Assessing the Quality of the Translation of Sex-Related Euphemisms in the Holy Qur’an: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

Very broadly, euphemisms are sweet-sounding, or at least inoffensive, alternatives for expressions that speakers or writers prefer not to use in executing a particular communicative intention on a given occasion” (Burridge 2012, 66). Based on this definition and adopting a pragmatic framework for the interpretation and translation of euphemism, this paper goes on to assess the quality of four English translations of four selected sex-related euphemisms in the Qur’an. Ross, RABIIT (Royal AAL AL-BAYT Institute Translation), Ghali and Bakhtiar have been selected from a period that extends to over 350 years. The paper uses Juliane House’s functional-pragmatic model of translation evaluation (1981, 2001, and 2015) to assess the quality of these four translations. The four translations are selected to examine the impact of four main variables on the quality of the translation of such euphemistic expressions; namely, historicity, gender, native language and institutionalism. The analysis of the data shows that the translations tend to generally preserve the euphemistic nature of the ST and convey it in an equally indirect and polite manner. The paper shows that there is a general tendency to translate these euphemistic expressions using an overt strategy, perhaps as an attempt to provide the target readers with access to source text euphemizing mechanisms and to preserve the indirectness and the politeness of the source text, the Qur’an.

Keywords: Qur’anic studies, Contrastive textology, Euphemism, Pragmatics, Translation, Translation quality assessment.

1. Introduction

The Qur’an, being a divine message, is inherently a polite text, hence essentially indirect, (Al-Dulaimi and Aued 2012). This paper examines how Qur’anic indirectness gets communicated across languages through looking at the translation into English of Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms. One of Grice's main contributions to the study of human communication is his emphasis on the significance of indirectness in human communication. The question of how the unsaid gets communicated has occupied researchers in communication, discourse analysis and rhetoric for a long time: Warren (1992, 1999); Lakoff and Johnson (1980); Lakoff (1987); Lakoff and Johnson (1999); Stallard (1993); Gibbs (1994); Nunberg (1995); Stirling (1996); Edwards (1997); Faucounier and Turner (2002); Allan and Burridge (2006), Pinker (1997, 2003) and Burridge (2012) among others. Euphemism is one of the major devices through which humans can express indirectness in different ways to carry out social functions such as politeness, implicitness and political correctness. But there is tension between being indirect and being
clear and orderly. Because of its indirectness, euphemism is inherently vague, which contradicts the clarity norm of the cooperative principle, Grice (1975).

There is often tension between the denotation of the conventional expression and that of the target expression. The former represents the linguistically constructed literal sense of the conventional expression and the latter represents the connotative and socially constructed sense of the expression. The former is the symbolic, hence arbitrary representation of the sense of the expression, while the latter is the indexical, hence the socially motivated representation of the sense of the expression. This tension leaves the translator of euphemisms in a dilemma. Translators are split between being faithful to the sense of the ST (the Qur’an, in the case of this paper) preserving the politeness of the message on the one hand, and being faithful to the target audience on the other by maintaining clarity of expression and rendering the intended message, thus observing the quality maxim of the cooperative principle.

This paper aims to investigate the translation quality of sex-related euphemisms in some Qur’anic texts in order to see to what extent the translators selected for this study have been able to strike a balance between the two poles of translation strategy, domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1996). The study focuses on sex-related euphemisms because sex has always been a major concern of human life and in many societies it tends to create some kind of embarrassment, hence the indirectness in expressing it. The study provides a fresh insight into the study of Qur’anic translations with regard to such a crucial aspect like indirectness and politeness of the Qur’anic text. Since euphemism varies across cultures and even across time within the same culture, its translation becomes an intriguing cultural and intellectual exercise in itself. However, the issue becomes even more interesting when it is about translating euphemisms in a religious book like the Qur’an into English because it carries immense cultural and practical implications to the understanding of this Holy Book by millions of people who speak English.

Linguistically, euphemisms are formed in different ways. According to Warren (1992) euphemisms can be formed by either formal or semantic strategies. Formal strategies include word-formation devices, phonemic modification, loan words, while semantic strategies include particularizations, implications, metaphors, metonyms, reversals, understatements, and overstatements. If we look at the Qur’anic text, we find that none of the formal strategies is used to form Qur’anic euphemisms (Khanfar, 2010). In fact, it seems that Standard Arabic generally does not make use of this formal technique. Farghal points out that “Arabic utilizes four major devices for euphemizing, viz., figurative expressions, circumlocutions, remodeling and antonyms” (1995, 377). Among the seven types of semantic strategies to create euphemism proposed by Warren (1992), the Qur’an tends to use the following two main strategies more frequently:

- Metonymy which refers to a contiguous relationship between the conventional sense and the novel euphemistic sense, such as the Qur’anic expression “touch women” for “having sexual intercourse” since the two senses are related in a part/whole metonymic relationship in that “touching a woman” is part of the overall sexual act with her, and “touch” is used to metonymically stand for the entire act.
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- Metaphor or resemblance between the conventional sense and the new euphemistic sense, such as “tillage” which stands in an analogous relationship to the woman or more precisely her sexual organ.

2. Research Questions

1. Are there any differences in the translation of Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms attributed to time and would it differ if the translation is done by an individual or an institution?
2. Are there any differences in the translation of Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms attributed to the translator’s native language or gender?

3. Review of Literature

Euphemism is widely used in religious discourse in general due to its indirectness and politeness which are both typical characteristics of religious discourse. Sex-related euphemisms are common in both Arabic and English because sexual relations tend to be euphemized in both languages and cultures. Several studies related to euphemism can be distributed into four different areas: (1) euphemism in Arabic, (Faraghal 1995, Khanfar 2012, and Al Shawi 2013); (2) euphemism translation between Arabic and English, (Shehab et al 2014); (3) English translations of euphemism in the Qur’an, (Al Tai 2010); and (4) English translations of sex-related euphemisms in the Qur’an, (Ali 1996, Al-Dulaimi and Aubed 2012, Al Hamad and Salman 2013, Al-Rubaiai 2013, and Al Barakati 2013).

Previous studies, mainly within the fourth area, match the interest of this study in euphemisms, but differ in scope and method, as follows:

Ali (1996) argues that when euphemism is used in texts such as the Qur’an, it acquires an aesthetic and poetic overtone which may fade or get lost when these expressions are translated into other languages. He demonstrates his claim by comparing two English translations (Sher Ali’s and Pickthal’s) of certain Qur’anic verses containing euphemistic expressions and concludes that both translations have failed in providing the functional, figurative, and - to a lesser degree – communicative equivalence of these words and expressions in English. Instead, they both obliterated the euphemistic salience by literal and lexical correspondence.

