Some Semantic, Stylistic and Cultural Problems of Translation

With Special Reference to Translating the Glorious Qur'ân

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Abstract

This paper deals with some semantic, stylistic and cultural problems of translation and offers modest solutions to each. Among the semantic problems discussed are homonymy; polysemy; and little knowledge of semantic change and its types including semantic generalization, specification, melioration and pejoration. The stylistic problems offered include: clarity, ellipsis, redundancy and extraposition. As regards the cultural problems discussed, they cover the problems underlying the translation of idioms, proverbs and culture-bound words.

1. Introduction

Since translation is a process of constant search for the transfer of a message from the Source Language (SL) into the Target Language (TL), it is often beset by many problems and difficulties that may be a result of the differences in both languages or differences in the cultures represented by them. Among the linguistic problems touched upon in this paper are some of the semantic and stylistic problems that face any translator of any text. There is also an attempt to shed light on some cultural problems that may be more likely to be encountered and more dangerous.

First, the problem is decided upon, many examples from different texts in general and the Holy Bible and the Glorious Qur'ân in particular are given, and the solution is finally suggested. The Glorious Qur’ân examples necessitate offering different translations of their meanings. The translations utilized are those attempted by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, ‘Abdullâh Yûsuf ‘Alî, Arthur John Arberry and Muhammad Mahmûd Ghâlî.

2. Semantic Problems:

2.1. Polysemy

Polysemy refers to "a lexical item which has a range of different meanings" (Crystal 1991: 267). For instance, plain means level, undecorated, pure, unobstructed, obvious, clear, common and ordinary (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary [MWOD] 2008). The numerous meanings a word acquires may be a
result of the metaphoric or abstract context in which it is used, thus giving it a metaphorical or abstract sense in addition to its original (literal) meaning. Moreover, the different meanings contained in polysemic words have the same etymological origins and are related to one another. For instance, the Arabic word عين is polysemic; it means: (1) عين (eye); (2) عينو الماء (spring); (3) عين الإبرة (the eye of a needle); (4) جاسوس (hesper); (5) جوهر (essence) as in Hâthâ huwa ‘aynu al-mawdâ‘i (This is the essences of the subject); (6) العقار (the essence) al-‘aynu mawdân ‘ār (the eye of the needle); (4) عين الموصوف الذراع ‘ânu aqîbara (the apartment at issue); (7) عين الصواب ‘ânu aqîbara (completely right); and (8) عين المكان ‘ânu al-malqânî (the very place). All of these meanings are derived from the same etymological origin, the stem لف. The first meaning is the literal meaning, and the rest are figurative.

Many Arabic words are polysemic; that is, they are of multiple meanings. In particular, the Glorious Qur’ân contains tens of polysemic words. For example, the verb دعا‘a occurs in many verses with slightly different, though related, meanings. It occurs in these verses:

《هَكَانَ الْأَعْرَافُ مَرْبَطًا لِّلَّذِينَ مَاتُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرْآنِ إِلَّا ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ مَسْلِكِ الْحَقِّ إِنَّمَا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُدْعَىٰ إِلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَرَضٍ》

《هُنَّ الْأُمُّوَّمَاتُ لَتْلَوْنَ الْأَعْرَافَ إِلَىٰ ثُلُثِّ الْخَلَّالِ»

《يا أَيُّهَا الْأَيُّامُ قَدْ أَلَّهْتُ الْأَيُّامَ الْأَعْفَاءِ مُدِينِي لَّهُمْ إِدْعَاءٌ كَذَٰلِكَ إِنَّمَا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ وَلْيُدْعَ لَهُ كُلُّ مَلَكٌ إِلَّا ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ مَسْلِكِ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَرَضٍ》

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(Yâ ‘ayyuhâ allaâthenea ’âmanû ’istajeebû liLâhi walir-Rasûli iîthâ da’akum lima yuhyeeekum / Believers, respond to God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.) (8:24) and

(Yâ ‘ayyuhâ allaâthenea ’âmanû là tadhkuhul buyûta An-Nabiyyi illâ ‘an yu’âthna lâmuk ilâ ta’amîn ghayraya näthireena inâhu walâkîn îthâ du’’eetum fâ-idkhulul/ Believers, do not enter the Prophet’s apartment for a meal unless you are given permission to do so; do not linger until [a meal] is ready. When you are invited, go in.) (33:53). The Arabic verb دعا’ in these three verses is polysemic; it has near related meanings, but not only one meaning. In the first verse (3:38), it means invoke; in the second (8:24), it means call; and in the third, (33:53) it means invite.

1 See the transliteration guide above. Arabic words in isolation are not inflected, while words in phrases and sentences are inflected and transliterated accordingly.
2 For more clarification, the translations of the Qur’anic verses are cited from Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem’s The Qur’an. However, this does not mean that the author totally agrees with them.
3 The bold number refers to the Qur’anic Sûrah (Chapter) and the regular number refers to the verse.
The various meanings of a given word may drag the inexperienced translator into troubles. He/she gets so confused that he/she is unable to choose the appropriate meaning, especially when the meanings are so close to one another and the context is literary or religious. To solve this problem, a translator should not imagine that all meanings are identical and, if in doubt, consult a monolingual dictionary know the precise difference in meaning. In addition, he/she should look closely at the words before and after the polysemic word to decide on the nature of the context precisely. This will be of much help in choosing the meaning that is in harmony with the context. Only then will the translator be able to choose the most precise and suitable meaning and translate it accurately.

