is a well-known property of angels. Accordingly, this verse is not textual evidence for supporting the prohibition of those who do not have ablution from touching the Holy Book.

Historically, the verses of the Qur'an were only collected in one unified volume after the Prophet's lifetime upon the instructions of the third Caliph, Othman Ibn Affan. The early process of collection took place during the reign of Abu Bakr, the first Muslim Caliph when he ordered that all scripts be collected and kept in one place. Therefore, the Qur'an was not contained in one book during the Prophet's lifetime and the book mentioned in the verse under investigation undoubtedly refers to the Preserved Book in the Heaven.

The third verse

"نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ" .(التوبة: 67)

Pickthall: They forget Allah, so He hath forgotten them. (Qur'an 9:67)

Shakir: They have forsaken Allah, so He has forsaken them.

Yusuf Ali (Saudi rev. 1985): They have forgotten Allah; so He hath forgotten them.

Yusuf Ali (orig. 1938): They have forgotten God; so He hath forgotten them.

Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar: They forgot God so He forgot them.

T.B. Irving: They have forgotten God, so He has forgotten them.

Muhammad Asad: They are oblivious of God, and so He is oblivious of them.

[Al-Muntakhab]: They … fail to recall Allah to mind and by consequence Allah has neglected them.

Abdel Haleem: They have ignored God, so He has ignored them.

Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali: They have forgotten Allah, so He has forgotten them.

Umm Muhammad (Sahih International): They have forgotten Allah, so He has forgotten them [accordingly].

Farook Malik: They have forgotten Allah; so He has forgotten them.

Muhsin Khan & Muhammad al-Hilali: They have forgotten Allah, so He has forgotten them.

Dr. Munir Munshey: They forgot Allah, and so He forgot them.

Arberry: They have forgotten God, and He has forgotten them.

Palmer: They forget God and He forgets them!

Sale: They have forgotten God; wherefore He hath forgotten them.

Rodwell: They have forgotten God, and He hath forgotten them.

The Arabic verb نسى 'to forget' was translated as "to forget" in 15 of the 18 translations included in the corpus used for this paper; the remaining three translations used different lexemes when the verb is used with God. Mohamed Asad rendered it as "be oblivious," Almuntakhab "to neglect," and Shakir "to forsake."

In all religions, God is infinite and free of any human imperfection. Therefore, forgetfulness mentioned in the above verse cannot be a Divine attribute. Accordingly, in his commentary on this verse, Al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) states, "They have stopped worshipping and obeying Allah, therefore He excluded them from His Divine help, guidance, and mercy."

تركوا الله أن يطيعوه ويتبعوا أمره ، فتركهم الله من توفيقه وهدايته ورحمته.

Similarly, Al-Baghawi (2002) comments, "They have stopped worshipping Allah, therefore He excluded them from His Divine help and guidance in this world and from His mercy in the hereafter."

تركوا طاعة الله ، فتركهم الله من توفيقه وهدايته في الدنيا ، ومن رحمته في الآخرة ، وتركهم في عذابه

Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE): "They have abandoned that which Allah commands, therefore, He left them in doubt."

تركوا ما أمرهم الله به فتركهم في الشك .

Al-Suyuti (Al-Itqan) calls this type of expressions and many others in the Qur'an as *mushakalah* namely "resemblance" where two words similar in form but not in content are used for metaphorical purposes because of actual or allusive proximity. He also listed many verses that contain seemingly problematic expressions of this kind.

فمن اعتدى عليكم فاعتدوا عليه بمثل ما اعتدى عليكم. (البقرة : 194).

Pickthall: And one who attacketh you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you. (Qur'an 2:194)

Shakir: Whoever then acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you.

Yusuf Ali (Saudi rev. 1985): If then any one transgresses the prohibition against you, Transgress ye likewise against him.

T.B. Irving: Attack anyone who attacks you to the same extent as he has attacked you.

To attack others or transgress is forbidden in all religions and communities. The attacked has the right to repel any unjust aggression and/or punish the attacker. The negative verb *i'tada* 'attack, transgress' is used first to describe the action taken by the attacker and is used once more to describe the action used in repelling the attack or punishing the offense. The negative verb in both actions is repeated for *mushakalah* 'resemblance of form' to give the attacked the right to defend himself according to the injury inflicted upon him.

There are more examples listed by Alsuyuti in line with the verse of forgetfulness above. Another negative verb was repeated to describe a positive Divine action. The verb مكر *makara* 'to plot against, deceive' in the verse below is used to describe the hidden agendas of the enemies of Jesus and their wicked schemes plotted against him. *Mushakalah* is used again to show that however cunning and clever they might be, their plots will prove futile and Jesus will be rescued alive.

{وَمَكَرُواْ وَمَكَرَ اللّهُ وَاللّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ } - آل عمران : 54

Sahih International: And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners.

Pickthall: And they (the disbelievers) schemed, and Allah schemed (against them): and Allah is the best of schemers.

Yusuf Ali: And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah.

Shakir: And they planned and Allah (also) planned, and Allah is the best of planners.

Mohsin Khan: And they (disbelievers) plotted [to kill 'Iesa (Jesus)], and Allah planned too. And Allah is the Best of the planners.

Arberry: And they devised, and God devised, and God is the best of devisers.

The negative verb was maintained in the translations of the verse above, overriding the metaphorical usage of repetition in the source language which might mean requital of their action. Commenting on this verse, Al-Tabari (2002:3,370) states,

أخذه منهم على غرة أو استدراجه منهم من استدرج على كفره به ومعصيته إياه ثم إحلاله العقوبة به على غرة وغفلة.

"Unexpected punishment or gradual respite to their unbelief and disobedience before abrupt punishment."

Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE) also states,

ومكروا يعني كفار بني إسرائيل ...، أي قتله، .... ومكر الله: استدراجه لعباده من حيث لا يعلمون

"They, the unbelievers amongst the Children of Israel (the Jews), i.e. they planned to kill him (Jesus). As to *makr* 'plotting, deception' of Allah, it means, gradual drawing of His creatures while they are unaware [of that]."

Alzajjaj (cited by Al-Qurtubi) also said,

مكر الله مجازاتهم على مكرهم

"*Makr* of Allah means requital of their deception/evil plots."

The same applies to the following verses:

والذين لا يجدون إلا جهدهم فيسخرون منهم سخر الله منهم. (التوبة : 79)

Pickthall: And such as can find naught to give but their endeavours, and deride them—Allah (Himself) derideth them. (Qur'an 9:79)

Shakir: Those who give to the extent of their earnings and scoff at them; Allah will pay them back their scoffing.

إنما نحن مستهزئون الله يستهزئ بهم (البقرة: 14–15)

Pickthall: Verily we did but mock. Allah (Himself) doth mock them. (Qur'an 2:14–15)

Shakir: We were only mocking. Allah shall pay them back their mockery.

6. Conclusion

Many of the arguments among Muslim scholars and schools of thoughts arise from their understanding of the language of the Sacred Text. Among the main reasons for such differences are their understanding of the linguistic and socio-historical contexts of some parts of the Sacred Text, leading sometimes to a difference in understanding and formulating laws derived from such texts. This gives birth to multiple translations of the Sacred Text, each adopting the approach of the translator's sectarian, political or personal inclination. This can be resolved by considering the various related systems, whether linguistic, literary, social, or cultural, synchronic and diachronic, in translating the Sacred Text. The translated text itself is treated as an independent system within the other systems of the target culture, such as social systems, history, etc. This is the framework of polysystem theory which is extended in this paper to include the network of relations of both the source text and target text.

In light of polysystem theory, a model was developed for translating the Qur'an that can serve as a comprehensive framework for translators of the Sacred Text to revisit the early and late Arab contributions from linguistic, historical and social perspectives to maintain the original message and present it afresh to the modern generations. Three verses were selected in this paper to demonstrate the validity of the model. These verses deal with some social, historical, theological and legal issues in the field of Sacred Text exegesis, theology and Islamic jurisprudence. The different readings of the verses are mirrored in the various translations of the Sacred Text.

References

Al-Baghawi, Alhusain Ibn Masoud. 2002. *Ma'alim al-Tanzil (Landmarks of revelations)*. Beirut: Dar Ihyaa Al-Turath Al-Arabi.

Al-Fayruzabadi, Majdu Eldin. 1952. *Al-qamuus al-muhiit (The comprehensive lexicon)*. Cairo: Matbaᶜat Mustafa Al-Babi Al-Halabi.

Al-Jawhari, Hammad. d. 1002. *Al-sihah fi al-lughah (Correct (usage) in language).* Al-Meshkat Islamic Library (online library).

Al-Hilali, Taqiy Aldin, and Mohsen Khan. 1993. *The Noble Qur'an in the English language (trans.)*. Riyadh: Maktabat Dar-us-Salam.

Al-Qurtubi Mohamed Ibn Ahmed. d. 1273. *Al-jaamiᶜ li-ahkaam al-qur'aan (The Compendium of Qur'anic Rulings).* Lebanon: Daar Al-Fikr.

Al-Tabari, Mohmed Ibn Jarir. d. 922. *Jamiᶜ al-bayaan fi ahkaam al-qur'aan (The comprehensive book in the rulings of the Qur'an).* Beirut: Daar Al-Fikr.

Elewa Abdelhamid. 2004. *Collocation and synonymy in classical Arabic: A corpus-based study*. Unpublished thesis, Manchester University, England.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. 1990. Polysystem studies. *Poetics Today* 11(1):97–191.

Ibn Katheer, Imad Eldin. 1996. *Tafseer al-qur'an alᶜaziim (Explanation of the Great Qur'an)*. Lebanon: Daar al-maᶜrifah.

Firth, John. 1957. Modes of meaning. *Papers in linguistics.* London: Oxford University Press.

Ibn Manzur, Mohamed. d. 1311. *Lisan al-ᶜarab (Arab language)*. Beirut: Dar Bayuut lil-Tibaᶜah wa-al-Nashr.

Khalil, Mohamed. 2005. Assessing English translations of the Qur′an. *Middle East Quarterly* XII(2):58–71. Available online at www.meforum.org/717/assessing-english-translations-of-the-quran, retrieved 21 December 2016.

Kidwai, Abdur-Rahim. 1988. English translation of the Holy Qur′an: An annotated bibliography. *Hamdard Islamicus* XI:47–55. Available online at http://alhafeez.org/rashid/qtranslate.html, retrieved 21 December 2016.

Munday, Jeremy. 2001. *Introducing translation studies, theories and applications*. London and New York: Routledge.

Said, Abdullah. 2004. *The Qur'an, an introduction*. London: Routledge.

Sibawayh, Abu Al-Bishr. d. 796. *Alkitab (the Book)*. Ed. Absulsalam Haroun. Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel.

Sperber, Dan, and Dierdre Wilson. 1986/1995. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Suyuti, Jalalu Adin. d. 1505. *Al-muzhir fi ᶜuluum al-lughah wa-anwaᶜihaa (The flowery book in linguistics and types of languages)*. Beirut: Daar al-Jiil.

Suyuti, Jalalu Adin. d. 1505. *Al-Itqān fī ʻulūm al-Qur'ān (Perfection on the sciences of the Qur'an).* Egypt: *al-Maṭbaʻah al-Kustalīyah.*