Al-Dulaimi and Aubed (2012) attempt to showcase two issues: translators’ awareness of euphemistic expressions in the translation process; and the accuracy of rendering Qur’anic euphemistic expressions into English. The study compares (1) Abdullah Yousif Ali, (2) Al Hilali and Khan and (3) Pickthlam translations of certain Qur’anic sex-related euphemistic expressions. The study contends that the Qur’anic language is such a unique one that no other language can achieve its miraculous nature whether in form or content. The study shows that English translations often fail to give the functional equivalence of certain euphemistic expressions in the Qur’an.

Al Hamad and Salman (2013) discuss the translation of 23 euphemistic expressions in the Qur’an. They classify Qur’anic euphemisms into categories: sexual intercourse, genitals, women, excretory functions, blindness and divorce. Their data come from translations by Abdullah Yousuf Ali, Hilali and
Khan, Pickthal and Arberry. They conclude that Qur’anic euphemistic expressions were not accurately translated into English and they suggest some translations based on two proposed translation techniques: linguistic approximation and cultural approximation.

Al-Rubaii (2013) investigates euphemisms in the Qur’anic Chapter known as An-Nisaa’. He analyzes several euphemistic expressions in nine verses of this Chapter and their translations by Pickthal, Arberry, and Hilali and Khan. His study shows that euphemisms in this Chapter are realized by two figures of speech: synecdoche and metonymy, and the strategies used by the translators to deal with these euphemistic expressions are: paraphrase, literal translation, and translation couplet. He concludes that not all translators have been equally successful in rendering euphemisms into English. The degree of success seems to be attributed to the level familiarity with the Qur’an as discourses, as well as the translators’ linguistic and religious background.

Al Barakati (2013) investigates how Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms are translated into English. He uses three contemporary English translations of about 29 Qur’anic verses with about 43 sex-related euphemistic expressions. Al Barakati adopts a functional framework in his analysis of such expressions and their translations. Translations were found to be source-oriented and translators tend to keep close to the forms and structures of the source text and this has led, according to Al Barakati, to successful rendering of most Qur’anic euphemisms.

The first comment that can be made about the studies reviewed above is that they do not seem to adequately problematize the notion of euphemism, nor do they sufficiently problematize the notion of translation. The concept of euphemism is taken as a fixed phenomenon and the process of translation is seen as transparent, static and in most cases as rule governed. Euphemisms in their context generally fluctuate in their meaning depending on the contextual variables active in reception situations. Burridge (2012: 79) in this connection, talks about the Allan-Burridge Law of Semantic Change which stipulates that “many euphemisms become tainted over time.” Similarly, the view of translation held by such authors as referred to above is merely a process of meaning transfer devoid of socio-cultural or political implications. The view advanced in this study derives from Venuti’s (1996: 196) argument that violence in translation “resides in its very purpose and activity: the reconstruction of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist in the target language.”

The second comment about the studies described above is that they do not seem to provide sufficient contextualization in the discussion of their data. In other words, the socio-cultural aspects of the euphemistic expressions in the SL are not thoroughly investigated; likewise, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the translations and the translators and their ideologies are not properly discussed. Euphemism interpretation and translation are greatly context-dependent processes. Apart from Al Barakati’s study, the other studies reviewed above do not seem to investigate the phenomenon using a particular theoretical model. They discuss individual examples of Qur’anic euphemism and their translations into English without relating their discussion to a specific paradigm of thought on translation quality assessment or justifying their choice of examples. The discussion of successful or unsuccessful rendering is based on surface analysis of the source text and target text expressions, usually through
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linguistic analysis. The outcome of this somewhat superficial comparison is a subjective opinion on the success or otherwise of the translation. Even Al Barakati’s study seems to build a framework based on two sources: Nord’s functional model and Nida’s and Newmark’s notion of response-oriented equivalence. In other words, only Al Barakati has attempted to build a model to use in assessing the quality of the translations of Qur’anic euphemisms. But because this model is eclectic in nature as it is synthesized from a number of sources and ideas discussed by different authors, it does not offer a fully practical and theoretically grounded model.

Furthermore, reviewing studies conducted in the area of translation quality assessment shows that these studies use different models to assess and evaluate the quality translation, as such.

Al-Qinai (2000) uses another eclectic approach to assess the quality of Arabic translations of an evocative text (an advertisement). Although the paper provided a contextualized account of both notions of ‘translation’ and ‘quality’, the model is far from a realistically systematic model because it did not show internal coherence and it came out as too comprehensive and too inclusive to be considered adequately methodical. Al Qinai’s study investigates the notion of translation quality assurance on the basis of objective parameters of textual typology, formal correspondence, thematic coherence, cohesion, pragmatic equivalence, lexical properties and grammatical/syntactic equivalence. The seven parameters are too comprehensive to provide a realistically objective account of translation quality.

Sharkas (2009) adopts a method of analysis proposed by Dickins et al (2002) to assess the quality of the translation of popular science articles but she had to adopt five textual levels of analysis which made her model another fragmentary and incoherent model. The fact that the model has to deal with five textual levels makes the model too comprehensive and rather unrealistic when it comes to actual translation quality assessment procedures. It is quite near to impossible to do a detailed description and analysis of a translation using all these five levels of analysis in a practical manner. In other words, the model is developed to be used in every day exercises of translation quality assessment (TQA) but to this end, the model seems to defeat its purpose because it purports to describe the ST and the TT in great detail using all levels of textual analysis, which is rather impossible to do realistically and objectively. As far as euphemism translation is concerned, the TQA models described here all emphasize the textual nature of translation, which is a great focus indeed. However, the focus of this study is essentially on the rendering of euphemism which is essentially a lexical phenomenon.

Williams (2004) developed a discourse-based and argumentation-centered approach to translation quality assessment. The author uses an argument schema model to assess the quality of translation because “it brings out the interrelationship and interdependence of the individual propositions, on the one hand, and the reasoning process and development of arguments and messages flowing through the text on the other.” (Williams 2004, 21). The theoretical orientation and the abstract nature of the model make this model rather impractical especially in contexts where TQA is done as a practical quality assurance routine on a daily basis. More importantly, the model is discourse-based and it seems unsuitable for the assessment of the quality of translation of euphemistic expressions which are inherently lexical.
This paper is the first study, to the best knowledge of the researchers, that adopts a one single model whose validity has been demonstrated by the author herself on a number of occasions (cf. House, 1981, 2001, 2015). In her book, House (2015) describes the processes of developing, verifying and modifying her model over the years. In chapter 7, she provides a practical example of how to implement the model on an actual source text (English) and a target text (German). This paper is the first attempt to apply House’s model on assessing the quality of the translation of Qur’anic sex-related euphemism into English.