2.2. Homonymy

Homonymy is a semantic phenomenon referring to "lexical items which have the same form but differ in meaning" (Crystal 1991: 167). For example, the word *bank* means:

(1) an organization where people and businesses can invest or borrow money, change it to foreign money, etc. or a building where these services are offered, (2) sloping raised land, esp. along the sides of a river, or a pile or mass of earth, clouds, etc. *(Cambridge International Dictionary of English [CIDE] 1995)*

It is clear that both meanings are far unrelated. This difference in meaning is due to their different etymological origins on which John Lyons comments, saying,

They differ etymologically: 'bank' \( \text{1} \) was borrowed from Italian (cf. the Modern Italian 'banca') in the fifteenth century; 'bank' \( \text{2} \) can be traced through Middle English, and beyond, to a Scandinavian word (related ultimately to the German source of the Italian 'banca', but differing from it in its historical development). (1995: 28)

Similarly, the Arabic word *كَلِيَّة* kulliyah means either: (1) a higher educational institution, such as *كَلِيَّةُ الأَلَّاب* Kulliyatu Al-Âdâbi (College of Arts) or (2) *كَلِيَّة* qadiyatun kulliyatun (a comprehensive case). Both words are homonymic. The difference in the two meanings is again a result of etymological differences. While the first meaning is borrowed from the American word *college*, the second one is derived from the Arabic stem *كَلِيَّة* denoting comprehensiveness *(Hijâzî 1999: 141)*.

Homonymy is a big problem for most Arab translators in particular. This is probably due to the possibility that most Arabs are taught at school that all words should be traced back to a simple stem consisting of three or four letters. This mistaken view is adopted in most Arabic dictionaries (Enani 2000a: 30). Therefore, most Arab translators think that English words should also be traced back to similar origins. This is neither true of Arabic nor English. So, any translator doing translation from Arabic into English or vice versa should pay much attention to homonymic words and be aware that etymology plays an essential role in deciding the meaning of these words.

2.3. Little Knowledge of Semantic Change
Little knowledge of semantic change causes a big problem for many translators make. The term of semantic change refers to the historical changes that occur to a word due to the changes in the ways of people's thinking and behaviors from an age to another. There are four types of semantic change: generalization, specification, melioration and pejoration.

2.3.1. Generalization
Generalization refers to the spread of a meaning from a narrower to a broader class of things. For example, the word *arrive* in English formerly meant *to come to shore*, but it now means *to come to any place* (Trask 1996: 42). In Arabic, the noun *sabab* was used to mean *حبل* (rope). Then, it was generalized to mean *مثير* (*mubārīr* (justification)) (El-‘Ikish 2003: 23).

2.3.2. Specification
Specification refers to the process of narrowing the meaning of a given word from a broader class of things to a narrower one. In English, the word *meat* once meant *food* in general, but it now means only *flesh food*. Similarly, *girl* also referred to *any young person (of either sex)*, but it is used nowadays to signify *only a young female person* (Trask 1996: 42). In Arabic, *صلاة salāh* formerly meant *دعاء du‘ā‘* (invocation) in general as in the Qur’ānic verse:

(Waṣalli ‘alayhim ‘inna šalātaka sakanun lahum / ... and pray for them — your prayer will be a comfort to them) (9:103). But it is used now with the meaning of *prayer*.

In a similar way, the Arabic word *madrasa* was used in Egypt during the 19th century to refer to all educational institutions, primary, secondary and high; but it is used nowadays to denote only primary, secondary and vocational education institutions. It is no longer used to denote high education institutions (Hijāzī 1999: 131).

2.3.3. Melioration
Melioration refers to improving the meaning of a given word. The English word *queen*, for example, formerly meant *any woman*. Today, it is used to designate *a woman ruling a country* (Trask 1996: 42). In Arabic, the verb *إمتاز* (*imtāza*) formerly meant *just to get apart* as used in the Qur’ānic verse:

(And step aside today, you guilty ones.) (36:59). But later on, it has acquired the meaning of being *outstanding*, which can be noticed in the noun *تميز* (*tamyuz* (distinction) and the adjective *ممتاز* (*mumtāz* (excellent)) (El-‘Ikish, 2003: 21).

2.3.4. Pejoration

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4 Prayer involves *takbeer* (saying *Allāh is Great* at the beginning of prayer), postures, standing, bowing, prostration, sitting and *tasleem* (saying *peace of Allāh be upon you* at the end of prayer).
Pejoration is the opposite of melioration. A word gets pejorative when it acquires an insulting or disapproving meaning other than its original one. For example, the English word *mistress* was once a respectful title for addressing a woman. However, it is used today derogatively to refer to "a woman kept by a man for sexual purposes" (Trask 1996: 43). Similarly, the Arabic word '웅 율 'usūlli was once used to refer to something in accordance with rules or someone of great knowledge of the rules of jurisprudence. But it is used nowadays, especially in media, with the meaning of *fundamentalist* or *terrorist*.

Lack of semantic change awareness is a special problem for those who translate from or into Arabic. This is owing to the fact that Arabic nowadays is classified into two linguistic branches fused together: Archaic Arabic -- the language of ancient religious, poetical and prose texts -- and Modern Arabic. Modern Arabic includes two varieties: the written variety, which is called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)\(^5\), and the spoken one, which is called Colloquial Arabic. Thus, Arabic is described as a diglossic language. While the written variety is used, with slight differences, all over the Arab world, the spoken variety is greatly different from an Arab country to another, thus forming different dialects such as Egyptian Arabic, Syrian Arabic, Iraqi Arabic, etc.

It may be thought that Archaic Arabic is completely different from Modern Standard Arabic. However, this is not totally true since "archaic Arabic is still, paradoxically, very much alive in…the Muslim scriptures," "still informs much of both modern versions [written and spoken] of Arabic and often interferes with … understanding … even the most patently modern texts" (Enani 2000b: 5). Therefore, we cannot fully understand modern written and spoken Arabic without a working background of Archaic Arabic.

As a solution to this problem, the translator can follow a diachronic approach in dealing with all Arabic texts, old and modern. This approach implies a vast knowledge of the culture in which the text (spoken or written) was produced and the differences which occur as a result of the age distance between the text and the translator. Though it may be assumed that the diachronic approach should be followed in translating only old texts, Enani sees that Arabic is a unique language in which old and modern meanings overlap in all texts, written and spoken (2000b: 108).