### 4. Methodology

(1) This study uses two approaches to analyze the data and answer the research questions. The first one is a theoretical approach which is used to create the theoretical framework on which the analysis of the data is based. The second is a practical approach which looks at the data from the perspective of four main variables perceived to be useful in examining how Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms have been translated into English by four selected translations, i.e. Alexander Ross (1649), RABIIT (2015), Ghali (2005), and Bakhtiar (2012).

For the first approach, Juliane House’s register-based functional-pragmatic model of translation evaluation (1981, 2001, and 2015) is used to assess the quality of 4 different translations of 4 Qur’anic sex-related euphemistic expressions. House’s model is based on Halliday and Hassan’s notion of register (1985) which divides ‘register’ into three main dimensions: field, tenor and mode. Because euphemism is essentially a lexical phenomenon and House’s TQA model (2015) is essentially textual, the paper will use “Denotation” as the lexical representation of the dimension of “FIELD” and “Connotation” as the lexical representation of the dimension of “TENOR” in House’s model as will be shown later in the paper. Warren’s (1992) two main rhetorical strategies to create euphemism referred to above, i.e. metonymy and metaphor will be used in this paper to represent the dimension of MODE in House’s model of translation quality assessment (TQA). The table below shows the levels of register and the category used to represent each level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denotation</td>
<td>Connotation</td>
<td>Rhetorical Strategy (Figurative Expression)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Denotation is the literal or dictionary meaning of a word and it is taken to represent Field because it conveys the ideational and experiential dimension of word meaning. To arrive at the denotative meaning of each of the renditions of each one of the translators, the Oxford English Dictionary (CD-ROM edition) is used.

- Connotation is the associative meaning of a word which is the contextually-based meaning of a word and this is taken to represent the level of Tenor because it conveys the contextual dimension of word meaning. According to Fromkin and Rodman (1993: 305), “euphemistic terms have linguistic denotative meanings and connotative meanings, reflecting attitudes, emotions, and value judgments and so on.” The connotative meaning of the euphemistic expression is determined by looking at both
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the denotative meaning as well as the context of the Qur’anic verse and the pragmatic factors influencing its interpretation.

• Rhetorical strategy is the means through which the language expresses a concept or a meaning and it is taken to represent the level of Mode because it concerns how the concept or word meaning is rhetorically structured. Farghal (1995: 369) argues that “the use of figures of speech is the most common device for euphemizing in natural language.” Jakobson’s (1971) approach to the distinction between and treatment of figures is used to guide the interpretation of the rhetorical strategy used in the expression of the euphemism in the Arabic original and the four English translations. Jakobson (1971) argues that the figurative space can be reduced to two main tropes: metaphor which is based on the principle of similarity or resemblance; and metonymy which is based on the principle of contiguity.

The analysis of the data follows House’s model in the following three-stage procedure:
1. A ST/ TT profile is created along the three dimensions of Field, Tenor and Mode, which are realized by denotation, connotation and rhetorical strategy respectively.
2. The type of translation is identified, i.e. either overt or covert.
3. Discussion of matches and mismatches and whether or not the cultural filter has been applied

For the second approach, the practical approach, four variables have been identified as significant orientations that would yield substantial translational comparative insights when the four different translations of Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms are compared. The four variables are:

(2) Historicity: this variable aims to trace any historical or evolutionary changes in the use of euphemisms by comparing the oldest English translation of the Qur’an, i.e. Ross’ translation with the other translations that are relatively recent. The historicity variable addresses the issue of how euphemisms themselves can become objectionable expressions as the community shifts perspectives toward certain euphemisms, a phenomenon called “euphemism treadmill” (cf. Pinker, 2003). Alexander Ross’ (1649) translation of these euphemistic expressions is compared to the translations of the other three translations, i.e. RABIIT (2015), Ghali (2005), and Bakhtiar (2012).

(3) Institutionalism: this variable aims to examine if there are differences in the translation attributable to whether the translation was carried out by an individual or an institution and whether the translation shifts identified are due to institutional norms. For the analysis of this variable RABIIT translation of such expressions will be used since this translation in particular is produced for an institution and is produced by a team of anonymous translators. This translation will be compared with the other three translations.

(4) Native language: this variable aims to show if there are differences in the translation attributable to the variable of Arabic being the native tongue of the translator. For this variable, Ghali’s translation is used as the benchmark, comparing it to the other three translations.
Gender: this variable aims to examine any differences in the translation of such expressions that are attributable to the variable of gender. For the analysis of this variable, the translation of Laleh Bakhtiar is used as the yardstick, comparing it to the other three translations.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion:

Four euphemistic expressions are identified for analysis and discussion in this paper. The analysis and discussion will take these four expressions one by one as they occur in verses 222 and 223 of Chapter 2 of the Qur’an, following House’ model of TQA as discussed in section 3 above. It should be noted that the sample of the study is highly selective and admittedly rather small and limited. However, this decision was made in order to provide in-depth analysis and insights instead of using more examples and ending up getting only superficial coverage and discussion. It should also be noted that although the sample is only four expressions, the discussion makes cross-references to other relevant sex-related euphemisms and their translations.

(1) The translation of the Qur’anic sex-related euphemistic expression “فانعتزلوا”(separate) in Chapter 2, Verse (222)

Table (1): ST/TT comparison and register analysis of the first euphemistic expression “فانعتزلوا” (separate) in Chapter 2, Verse (222).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>TT</th>
<th>Field Denotation</th>
<th>Tenor Connotation</th>
<th>Mode Rhetorical Strategy (figurative Expression) of ST and TT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>separate yourselves from your wives</td>
<td>Remove from conjugal cohabitation, Set apart or segregate for a special purpose</td>
<td>Direct reference to physical separation by means of divorce</td>
<td>Direct, literal and explicit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RABIIT</td>
<td>part with women</td>
<td>Give up, separate (between lovers)</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metonymy: Cause for effect Giving up women leads to lack of sexual intercourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghali</td>
<td>keep apart women</td>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metonymy: Cause/Effect Keeping apart women is the cause of lack of any physical and consequently sexual contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakhtiar</td>
<td>withdraw from your wives</td>
<td>Draw away from a person</td>
<td>Dysphemistic reference to a specific aspect of a special type of sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Direct, explicit and literal rendering.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from table (1) above that the ST expression is indirect and euphemistic referring directly to the idea of “separation” which is a generic sense and could, out of context, mean all kinds of separation, physical, social, emotional and sexual. It only indirectly (metonymically) refers to the sexual act, given the pragmatic context of the Qur’anic text. The denotative meaning of the word “فائهزنوا” (separate) is to avoid, and distance. The connotation of this expression which is retrievable from contextual and contextual variables is actually the reference to the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. The ST used a generic expression that can be interpreted as euphemistic expression for sexual intercourse, given the right textual and contextual clues. However, the TTs provided by the four translators vary in this regard. The ST expression is metonymically driven as it establishes a cause/effect relationship between the trigger expression “فائهزنوا” (separate), given the right context, and the target expression, the intended meaning which is “sexual intercourse”. Separation leads to/causes the state of not having physical contact and the state of not having physical contact causes the state of not having sexual intercourse, a cyclical signification process based on a cause/effect contiguous relationship.