Hence, it is very important for any translator to learn the techniques of the diachronic approach by reading much on semantics and etymology. Then, he/she will be able to analyze the text under translation in a good way. When he/she is faced, for instance, by the word حكومة *hukûma* in ‘Ali Ibn Aby Ṭalib’s saying to his disloyal supporters,

> "ئِ اَلْأَنْبُرُ اللَّهُ وَطَرِيعٌ فِي ُمَّالِكِ"
"Walaqad kuntu 'amartukum fi hâthihi al-ḥukûmati 'amry / I had given you in this case an order *" (as cited in Enani 1999: 35), he/she can guess that its real meaning, in the context in which it was used, was *case*, not its present meaning; that is, *government*.

3. **Stylistic Problems**

Style plays an important role in translation and may cause many problems. While much attention is paid to the content of the Source Text (ST), style is often neglected, though important, especially in literary and religious texts. Style refers to the form in which a text is molded. It is the way a speaker or writer expresses himself/herself. Abrams suggests that

the characteristic style of a writer may be analyzed in terms of its diction, or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language; the patterns of its rhythm, component sounds; … and its rhetorical aims and devices. (1981: 191)

Style, furthermore, varies according to receptors. An editorial about bird flu, for example, is supposed to be generally written in a simple informative style so that it can cater to the tastes and culture levels of all potential readers. If it is written in a technical style, there is a very little chance that it will be read, let alone understood, except by specialists. However, a guide of instructions about bird flu symptoms addressed to specialists in medicine is expected to be written in a technical style.

Due to the paramount importance of style in translation, Nida and Taber define translation as a process consisting in "reproducing in the receptor language [TL] the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in meaning and secondly in style" (1969: 12). This definition clearly shows the importance of style in translation, especially in literary and religious texts that aim at conveying a message and, at the same time, producing an effect on their receptors through the use of a special style. In this case, style is not a linguistic ornament. Rather, it is "an essential part of the very act of translating… without which the translation ceases to be a translation in the full sense of the word" (Zaky 2006).

Religious texts in general offer more elaborate stylistic problems in translation. This is owing to the fact that they are addressed to different receptors, thus requiring various styles matching each group (Chatzitheodorou 2006). The Glorious Qur'ân in particular depends on many styles in conveying its message: historical narrative, didactic, argumentative, literary, persuasive, etc. (Mir 2006). These various styles make translating the Glorious Qur'ân a hard task to carry out. However, a translator of a sacred text in general and the Glorious Qur'ân in particular should not pay attention to style at the cost of meaning.

3.1. **Clarity**

Clarity is one of the stylistic priorities in any sound translation. To achieve clarity, any translation should avoid ambiguity, unless intended by the ST author (e.g. political texts), as much as possible, in all its aspects: lexical, syntactic, semantic and stylistic. Indeed, clarity is a guarantee of intelligibility, which is the ultimate goal behind translation.
To attain clarity, the simplicity of language should be adopted in any translation. Simplicity is the potential of the language used in translation to be easily heard or listened to and grasped. However, simplicity does not mean depending on colloquial expressions, vulgar words or expressions on the pretext that they are easily understood and, thus, accomplish the aim behind translation. In fact, "the principal objective in style should be toward dignity and simplicity. The combination of the two is the highest" (Nida 1947: 17). For instance, Ghâlî renders the verse that reads:

\[
\text{(Yawma lâ yughny mawlan ‘an mawlan shay’an) (44: 41)}
\]

as

\[
\text{‘The Day a patronizer will not avail any patronized thing’. His ‘any patronized thing’ seems syntactically vague and strictly literal. ‘Patronized’ is supposed to describe someone protected by the ‘patronizer’. However, ‘patronized’ here describes ‘thing’, not the person who is in need of support. The whole translation is thus awkward and far away from being simple, though it can be simply translated as ‘the Day (when) a supporter will not benefit anyone asking for support anything’.*}
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In addition, a translation should cater to the taste of the age; this undoubtedly makes it easily appeal to its receptors. For instance, translating an English poem into archaic Arabic, employing difficult strange words and constructions, is supposed to make receptors completely avoid it. The simplicity of the language adopted in translation, however, should not be at the cost of semantic precision. Meaning should always have a priority over style.

Sacred texts in general should be translated in a simple language. This is due to the fact that the aim behind translating such texts is to provide a chance to everybody to receive and understand their teachings well. If they are translated in a difficult language, employing ambiguous words, elaborate constructions and highly literary devices, the TL receptor is not expected to grasp them altogether. The effect of the simplicity of the language used in translation can be felt when comparing different translations of a given sacred text. Nida, for instance, believes that the 1970 New English Bible (NEB) is easier to be read, understood and, therefore, felt than the 1895 English Revised Version (ERV) thanks to the great efforts of the panel of stylists who participated in producing the first -- the NEB -- and endeavored to facilitate every part of it (2000: 132).

It is also worth noting that the archaic style of earlier Biblical translations, especially that of the King James Version (KJV), influenced many English translations of the Glorious Qur’ân. As a result, … new converts [to Islam] have been heard to express their weariness at the Biblical style of Qur’ân translations and their desire for translations in regular, modern, free-flowing English, which would not only be scholarly but also interesting and enjoyable. (Al-Ghazâlî 1983:13)
All these examples prove that the simplicity of the language used in translating sacred texts, in order that they are easily received and understood by the general receptor, is a must.

3.2. Ellipsis
Ellipsis poses a special stylistic problem in translation. Ellipsis, according to As-Sâmirâ’î (2006), refers to the omission of some parts of a sentence which can be understood either from the surrounding text or the situation itself. It is sometimes used to avoid repetition. The aim behind using ellipsis may be to urge receptors to participate in understanding the text rather than having a negative stance by merely receiving it passively. Ellipsis poses a problem in translation since the translator is faced with an incomplete text and, therefore, should know the missing parts, restructure the ST and, then, begin to translate it. The missing parts, especially on translating a sacred text, may be interpreted in various ways, thus complicating the translator’s task more and more. Arabic in particular depends much on ellipsis. Therefore, in translating from Arabic into English, a great care should be taken to make the implicit in Arabic explicit in English (Massoud 1988: 23).