The translations reflect different orientations even though they are all generally formal and source oriented. They, however, differ in that some use expressions with established euphemistic meaning while others just use generic expressions hoping that the contextual clues will aid the retrieval of the euphemistic function. Ross, for example, uses the word “separate” which according to Oxford English Dictionary, means, among other meanings, “to remove from conjugal cohabitation especially by a judicial decree”. Ross in his translation uses a biblical expression relating to the separation between the priests who had been married and their wives. He is trying to use religious diction but creates some denotative confusion because what is meant by the expression “separate” is permanent separation from conjugal cohabitation, while the Qur’anic expression “فائهزنوا” (separate) is temporary separation for a special temporary reason during the menstruation period. For this Qur’anic separation there is no need for a judicial decree because it happens quite frequently every month. It should be noted here that Ross’ translation was not directly from the Arabic text of the Qur’an but from a French translation from Arabic by Sir du Ryer in 1647. It should also be noted that Ross did not know Arabic.

It is interesting that none of the other translators in this corpus used the word “separate” to translate the Arabic “فائهزنوا”, which shows a significant difference attributable to the variable of historicity. In other words, this shows that euphemistic expressions seem to shift across time (cf. Burridge, 2012 and Pinker, 2003). RABIIT, Ghali and Bakhtiar do not use this word. It seems that the word “separate” no longer expresses a euphemism, and other words are used to express this social function. In 1649 “separate” was perhaps the most readily used expression in a religious context to translate a sex-related euphemism. Ross tried to be faithful to the genre of the Qur’anic text and used equally parallel diction derived from biblical sources. However, his choice created some significant shift, and consequently a mismatch at the ideational and experiential level because at least one semantic component of “separate” is the meaning of ‘permanent separation’, which is not part of the ideational and experiential grid of the ST. If the denotative meaning of “separate is to remove from conjugal cohabitation which is permanent
separation, then the connotative meaning “indirect reference to sexual intercourse” becomes untenable. It should be noted that Ross used the word “wives” even though the ST expression is “women”. This choice is quite successful because it reflects an understanding of both the field and the tenor, i.e. the subject matter as well as the participants in the discourse. The Tenor in Ross’ translation is made more specific, explicit and intimate by explicating the relationship as that between a husband and wife but perhaps in vain due to the shift in the dimension of field. The Mode or the rhetorical strategy in Ross’ translation is that of direct, explicit and literal rendering because the separation to her is meant actual separation of cohabitation by means of a judicial decree, i.e. a divorce.

Ross clearly translated the expression formally and left it to the target reader to adjust the cultural differences between the two expressions based on the further textual evidence provided by the Qur’anic verse. There is no evidence of using a cultural filter because Ross did not really intervene as a cultural mediator to provide the pragmatically intended meaning of “separate” which is “sexual intercourse”. He provided only the trigger and left it to the reader to make the inference to the intended expression, ‘the target’ of the trope. This kind of translation is psycholinguistically complex according to House (2015) because it activates both ST and TT contexts and target readers are invited to eavesdrop not to participate in the discourse as actual participants. Ross, by adopting a biblical style, wanted the ST to be co-activated as a religious text and wanted his audience to observe and judge the original’s impact from outside (cf. House, 2015).

RABIIT’s translation uses a general and neutral, but not exactly the same expression. This translation uses “part with women” which denotatively means “give up, separate between lovers”. Both senses imply permanent separation, and the sense of temporary separation for a special reason is lost in the translation. The denotative meaning alone is not helping the target text reader to reach the intended euphemistic interpretation because the Qur’anic text does not imply permanent separation or abandonment. Even if we take it that the expression actually implies temporary separation and not a permanent one, one can still argue that the expression actually implies all kinds of abandonment, social, physical and emotional even if it is temporary, which is not the right interpretation. The Qur’anic verse means only sexual intercourse should be avoided during this period.

RABIIT’s translation is an institutional translation and institutionalism is one of the variables that this study aimed to explore to see if translations carried out by institutions would differ from those translations done by individuals. It is clear from the translation and from the discussion above that institutionalism does not play an important role because even though the actual words used in RABIIT’s translation are different from those used in Ross’, the meaning is essentially quite similar, basically to separate and leave in solitude. Institutionalism does not seem to play a significant role in translators’ choice at least in this particular example. It seems, however, that translators’ choices are more motivated by previous translation practice. In other words, especially after the 1930s Qur’anic translations into English became widely circulated and subsequent translators seemed to take previous translations as a yardstick or perhaps as a best practice. This best practice tendency made shifts in translation rather
minimal and we have what can be called Qur’anic Translation Norms that became somehow respected by later translators.

RABIIT’s translation is also overt and the role of the translators’ is limited to formal transfer of words without paying attention to the worlds that exist beyond these words. Clearly there is a mismatch between the ST expression and the TT expression in terms of connotation. The ST expression “فامتنزلوا” connotatively gives the sense of temporary separation by means of other contextual variables like para text and situational factors. It should be noted that in terms of connotation there are two semantic issues in this expression. The first one is the sense of temporariness and the second is that of restricted scope of separation. The overall discourse clarifies the first sense that the separation is temporary. The TT expression by being an overt rendition succeeds to denotatively convey the sense of separation and connotatively convey the sense of temporariness by means of other textual and discourse variables. The sense of limited scope in the ST is not clearly evident in the denotative meaning of the expression at the lexical level but is only evident at the connotative and textual level. By adopting an overt translation strategy this sense is not clearly evident at the TT’s lexical level either. It is the context that clarifies the scope of separation, abandonment and desertion. The context makes the scope limited to sexual intercourse. It is clear also that the there is no application of any cultural filter and the TT reader is left to think carefully about the ST possible cultural implications and tries to establish his own links between the possible ST and TT cultural implications.

Ghali as a native speaker of Arabic chooses a different lexical expression to render the Arabic euphemism. He uses “keep apart women”. Two observations need to be made about this choice. First, the combination of “keep apart” was not found in the Oxford English Dictionary. In other words, according to Oxford English Dictionary these two words do not collocate. The denotative meaning of “keep apart women” is basically “separate”. Again, the same argument presented above about the use of the expressions denoting the sense of separation, can be said here about Ghali’s choice. Basically, the expression has two problems: (1) it does not convey the sense of temporariness encoded in the ST expression and (2) it does not convey the focused scope of separation to mean only sexual contact and not any other contact. As a native speaker of Arabic, it was expected that Ghali’s native understanding of the nuances of meaning (denotative and connotative) in his mother tongue would enable him to make better and more precise choices in his translation as to encode them in the selection process of the lexical item. However, it is evident that Ghali’s choice, although perhaps is denotatively fine, is connotatively deficient because the lexical item selected is not self-explanatory as it does not really convey the above senses but rather leaves it to the textual and para-textual interpretation to clarify the kind of separation. In the Oxford English Dictionary, there is not even one single sense of the expression “keep apart women” that is euphemistic referring to sexual isolation. The euphemistic sense is obtained only through the entire contextual configuration of the entire translation of the Qur’anic verse.