In particular, the language of the Glorious Qur'ân is full of numerous examples of ellipsis. For instance, As-Suyûtî & Al-Mahallî think that the Qur'ânic verses:

\[\text{\‘Innee 'âmantu birabikum fa'isma'ûni (25) Qeela udkhul Al-Jannata qâla yâ layta qawmee ya'lamûna/ 25 I believe in your Lord, so listen to me.' 26 He was told,' Enter the Garden,' so he said, 'If only my people knew} \]

\[\text{(36: 25-26) contain an ellipsis after} \]

\[\text{fa'isma'ûni referring to the killing of the person speaking}\]

\[\text{in the verse on the part of his people. Accordingly, this ellipsis should be mentioned in the translation, which can finally go as} \]

\[\text{Surely, I have believed in your Lord, so listen to me (but his people killed him)} \]

\[\text{.* The words placed between brackets are the elided ones that should be mentioned and, at the same time, put in brackets to make the receptors know that they are not mentioned in the original.} \]

3.3. Redundancy
Redundancy is the opposite of ellipsis. It is a rhetorical device depending on repeating the same meaning by using different words acting as synonyms. It may also be represented by using superfluous words that do not add anything new to the meaning already conveyed before (As-Sâmîrâ’î 2006). In English, for instance, expressions like PIN number and new beginning are considered redundant. This is due to the fact that N in the expression PIN number refers to the word number. So, there is no need to repeat it. New beginning is also redundant since any beginning is always new. In Arabic, furthermore, an expression likeبَحْثَانَ عَنَ الأَسبَابِ وَالأَيَادِيِّاتِ الرَّئِيسَةِ (1) bathhan ‘an al-‘asbâbî wal-mubarirâtî ar-ra’îsâti is a redundant one since أَسْبَابُ ‘asbâb has the same meaning of مِرَادَاتُ mubârabirât. Since redundancy in these examples does not have a rhetorical purpose, it is considered a rhetorical defect. In case there is a
rhetorical purpose, such as emphasizing the meaning, redundancy is regarded as a stylistic advantage; and this occurs much in the Glorious Qur’ân.

Redundancy is used in the Glorious Qur’ân as a means of emphasis, not as a linguistic ornament. For example, the Qur’ânic verse:

\[ \text{Qâla hiya ‘aşâya ’atawakka’u ‘alayhâ wa’ahushshu bihâ ‘alâ ghanamy waliya feehâ ma’âribu ’ukhrâ / 'It is my staff,' he said, 'I lean on it; restrain my sheep with it; I also have other uses for it.'} \] (20:18) is a redundant one. In this verse, Prophet Moses is supposed to answer Allâh's question placed in the previous one:

\[ \text{Wamâ tilka bi-yameenika yâ Mûsâ / Moses, what is that in your right hand?} \] (20:17). The question Allâh poses to Prophet Moses concerns only the nature of the thing he holds, not its function. But Prophet Moses' answer covers many things. First, he defines the nature of the thing in his hands, which is enough for the question; but he does not stop at this point. He mentions how he uses his stick in leaning on it and using it in beating down tree leaves for his sheep. When he feels that his answer came longer than required, he sums up, saying that he also uses it in many other things. The aim behind Prophet Moses' long answer, according to Imam Ar-Râzî, may be that he wanted to enjoy speaking directly to Allâh for the longest time. It may also be that he thought that the purpose of Allâh's question was not to know the nature of his stick, but to know from him in what way he used it in order to tell him that he would be able to use it in some miracles afterwards (1981, Vol. 11: 24).

In translation, redundancy should always be taken into account. If the aim behind it is to merely add a linguistic ornament without a rhetorical purpose, it should be left in the translation in order that the Target Text (TT) is direct and free from any useless repetitions. Thus, the above-mentioned Arabic expression

\[ \text{bâhthun ‘an al-’asbâbi wal-mubarirâti ar-ra’îsati} \] can be translated as

**in search for the main reasons not as in search for the main reasons and justifications.** But in case the purpose behind the redundant words, phrases or sentences is a rhetorical one such as emphasis or amplification, the redundancy should be kept in the translation in order that the TT is like the ST in all its details and, thus, reflects the spirit of the SL.

### 3.4. Extraposition

Extraposition is another stylistic problem in translation. It refers to

> The process or result of moving an element from its normal position to a position at or near the end of the sentence, e.g. *That the boy came in late upset the teacher, compared with* It upset the teacher that the boy came in late. (Crystal 1991: 131)

Arabic is a greatly extrapositive language, employing many forms of extraposition with rhetorical purposes. For example, the Arabic sentence

> yatawakkalu al-mu’minûna ‘ala Allâhi (Put trust the faithful in
Allâh) can be extraposed as \( \text{al-mu’minûna yatawakkaluna ‘ala Allâhi} \) (The faithful put trust in Allâh) and as \( \text{‘ala Allâhi yatawakkalu al-mu’minûna} \) (in Allâh put trust the faithful). Each of these sentences expresses nearly the same meaning, but the rhetorical purpose of each is different: in the first one, the focus of the sentence is placed on the action of \( \text{‘ala Allâhi} \) (putting trust in Allâh); in the second, the focus is on \( \text{al-mu’minûna} \) (the faithful); and in the third, the focus is on \( \text{Allâh} \) (Allâh). But it should not be thought that the only aim behind extraposition is drawing attention by focusing on a given part of the sentence. In fact, this phenomenon has many rhetorical purposes such as praise, dispraise, significance, degradation and veneration (As-Sâmirâ’î 2006).

The Glorious Qur’ân in particular is full of many extraposition examples, whose rhetorical purposes depend on the context and how far extraposition serves the intended meaning. For instance, the Qur’ânic verse that reads:

\[
\text{‘ala Allâhi yatawakkaluna, ‘ala Allâhi yatawakkaluna al-mu’minûna.}
\]

(Fa’mmâ al-yateema falâ taqhar / So, do not be harsh with the orphan) (93:9) is a live example. In this verse, the word \( \text{al-yateema} \) is extraposed to warn everybody against oppressing the orphan as he/she is weak and has nobody to defend him/her. So, the rhetorical purpose behind extraposing \( \text{al-yateema} \) is to attract the attention of everybody not to deal with the orphan unjustly or oppress him/her (As-Sâmirâ’î 2006).

Another example of extraposition is the Qur’ânic verse:

\[
\text{Wa’ith ‘akhaṭhâna mina an-nabiyyeena mîthâqahum wamînka wamin Nûh wa’Ibrâheem waMûsâ wa’Îsâ ibni Maryama wa’akhaṭhâna minhum meethâqan ghaleethan / We took a solemn pledge from the Prophets — from you [Muhammad], from Noah, from Abraham, from Moses, from Jesus, son of Mary — We took a solemn pledge from all of them} \) (33:7). In this verse, the word \( \text{mînka} \) is extraposed. It is related to Prophet Muhammad. The context mentions many Prophets, including Noah (Nûh), Abraham (‘Ibrâheem), Moses (Mûsâ) and Jesus (‘Îsâ). All of these Prophets are mentioned in the verse chronologically. As long as the context is chronological, Prophet Muhammad is supposed to be mentioned after Jesus (‘Îsâ). But a shift in arrangement occurs: Prophet Muhammad is mentioned before all of these Prophets and extraposed in a special position in the verse. The goal behind this extraposition is "to honor Prophet Muhammad all over the Messengers of Resolve" (As-Sâmirâ’î 2006).

In translation, extraposition should be taken into consideration so that the rhetorical purpose in the SL is kept in the TL. In translating

\[
\text{Fa’mmâ al-yateema falâ taqhar} \] (93:9), for instance, \( \text{al-yateema} \) should be positioned in a place identical or nearly identical, as much as possible, to its position in the ST in order that everybody's attention is drawn towards it, thus
achieving the goal of extraposing it in the verse. Accordingly, ‘Ali’s translation of this verse as (Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness) (1997: 1753) does not convey the intended aim behind extraposing al-yateema. His translation does not focus on al-yateema, but on the action warned against; that is, oppressing him/her. Ghâlî, in contrast, offers a more accurate translation of the verse under study as (Then, as for the orphan, then do not subdue (him)) (2005: 596). This translation succeeds in drawing the attention of receptors to al-yateema and, therefore, is identical to the original in achieving the rhetorical purpose behind extraposing it at the beginning of the verse.

4. Cultural Problems

Another more elaborate type of problems that is always there in translation concerns cultural problems. So many people think that translation is only a linguistic process, not paying attention to the fact that culture is so related to language that both can never be separated in general and in translation in particular. In fact, culture causes "many more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Nida 2000: 130).

Culture, as many people believe, comprises everything in life, large or small. This simple view held by many people is also asserted by many organizations concerned with culture. For example, the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) defines culture as

an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relations and expected behaviors of racial, ethnic, religious or social groups and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations. (as cited in Kamal 2005: 451)

This definition sheds light on the relationship between language and culture, asserting that language is part of culture. Probably, none offers a description of the interrelationship between culture and language and then translation like Susan Bassnett, who believes that language

is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy. In the same way that the surgeon, operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril. (2000: 14)

This proves that language is part of culture, and makes it necessary for any translator to take culture into account.

As some linguistic problems of translation arise from the differences between the SL and the TL, cultural problems also occur as a result of the differences between the SC (Source Culture) and the TC (Target Culture). Here, it should be asserted that not all cultures are alien to one another with the same degree. The greater the differences between the SC and the TC, the greater the difficulties in translation; and the less differences between them, the less the difficulties in translation. This can be clear in translating, for example, from German into English. Both English and German belong to the same language family (the Germanic branch of the
Indo-European family) and have greatly similar cultures, which facilitates translation from and into both of them. However, translating from Arabic into English is a greatly difficult task. This is due to the differences in the origins of both Arabic (belonging to the Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family) and English (belonging to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family) and the extremely different cultures represented by them. In this concern, Nida sees that when the SC and the TC are very different-- as in the case between Arabic and English-- it is expected that there will be many "basic themes and accounts which cannot be naturalized by the process of translating" (2000: 137). However, a translator should attempt to acquire both the SC and the TC in order to be able to convey the message in a correct way.

As a translator should be well versed in both the SL and the TL, he/she should be of vast knowledge of both the SC and the TC. A translator must be "bilingual and bicultural, if not multicultural" (Karmanian 2006). The translator's deep knowledge of the SC and the TC is a great help in translation since it helps the translator get familiar with the way of thinking of his/her receptors and what they expect from his/her translation. Consequently, he/she colors his/her translation according to their way of thinking, thus leading to their quick understanding of the message. Moreover, a translator's knowledge of culture helps him/her produce the most precise expression which sometimes depends on culture. For instance, when a translator is asked to translate the Arabic sentence ؛ إِنّهُ لِيُبَلَّغُ صَدِرِي أَنَّ أَرَّاكَ 'Iinnahu la-yuthliju šadrya 'an 'arâka into English, he/she should be aware of both Arabic and English cultures and how the differences between the two cause many problems in translating this sentence. Arabic is the language of some peoples mostly living in desert where اثلج (snow) is something everybody likes. In contrast, English is the language of some peoples mostly living under storms and snow for a great part of the year. So, warmth in this culture is something desired by all people. While اثلج (snow) is a reference to the happiness of any Arab, warmth is another reference to the happiness of any English-speaking person. The Arabic sentence ؛ إِنّهُ لِيُبَلَّغُ صَدِرِي أَنَّ أَرَّاكَ 'Iinnahu la-yuthliju šadrya 'an 'arâka expresses happiness. So, it is illogical to translate it as It snows my heart to see you since this expresses unhappiness, thus expressing a completely different meaning than the intended one. Therefore, the best translation for this Arabic sentence is to use the English idiom to warm the cockles of heart; and the final translation goes as It warms the cockles of my heart to see you. This translation, which may appear contradictory to the original at first sight, responds to the TC concepts and conveys the message in an intelligible way. All this asserts the fact that vast knowledge on the part of the translator of both the SC and the TC is a must for the translation to be precise and idiomatic.