The second observation is the use of the word “women” instead of “wives” which was used by Ross and Bakhtiar in this study’s corpus. Again, as a native speaker of Arabic, one would expect him to
intervene and render the connotative meaning of the Arabic word “women” which is “wives” to make the translation more precise and more factually accurate. Since Ghali did not choose an established euphemistic expression in English to render the euphemistic expression in Arabic and since Ghali decided to render women literally as women, it seems therefore plausible to argue that the variable of “native language” is not making any significant difference in the choice of translations by Ghali in this particular example. However, we cannot make a general conclusion on this until all of Ghali’s renditions in this corpus are discussed. The type of translation that Ghali uses is that of an overt type (House, 2015). There is no evidence of any application of the cultural filter as we have shown in the discussion above. Ghali has adopted a clearly source-oriented translation strategy in an attempt to preserve faithfulness to the ST in terms of indirectness and politeness.

The last example in the corpus of this study with reference to this euphemistic expression is the American-Iranian scholar and translator Laleh Bakhtiar who is used in this study to represent the gender variable. Bakhtiar, like other translators in this corpus, chooses to translate the euphemistic expression “ﻓﺎﻋﺘﺰﻟﻮا” quite differently using a different lexical item. She used “withdraw” to denotatively mean draw away from your wives. It is interesting to note that Bakhtiar’s choice is the only one in the corpus that is an established euphemism in English according to the Oxford English Dictionary. One of the senses of the verb “to withdraw” according to the Oxford English Dictionary is “to practice coitus interruptus”. This is quite interesting because it has significant implications on the denotative and connotative dimensions of meaning. If we take this sense which is provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, then Bakhtiar is actually introducing a new meaning that is probably not in the original Arabic. The Arabic verb that gives the meaning of “practicing coitus interruptus” is “ﻋﺰل” and the imperative form of this verb is “اﻋﺰل” and the second person plural form of this verb is “اﻋﺰلوا”. As can be seen from the form itself, “اﻋﺰلوا” which is the second person plural imperative form meaning “practice coitus interruptus” is morphologically different from the form “اﻋﺘﺰﻟﻮا” which is the form used in the Qur’anic verse under discussion here.

It looks as if Bakhtiar in her translation of “ﻓﺎﻋﺘﺰﻟﻮا” into “withdraw” is advocating a different reading of the Qur’anic verse, a reading that is not shared by any of the translators discussed above. She is probably saying that during menstruation, husbands can still do sexual intercourse with their wives but they can practice coitus interruptus in this case. If this interpretation of Bakhtiar is accurate then this rendition could be motivated by either a possible misunderstanding on the part of Bakhtiar of the difference between “separate” and “withdraw” in the two verbs “اﻋﺘﺰﻟﻮا” and “اﻋﺰلوا” respectively, or that she is deliberately advocating this kind of reading. If the latter assumption is accurate, which is more likely, and then Bakhtiar’s translation really stands out as unique and introduces a new jurisprudential view on this legal matter, not shared by any other translator at least in the corpus at hand.

If Bakhtiar intends to use the sense of the verb “withdraw” to mean “to practice coitus interruptus” in this context then there is no euphemism in her translation and the direct meaning of “withdraw” is rather
dysphemistic referring to the actual act of withdrawing the man’s sex organ towards the end of the process of sexual intercourse before ejaculation takes place. In this case, neither the denotative meaning nor the connotative meaning have been accounted for in this kind of rendition because “withdraw from” refers to a totally different sense and act altogether. The question that comes to mind now should be: is this reading motivated by the fact that the translator is a woman and that she is exercising some kind of gender advocacy in protecting women’s rights not to be sexually isolated or abandoned during this menstruation period? In fact, this orientation is quite evident in Bakhtiar’s translation of another Qur’anic verse, though it is not related to sexual euphemism. This is verse (4:34) related to husband-wife relationships in general and the issue of husbands beating their wives. The verse has become a contentious subject among Qur’an translators and even some modern Qur’an exegetes.

Bakhtiar advocates the view that “beating” does not mean its literal sense of “hitting” but the sense of “going away from women”. Similarly, unlike many other Qur’an translators who translate the word “ﻗﻮاﻣﻮن” (in charge of) in (4:34) “men are in charge of women as “caretakers, protectors or guardians”, Bakhtiar chooses to translate the word as “supporters” probably to express a specific power relation between men and women and to show her attitude and ideological stance towards the issue of women’s rights and status in the Qur’an. Bakhtiar is actually conveying a clearly mediated sense probably influenced by feminist views in which men become not even equal to women but rather inferior as they only provide support in the form of assistance to women who are perceived to be the key players.

Bakhtiar’s translation is clearly a covert translation because the ideational and experiential dimensions of the field have both been shifted since the verb “withdraw” here means something different from the ideational and experiential meaning of the verb “separate” used in the verse. So, the Field is shifted. The Tenor is also shifted since the politeness that is encoded in the ST by using a euphemistic expression is no longer there in the TT which uses a dysphemistic expression directly and explicitly referring to a specific aspect of the sexual intercourse. The Mode is also shifted because the expression is conveyed directly without using any special rhetorical strategy. There is a clear use of the cultural filter which is evident in the intervention of the translator to shift all the meaning dimensions to convey a particular ideological perspective and also to introduce an interpretation that fits with the translator’s political agenda.

Let us now turn to the second euphemistic expression in the verse (222) of Chapter 2 of the Qur’an to find more evidence to support the claims made so far about the different translations discussed above.