In case the translator does not pay attention to culture, many instances of misunderstanding or complete distortion of the message may occur. One day, an Egyptian translator wanted to translate a Sudanese poem that recounted the story of a Shilluk (3) chief spitting on the ground in front of his brother. He interpreted this action, according to his Egyptian culture, as a sign of rejection or lack of
respect. So, he was later amazed to find out that this action in Shilluk culture of the Sudan is a sign of forgiveness, not rejection (Massoud 1988: 13). This example may highlight the importance of not looking upon different cultures, especially the non-widely spread ones, when translating and bearing in mind that respecting cultures, regardless of their spread, is a step towards producing a dignified translation (Nida 1954: 14).

If the translator should be aware of culture in translating any text in general, he/she should pay special attention to culture in translating a sacred text in particular. This owes to the fact that sacred texts include very deep and elaborate cultures. A simple look at the Holy Bible or the Glorious Qur'an, for instance, reveals much about this. The Holy Bible is composed of 66 books in the form of ancient writings and divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic; and some of its passages cover many cultures and more than a thousand years. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, though some of its parts had been earlier written in Hebrew or Aramaic and then translated into Greek (Chatzitheodorou 2006). The different languages of the Holy Bible suggest that there are numerous cultures and different ages inserted in it. Moreover, the Holy Bible is a very deep book on all aspects of life such as history (Adam and Eve, etc.); clothing (sandals, coat, etc.); drinking (wine, etc.); money (penny, etc.); measures (mile, etc.); government (King, Emperor, etc.); law (advocate, covenant, will, etc.); occupations (carpenter, teacher, etc.); religion (God, apostle, etc.); the supernatural (devil, ghost, spirit, etc.). All this adds more and more problems before any translator of the Holy Bible.

The Glorious Qur'an is a very rich book on all cultural matters. It comprises many historical incidents such as the histories of many Prophets and Messengers along with some historical figures: Prophet Moses (7:142-145); Prophet Noah (3:33); Pharaoh (40:23-24), etc. Furthermore, it mentions many scientific issues (52:6) and foretells many aspects of the Unseen such as Paradise (64:9), Hell (9:63), the supernatural world (15:27) and what will happen in the Day of Judgment (99:1-8). The Glorious Qur'an also deals with many decencies of dealing with wives (4:19), having sexual intercourse with wives or husbands (2:222), dealing with neighbors (4:36), having food (5:4), etc. In addition, it mentions many food and drinking items such as meat (52:22), milk (66:16) and fruits such as vine (80:28) and pomegranate (6:99). All this makes the Glorious Qur'an a book of a vast coverage of culture, thus making it more and more difficult to translate in any language, especially if this language does not have a long cultural tradition like Arabic.

Idioms, proverbs and culture-bound words in particular cause many cultural problems in translation. They all share in that they have cultural origins and, therefore, require a cultural background before translation begins.

4.1. Idioms
An idiom, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* [OALD], is "a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words" (1992). For example, the idiom *to kick the bucket* expresses the meaning of death in English. It is composed of words whose literal meanings are completely far away from the meaning of the idiom as a whole. So, foreign learners of English cannot imagine that this idiom, or group of words, conveys the idea of death. This is due to the fact that this idiom, as all idioms in all languages, has a cultural association. As long as no two cultures are the same, cultural problems will always occur when trying to understand and translate idioms.

A translator is advised to have a cultural background about any idiom he/she is going to translate. This background is supposed to make him/her get the true and complete meaning behind the idiom and, at the same time, enable him/her to find an equivalent idiom having the same or a similar function in the TL. For instance, when a translator is faced with an idiom like *to carry coals to Newcastle*, he/she may find a great difficulty in guessing its meaning. Only the cultural background can solve this problem. Newcastle is a city located on the north bank of the River Tyne in North East England. It has been a large port and center for coal exports ("Newcastle Upon Tyne," 1998: 760). This gave rise to the idiom *to carry coals to Newcastle* meaning to do something unnecessary. Of course, it is useless to take coals to a city full of coals. So, the idiom concerned means to do something worthless.

When translating an idiom, it is better to use an equivalent idiom, if possible. Therefore, the Arabic idiom يبيع مياه في حارة السقايين *yibee' mayyah fi hârit is-saqqaiyeen* (literally: *to sell water in the water-bringers' alley*) is a good translation of the English idiom *to carry coals to Newcastle* since it has an equivalent function to the English idiom and expresses the local Arabic culture, especially in Egypt. At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly all districts of large Egyptian cities like Cairo and Alexandria were not provided with water supplies. Someone called سقنا *saqqâ* (*water bringer*) used to bring water to these districts. As usual in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century, people with the same jobs used to live in the same place, which was usually an alley named after them. Thus, there were the alleys of shoemakers, blacksmiths, water bringers, etc. At that time, it was useless of anybody to sell water in the alley of water bringers since it was full of water and needed nothing more. Then, the idiom يبيع مياه في حارة السقايين *yibee' mayyah fi hârit is-saqqaiyeen* arose expressing the meaning of doing something completely unimportant.