(2) The translation of the Qur’anic sex-related euphemistic expression “وﻻ تقتربوهن” (do not approach) in Chapter 2, Verses (222)
Table (2): ST/TT comparison and register analysis of the first euphemistic expression "وﻻ تقربوهن" (do not approach them) in Chapter 2, Verse (222).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>TT</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Denotation</td>
<td>Connotation</td>
<td>Rhetorical Strategy</td>
<td>(figurative expression) of ST and TT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metonymy:</td>
<td>Cause for effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not coming near/nigh leads</td>
<td>to/causes lack of sexual contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metonymy:</td>
<td>Cause for effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No approaching causes lack</td>
<td>of sexual contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metonymy:</td>
<td>Cause for effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not drawing near women</td>
<td>causes absence of sexual contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metonymy:</td>
<td>Cause for effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not coming near women</td>
<td>causes lack of sexual contact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the senses of the verb “come” according to the Oxford English Dictionary is “to come into bodily contact or sexual connection with somebody”. The verb “do not come” is used by Ross, for example, to translate the Arabic verb “وﻻ تقربوهن”. Regarding the historicity variable, it seems that the expression “come not nigh them” is still used in modern day English to express a euphemism for sexual intercourse, albeit with the modern adverb “near” instead of “nigh”. Bakhtiar, as will be shown later, actually uses the same expression with the adverb “near” in place of “nigh”. RABIIT uses the verb “approach” whereas Ghali uses the expression “draw near”. These expressions all have a euphemistic sense. Therefore, as far as the variable of diachronic evolution of the euphemistic expression there seems to be no significant difference between the four translators in this corpus. The euphemistic sense is already encoded in the denotative sense of the verb, i.e. the euphemistic sense has already found its way to the dictionary and has become part of the word’s dictionary meaning. In this case, both the denotative and connotative meanings have become one.

Through the process of lexicalization, the socially constructed sense becomes part of the linguistically constructed sense. The verb “come” denotatively means “to move to the place of the speaker” but also denotatively conveys a physical or sexual proximity between two or more persons. Both indirectness and politeness have been established in Ross’ translation because he chose a verb that is equally euphemistic in English to convey the meaning of a euphemistic expression in the Arabic text, although as it was mentioned earlier Ross’ translation was from a French translation of the Arabic text, not directly from Arabic. The Field of the expression “come not nigh them” with its ideational and experiential components is equivalent to the Field of the expression “وﻻ تقربوهن” used in the ST. Both convey the sense of sexual contact. The Tenor of the expression with its social stance and attitude as well
as the connotation of the expression used by Ross conveys the same social attitude of politeness and indirectness expressed in the ST expression. At the level of Mode, both the ST and TT expressions are metonymically constructed via cause/effect and part/whole relationships. “Coming near someone” causes physical contact and consequently sexual contact. Also “coming near someone” in the physical sense is perceived as “whole” and the sexual sense is seen as “part” of that whole because it is a specific kind of contact. The translation is clearly covert and the cultural filter was used to give the TT audience a domestic image understood by means of a local euphemism in the TT culture.

RABIIT’s translation although using a different expression “approach” is essentially conveying the same euphemistic function because according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the verb “approach” is actually used euphemistically especially in biblical sources to mean sexual relations. The ideational and experiential components of the meaning of the ST expression are faithfully encoded in the TT expression. Even the interpersonal component of the meaning which represents the level of Tenor is conveyed in the TT expression showing politeness and indirectness and avoiding any potential embarrassment of the reader. The rhetorical strategy used is that of a metonymy. The translation is clearly covert and the cultural filter has been successfully used to render an expression in an equally similar genre by drawing on a shared religious diction. It seems that the variable of institutionalism is showing a significant difference compared to other translations in the corpus. RABIIT’s translation is the only one that used the verb “approach” which is both euphemistic and conjures religious connotation, i.e. biblical connotations. But the choice of this verb is also significant in another sense. It is the only lexical verb among all translations in the corpus. Ross uses “come not nigh them”, Ghali uses “draw not near them” and Bakhtiar uses “come not near them”. All these renditions make use of phrasal and prepositional verbs which could convey a shift in style, formality or even structural complexity. RABIIT’s translation is the only one in the corpus that uses a one word euphemistic expression “approach”. This structurally simple and stylistically relevant translation could only be attributed to an institutional norm which the Royal AAL AL-BAYT Institute is perhaps following in terms of simplicity of structure and appropriateness of style.

Ghali uses the expression “draw near” which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, has no euphemistic function and it does not indirectly refer to “sexual intercourse”. Ghali’s translation is denotatively faithful because it rendered one denotative aspect of the expression which is the sense of “close proximity” but it did not convey an established euphemism in the TT or at least this is what the Oxford English Dictionary is telling us. What does this mean? It means that the ideational and experiential components of the ST expression are faithfully rendered but the interpersonal component of the Tenor, or the connotation of the ST expression was not conveyed. However, the rhetorical strategy used is that of a metonymic nature similar to those used by other translators. The translation is overt because the translator wanted the TT reader to process the expression in a rather foreign flavor not in established euphemism in his own culture. Therefore, we can say that the cultural filter was not used in this kind of rendition because the expression needs to be processed as a neutral general expression and then by means of textual and contextual help the expression is to be perceived as a euphemism. Ghali’s translation does show a significant difference attributed to the variable of “native language” as his.
translation, unlike other translations in the corpus, uses a general word to convey a general meaning that necessarily requires some textual and contextual help to be interpreted as a euphemism. So, it can be seen that Ghali’s native knowledge of Arabic helps him to understand the sense of the verb “do not approach them” but it does not help him in selecting the appropriate and relevant euphemistic expression in English.

Bakhtiar’s choice is very similar to Ross’ except the use of the word “near” instead of the old and archaic word “nigh”. This shows two issues pertaining to the variables of this study. One is that for this particular euphemistic expression the historical change is really minimal; it affects the adverb “nigh”, not the main verb “come”. This means that some euphemistic expressions do change over time while others survive time, and others lose some of their parts and retain other parts. Two, there does not seem to be a significant difference attributed to the variable of gender as Bakhtiar’s choice is not significantly different from that of Ross.

(3) The translation of the Qur’anic sex-related euphemistic expression “ﻓﻼ ﻣُتُقَرِّبُوهُنَّ” (do not approach them) in Chapter 2, Verses (222)

Table (3): ST/TT comparison and register analysis of the euphemistic expression “ﻓﻼ ﻣُتُقَرِّبُوهُنَّ” (approach them) in Chapter 2, Verse (222)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>TT</th>
<th>Field Denotation</th>
<th>Tenor Connotation</th>
<th>Mode Rhetorical Strategy (figurative expression) of ST and TT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>approach them</td>
<td>Come near</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metonymy: Cause for effect Physically approaching women causes sexual contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(euphemism of sexual relations)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RABIIT</td>
<td>then come to them</td>
<td>Approach them</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metonymy: Cause for effect Coming to women causes sexual contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghali</td>
<td>then come upon them</td>
<td>Approach them</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metonymy: Cause for effect Coming upon them causes sexual contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakhtiar</td>
<td>approach them</td>
<td>Come near (euphemism of sexual relations)</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metonymy: Cause for effect Approaching women causes sexual contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two patterns with regard to the translation of “ﻓﻼ ﻣُتُقَرِّبُوهُنَّ” (approach them). The first one is that of Ross and Bakhtiar who both chose the verb “approach” with its euphemistic function already established in the dictionary, hence the denotative and connotative dimensions of meaning are already combined and encoded in the dictionary. This shows that the variable of historicity is not evident since the same expression which was used in the middle of the 17th Century is still used in the early 21st Century. Also it shows that the gender variable is not making any significant difference. The levels of Field, Tenor and Mode are clearly represented by the verb “approach” expressing ideational and...
experiential content and at the same time an interpersonal component of politeness and indirectness. The level of Mode is expressed by the metonymic rhetorical strategy of the cause/effect and whole/part relationship.

The second pattern is that of RABIIT and Ghali who both use the verb “come” as the main verb expressing this euphemistic function, with two different prepositions: “to” by RABIIT and “upon” by Ghali. This approximate similarity shows that the institutionalism variable within which RABIIT works is not evident since the individual translation by Ghali is quite similar to that of RABIIT. Similarly, the variable of “native language” does not seem to be working either since the choice of the verb “come” is not unique to Ghali or RABIIT translators. We have seen Ross and Bakhtiar, who are not native speakers of Arabic; use the same verb to express this euphemistic function.

(4) The translation of the Qur’anic sex-related euphemistic expression “ﺣﺮث” (tillage) in Chapter 2, Verse (223)

Table (4): ST/TT comparison and register analysis of the euphemistic expression “ﺣﺮث” (tillage)in Chapter 2, Verse (223).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>TT</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>your tillage</td>
<td>Cultivation, (figuratively sexual intercourse)</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse.</td>
<td>Metaphor: Resemblance Sexual intercourse is similar to cultivating tillage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RABIIT</td>
<td>a tillage for you</td>
<td>Cultivation, (figuratively sexual intercourse)</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metaphor: Resemblance Sexual intercourse is similar to cultivating tillage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghali</td>
<td>a tillage for you</td>
<td>Cultivation, (figuratively sexual intercourse)</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metaphor: Resemblance Sexual intercourse is similar to cultivating tillage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakhtiar</td>
<td>a place of cultivation</td>
<td>Tillage</td>
<td>Indirect and polite reference to Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>Metaphor: Resemblance Sexual intercourse is similar to cultivating tillage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (4) shows two patterns of translation that can be commented on. The first pattern is that of Ross, RABIIT and Ghali. These all use the word “tillage” which according to the Oxford English Dictionary has the sense of “sexual intercourse (with a woman)”. The use of this euphemistic expression to translate the Arabic expression “ﺣﺮث” shows that neither the variable of historicity (Ross) nor that of institutionalism (RABIIT) nor that of native language (Ghali) is playing any significant role in this particular example because they all use the same expression regardless of time difference in the case of
Ross, institutionalism in the case of RABIIT or native language in the case of Ghali. They all use an expression that denotatively conveys the sense of “farming” and “cultivation” but at the same time connotatively conveys the sense of “sexual intercourse”. However, the euphemistic function is already encoded in the dictionary so there is already a combination between both denotation and connotation. The ideational and experiential meaning is conveyed in the meaning of farming and cultivation, and the interpersonal meaning is conveyed in the indirectness and politeness of the euphemistic expression. However, in this example the rhetorical strategy is different. The Mode is using a metaphor to create the euphemism. The metaphor is based on the principle of similarity (Jakobson, 1971), i.e. the woman is perceived as a farm or a place of cultivation into which the seeds are sown in order to produce crops. The man is the farmer who does the ploughing and the sowing. The translation is overt because the TT happened to have an equally euphemistic expression that is capable of conveying the same communicative effect and is able to elicit the same reader’s response (Nida, 1964). The choice of this expression in the TT indicates a formal rendering in which there is no evidence of the cultural filter being applied.

The second pattern is that of Bakhtiar who used a rather general and neutral expression “a place of cultivation” which according to the Oxford English Dictionary does not convey any figurative or euphemistic meaning on its own. In other words, the denotative meaning of the expression is just the literal meaning of its words, i.e. cultivation of crops or knowledge. The connotative meaning is inferred only from the surrounding text and context of the utterance especially when the reference is made to women. The ideational and experiential meaning of “place of cultivation” is formally conveyed but the interpersonal component is not because of the choice of an expression that is not inherently euphemistic. The Mode is expressed through a metaphorical signification based on resemblance between cultivating crops and the act of sexual intercourse in which one salient feature shared between the two acts which is the intention of producing crops/children. Even though Bakhtiar’s translation is quite distinct from other translations in the corpus, there does not seem to be a significant difference attributed to the variable of gender because the expressions tillage and place of cultivation both literally mean the same. The translation is clearly overt and source oriented. The reader is not given a ready-made expression from their own cultural environment that meets their cultural expectation. The reader has to process the literal meaning and then with the help of surrounding text and context establishes a link between that literal meaning and the associated pragmatic implications. No use of cultural filter is evident.

6. Conclusions

This paper investigated the translation of four euphemistic Qur’anic sex-related expressions by four translators in order to show any significant differences between the translations that can be attributed to the variables of time, institutionalism, native language or gender. The analysis followed House’s model of TQA to assess the quality of the translation. The conclusions of the study will be listed below in two different sections: Section (a) addresses the research questions raised earlier in section (2) above; section (b) draws conclusions on the quality of the translations in general.
(a) Euphemism translation and the four variables

With regard to the question related to whether or not there are any differences in the translation of Qur’anic sex-related euphemisms attributed to time, the analysis of the data, despite the fact that the data are limited to only four euphemistic expressions, shows that euphemisms do change over time and Ross’ translation of these four euphemistic expressions supports this conclusion. Ross uses “separate” for the Qur’anic expression “فاعتلوا” and he is the only one among the four translators in the corpus to use this expression. According to the Oxford English Dictionary “separate” is a biblical expression that suggests removal from conjugal cohabitation. The expression is no longer used in modern day English to mean that specific meaning. This shows that euphemisms do actually change over time. This finding is supported by the literature which describes this as “euphemism treadmill” (cf. Pinker, 2003). One clear example, which is not part of the data of the corpus of this study, but is directly relevant to this discussion, is the translation of the expression “اﻟﺮﻓﺚ” in verse 187 of Chapter 2 of the Qur’an in which Ross used the verb “know” to mean sexual intercourse. Other examples which show the distinct translation of Ross include: “십시روا” in the same verse (2:187) which he translated as (know them, i.e. touched them sexually), “دخلتم” in (4:23) which he also translated as (have known, i.e. gone on into them), and “لمكم” in (4:43) which he translated as (have known, i.e. touched). Obviously, this verb is no longer used in modern day English to euphemistically refer to sexual intercourse.