The cultural background is the only way out to translating idioms in an equivalent way. So, a translator should pay much attention to idioms and not be satisfied with translating them literally since literal translation of idioms could lead to complete misunderstanding. In case the translator is unaware of the cultural background concerning the idiom under translation, he/she should consult specialized dictionaries or encyclopedias; they may be of much help to him/her.
4.2. Proverbs
A proverb is "a short sentence, etc., usually known by many people, stating something commonly experienced or giving advice" (CIDE 1995). It is formed through observation and experience. If it endures the test of time, it becomes familiar to everybody and usually memorized. Then, it is passed from a generation to another. By its nature, the proverb is culture-bound; that is, it comes into being in a special culture that is very often different from any other one. For instance, the English proverb *put your trust in God, but keep your powder dry* was first said by the Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) during the English Civil War (1642-1652). He said it to his soldiers who were about to cross a river in order to remind them of putting their trust in God and, at the same time, to take care of water lest it destroys their powder (Al-Balabkî 2000: 76). By that, Cromwell wanted to assert to his soldiers the fact that trusting God did not mean to be lazy or not to take care. Cromwell's warning went on as a proverb memorized and mentioned by many people, who may know nothing about its history. Therefore, translating a proverb requires a cultural background that helps the translator get the precise meaning of the proverb and, then, find an equivalent one in the TL.

When translating a proverb, the translator should think of a TL proverb having the same function and responding to the TC. In fact, translating an SL proverb as a proverb in the TL has a role in convincing the receptor of the significance of the proverb in summing up experiences. The English proverb *A cat has nine lives*, for instance, can be translated into Classical Arabic as ً‘اَمَرَعَ مِن حَيَةً (literally: of a life longer than that of a serpent) or colloquial Egyptian Arabic as ْتِبْْلَٰثَبَ وَيْلِقَأَكَِنْحَيْسَة (literally: like cats which have seven souls/lives). According to English culture, a cat has nine lives, expressing the fact that cats live for a long time in spite of the dangers they encounter. In ancient Arabic culture, in the Pre-Islamic period and afterwards, people thought that a serpent lived for a long time. In fact, they used to live in the desert and see serpents and many kinds of snakes. They, besides, thought that a serpent did not die until it was killed. Nowadays, Egyptians have a conception about cats similar to the English one. But the difference is that Egyptians think that a cat has seven lives, not nine. It is clear, then, that the two given Arabic translations express the same idea included in the English proverb and suit the TC mode of thought.

In case it is impossible to find an equivalent TL proverb, the translator can translate the proverb literally and then explicate its meaning in a footnote, especially if he/she wishes to make his/her receptors get familiar with the way of thinking of the SL speakers. For instance, if it is supposed that there is not an equivalent Arabic proverb for the English proverb *Even Homer sometimes nods*, a translator can render it literally as ًٍّاَحَيُّةُ اَمْعَنَ مُن حَيَّةً Hatta Humiruws yukhtī’u ًاَحِيَّانَ and then explicate the intended meaning behind the proverb, telling his/her receptors that the significance of this proverb is to assert the fact that all people are fallible. He/she can also clarify that Homer (commonly
assumed to have lived in the 8th Century B.C.) was the greatest Greek poet and the writer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and that he was considered a symbol of accuracy and enlightenment. Besides, it can be mentioned that the proverb under discussion, which was first said by Horace (65 B.C. - 8 A.D.), went throughout English-speaking countries meaning that if the great Homer made mistakes sometimes, then it is not a sin for anybody to make a mistake (Al-Ba’labkî 2000: 35). In this way, the translator can be sure that the precise meaning of the proverb is greatly likely to be grasped by his/her receptors. Certainly, explicating a proverb in a way similar to this one offered here requires a great deal of cultural background concerning the origins of the proverb and the conditions under which it originated.

### 4.3. Culture-Bound Words

Culture-bound words are those words that are deeply rooted in a given culture. They are colored according to the features of this culture and, thus, are very difficult for anybody outside it to understand them. For instance, in many of Naguib Mahfouz’s novels, many words and constructions -- like at-ta’miya, كفر الزغارى *Kafr Az-Zaghghârî*, الربابى *ar-rabâbâ*, يا ابن القديمة *yâ ibn al-qadeema!*, يا أطاف الله *yâ ‘alţâf iLlâh!* -- are culture-bound, thus making them very difficult to be well translated (El-Gamal, 2000: 79). These words, which denote food, places, musical instruments, swear words and interjections, are very difficult to be translated into any other language since they are rooted in Egyptian culture, especially the culture of the poor living in poor slums and alleys. The solution to this problem is to transfer or paraphrase them, or explain them in footnotes (El-Gamal 2000: 78). In translating *ar-rabâbâ*, for instance, it can be transferred as *ar-rabâbâ*; paraphrased as *a violin-like instrument*; or explained in a footnote as: *a musical instrument similar to a violin and composed of a solid short stick, with a few number of cords, producing generally sad oriental tunes.*

As long as sacred texts include elaborate cultures, as noted above concerning the Holy Bible and the Glorious Qur’ân, those who shoulder the responsibility of translating them are required to look closely at culture-bound words that teem with them.

The Holy Bible is full of culture-bound words in many of its books. Words like *synagogue, homer, ephah, cherubim, seraphim, jubilee, Sadducees, Pharisees*, etc. are all related to the very Biblical culture with its practices and ceremonies. In translating these words, there is very little hope to eliminate all the "traces of the 'foreign settings' since they are deeply imbedded in the very thought structure" (Nida 2000: 137) of the SC. So, if there is no way out to translate them equivalently, they can be paraphrased or transferred and explained in footnotes. In this way, there will be a guarantee that they will be understood by the average receptor.
The Glorious Qur'an is a great source of culture-bound words. Since it was revealed in the Arabian Peninsula, it reflects desert culture by mentioning numerous desert products (16:80), animals (6:144), means of transport (16:8), landscapes (13:3), and conceptions (37:65). Therefore, anyone translating the Glorious Qur'an should be familiar with that culture in which it was revealed. The above-mentioned diachronic approach suggested by Enani in his On Translating Arabic: A Cultural Approach (2000b). can be of much benefit in this concern. In addition, the context in which the verses of the Glorious Qur'an were sent down should be completely taken into account before translating them. This can be done through a command of the reasons behind the revelation of these verses, which can be known from the Glorious Qur'an interpretations.

For instance, **تُصَعَّرْ tuša‘‘ir**, in the verse:

(Walâ tuša‘‘ir khaddaka lin-nâsi / Do not turn your nose up at people) (31:18);

and **أَرْآَﺴَﻬُﻢْ 'arkasahum** in the verse:

(Famâlakum fil-munâfiqeena fi‘atayni waAllâhu 'arkasahum bimâ kasabû / [Believers], why are you divided in two about the hypocrites, when God Himself has rejected them because of what they have done?) (4:88) are all culture-bound words that are very difficult to be understood or translated unless the translator is well versed in Arabic culture and the TC. These words represent the very makeup of Arabic culture, and are very hard nowadays for many Arabs to understand because of the vast differences between modern Arabic culture and the ancient one at the time of the Glorious Qur'an revelation.

In translating the Glorious Qur'an, the translator finds huge difficulties in conveying the complete meaning of culture-bound words like the ones mentioned above. For instance, when translating the Qur'anic verse that reads:

(Walâ tuša‘‘ir khaddaka lin-nâsi) (31:18), **تُصَعَّرْ tuša‘‘ir** should be explicated before the translation begins. This word is greatly related to desert culture, where it is understood as a verb from the noun **الصَّعَرَ الصَّعَرَ aš-ša‘r**, which is a disease that afflicts camels and makes their necks twist. While the camel afflicted with this disease walks with its chest straight forward, its neck appears twisted to the right or the left in a funny way (Hifny 1992: 170). Here, the Glorious Qur'an likens the haughty to the camel in that shape by way of demoralizing him/her. This image was completely understood by ancient Arabs, to whom the Glorious Qur'an was sent, since they were fully aware of many types of camels, their characteristics and diseases.

Generally, the verse under discussion calls people not to walk in a haughty manner, with some connotations concerning the disease of **الصَّعَرَ aš-ša‘r**. As to the verse translation, Pickthall translates it as 〈Turn not thy cheek in scorn toward...〉
folk) (1981: 540), ‘Alî as 《And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at men》 (1982: 563), Arberry as 《Turn not thy cheek away from men in scorn》 (1983: 263) and Ghâlî as 《And do not turn your cheek away haughtily from mankind》 (2005: 412). All of these translations convey the exact plain intended meaning of the verse. But none succeeds in portraying the connotation associated with the verse; that is, the image of the camel afflicted with the disease of aṣ-ṣaʿr that calls for laughing at the haughty. In this case, clarifying this image is of vital importance since it illuminates the shades of the meaning and the rhetorical purpose behind it on the one hand and reflects the SL speakers' ways of thinking and culture on the other. As long as it is impossible to produce the precise meaning of the verse and its connotations in the translation -- as clear in the four translations given above -- the last resort is to explain it in a footnote as follows:

*the verb* ṣaʿir *is derived from the noun* aṣ-ṣaʿr, *which is a disease that afflicts a camel and causes its neck to twist, while its chest is straight forward, in a funny way.*

As noted above, culture has a very effective role in translation. Even when the translation is utterly precise linguistically, it can never attain complete intelligibility without responding to the TC. Cultural issues in translation can convey the massage or distort it. Therefore, they should be given special attention, especially in translating idioms, proverbs and culture-bound words; and translators should familiarize themselves with both the SC and the TC.

5. Conclusion
The semantic problems offered here (i.e. homonymy, polysemy and little knowledge of semantic change) need much readings on semantics and etymology so as the translator can overcome them. Most of these problems, especially semantic change, are not clear-cut ones. So, they may drag the inexperience translator to mistranslate and, hence, miscommunicate. As regards the stylistic problems discussed here, they should be given attention so that the effect of the ST can be transferred in the TT with the same, or similar, effect intended by the author. It must be clear that a good, easy and simple style has a very important role in making the translation receptors (readers or listeners) accept or reject the translation altogether. Culture differences cause many problems that should be given much attention, if the translation is intended to attain any kind of intelligibility and accuracy. Even if the TT is linguistically correct, cultural mistranslations would distort the whole effort of the translator in case he/she is not concerned with the cultural background where the text under translation was produced. Idioms, proverbs and culture-bound words are among the most grave problems that may cause complete intelligibility if not taken into account. Accordingly, any translation of any text in general and the Glorious Qur'ân in particular should be based on anthropological training of the culture into which the text is going to be translated.
Endnotes

1 Here is a passage from Al-Maqqarî At-Tilmsânî's Nafh At-Ţeebi min Ghusni Al-'Andalusi Ar-Raţeebi (The scent spread from the Andalusian ripe twig) in which the word  uğûlî occurs with this meaning:

"Faqâla 'Abû Mûsâ lis-Sulţân: haţha kalâmun 'uşûlîun muhaqaqun/ 'Abû Mûsâ said to the Sultan, 'This speech is conforming to the rules of jurisprudence and verified.' "* (1996, Vol. 3: 20)

2 The person speaking in this verse (36: 25) and the five verses before it (36: 20-24) is called Hâbeeb Ibn Marî who may have worked as a carpenter, bleacher or shoemaker. It is reported that this man was a leper and was so charitable that he gave half of what he earned to the needy (Al-Qurţûbi 1990, Vol. 8: 5652).

3 The Shilluk are a major Nilotic ethnic group of Southern Sudan, living on the west bank of the Nile between Lake No and the latitude 21º N. They speak an eastern Sudanic language of the Chary-Nile branch of the Nilo-Saharan family. ("Shilluk," 1986, Vol. 10: 739).
Transliteration of Arabic Sounds in English

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6 This translation guide is adapted from Ghâlî's *English Grammar* (2001: 45).
A List of the Abbreviations and Symbols Used

CIDE: Cambridge International Dictionary of English
ERV: English Revised Version
KJV: King James Version (a Bible translation)
MSA: Modern Standard Arabic
MWOD: Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary
NCCC: National Center for Cultural Competence
NEB: New English Bible
OALD: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary
SC: Source Culture
SL: Source Language
ST: Source Text
TC: Target Culture
TL: Target Language
TT: Target Text
⟨⟩ These symbols are used to quote Qur'anic verses.
-chief This sign is used to separate Qur'anic verses.
* This sign refers to a translation suggested by the author.
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