The variable of institutionalism was found to make a difference in the translations of these four euphemistic expressions. There is a general tendency in RABIIT translations to go for the literal and source-oriented renditions regardless of whether or not they convey a euphemistic sense. As discussed earlier with reference to the translation of “فاعتلوا”, RABIIT’s translation was the only one that opted for a lexical verb, unlike other translations in the corpus which made use of phrasal and prepositional verbs to express this euphemistic function. In the discussion there it was noted that this might be an institutional norm that the Institute is following in their translation of the Qur’an. Of course, this needs to be further investigated using a larger corpus. But for the limited corpus we have for this study, it seems that institutionalism does make a difference in translating euphemistic expressions.

The role of the variable of “native language” was not found to make a significant difference in the translation of these euphemistic expressions. This is probably because even if there is native understanding of the ST, unless this understanding is coupled with highly competent skill of reproducing the nuances of meaning in the target language, it will not make a significant difference in the translation compared to other translations in the corpus. This high competence and mastery in the target language seem to be not evident in the case of Ghali. As a result, his translations were not significantly different from other translations in the corpus.

The variable of gender was found to make a difference in the translation of euphemistic expressions. Bakhtiar’s translations stand out as distinct suggesting a gender influence. Bakhtiar’s use of “withdraw” and “place of cultivation” to translate two different euphemistic expressions, i.e. “حورا” and “فاعتلوا”
respectively, unlike other translators in the corpus, is very much indicative of this influence. In fact, in other euphemistic expressions, not included in the corpus but directly relevant to the discussion here, (verse 187 of Chapter 2, verse 56 of Chapter 55, verses 21 and 43 of Chapter 4), Bakhtiar is more explicit and is being quite dysphemistic using the expression “sexual intercourse” to translate the expressions “اﻟﺮﻓﺚ”, “ﻳﻄﻤﺜﻬﻦ”, “أﻓﻀﻰ”, “إﻟﻤﺴﺘﻢ”, “الرﻓﺖ”, which were translated by others as “lying with”, “touch”, “approach” and “touch” respectively.

(b) Euphemism translation quality assessment

Most of the translations as shown in the discussion are overt and source oriented conveying the denotative meaning and leaving the reader to work their own way to reach the intended euphemistic meaning through assessing the surrounding text and context of the verses. The cases where a covert translation was used are those where there is an ideological factor as in the case of Bakhtiar’s translations. The cultural filter was seldom used because the translators were trying to provide a faithful translation that would provide the main denotative meaning to ensure the understanding of the Qur’anic concept in its literal sense. They hoped that this source text-oriented translation would help the reader to co-activate the source text context and then work out the connotation as well as the intended meaning from the overall context.

There seems to be an established Qur’anic Translation Norm which basically means that most contemporary Qur’an translators actually read previous translations and because of this there is a great deal of overlapping translations and use of similar expressions as well as translation strategies used by previous translators.

Qur’an translators into English seem to be split between two loyalties. One of these loyalties is for faithfulness to the source text expression in order to preserve the politeness and indirectness of the source text by choosing either inherently euphemistic expressions in English or neutrally literal senses that are not euphemistic at all even if those senses are vague or too indirect. The other loyalty is for clarity and explicitness. It is evident from the discussion of the data in this corpus that the majority of the translators ignored this loyalty despite the fact that clarity and explicitness are arguably more helpful to making successful communication than politeness considerations. The principle of politeness prevailed over the principle of clarity in the translation of these euphemistic expressions.
Assessing the Quality of the Translation of Sex-Related Euphemisms in the Holy Qur’an: A Pragmatic Study

تقييم جودة ترجمة التعبير التلطيفي عن العلاقات الجنسية في القرآن الكريم: مدخل براغماتي

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الملخص

تسعى هذه الدراسة، من الوجهة البراغماتية، إلى تقييم جودة ترجمة التعبير القرآني التلطيفي إلى الإنجليزية. وتبتين أثر المتغيرات الآتية: التطور، والتوجه، والمرجعية اللغوية، والمؤسساتية والفردية - في فهم معنى التعبير التلطيفي وترجمته إلى الإنجليزية. وتعتمد هذه الدراسة على مفهوم بوريدج (Burrige) في تعريف التلطيف: بأنه "بديل لغوي تحظى بقبول حسن، أو غير جارحة، تعبيرات لا يميل المنكملون والكتاب إلى استعمالها في الإعراب عن معاني معينة". وترسم إطارا نظريا براغماتيا يعين على تأويل التلطيف وترجمته، وتنخذ نموذجا وظيفيا - براغماتيا لجوليانا هاوس (Juliane House) في تقييم ترجمة أربعة تعبيرات قرآنية تلطيفية، في مجالات العلاقات الجنسية، إلى الإنجليزية. مستندة من أربع ترجمات منتفخة لمعاني القرآن: ل- إلكسندر روس (Alexander Ross) (2012، وغالي 2005)، ومؤسسة آل البيت الملكية للفكر الإسلامي 2015. وقد أظهرت الدراسة أن الترجمات تتحو إلى الحفاظ على الخصوصة التلطيفية في النص القرآن، وإبلاغه بطريقة يظهر فيها التأدب في التعبير، وأنها تعتمد في الأغلب على الترجمة الحرفية. للحفاظ على التأدب وتجنب التصريح في النص القرآن، وتعرف متتالي هذه الترجمات بالاليات التلطيفية. الكليات المفتاحية: الدراسات القرآنية، علم النص النقابي، التلفظ، البراغماتية، الترجمة، تقييم جودة الترجمة.

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Endnotes

1 A brief note on the translations can be found in Appendix (1)

2 This idea was negotiated with House in an email correspondence in which she commended the idea.

3 The full text of both the Arabic original and the four full translations can be found in Appendix (2)

References


Assessing the Quality of the Translation of Sex-Related Euphemisms in the Holy Qur’an: A Pragmatic Study


Al-Sharafi and Abu Khader


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Appendix (1)

A brief note on the translations

(1) Ross

Alexander Ross (1654 – 1590) was a Scottish poet and critic, born in Aberdeen- Scotland and was the religious guide of King Charles I. He was interested in theology which he studied for many years. He was also interested in history and philosophy. His interest in history led him to study the Turkish legacy which was based on the Qur’an. He thought of the Turks as heretics who defied the truth which the Church had. He translated the Qur’an from a French translation that was popular at the time by Reyer Andre Du with the aim of showing the Western reader of the English translation of the Qur’an the Turks as an enemy, (Al Khatib, 2014, 30).
Assessing the Quality of the Translation of Sex-Related Euphemisms in the Holy Qur’an: A Pragmatic Study

(2) RABIIT

Royal AAL AL-BAYT Institute Translation (RABIIT) is produced by the Royal AAL AL-BAYT Institute for Islamic Thought which is “an international charitable trust based in Jordan but comprising of 70 to 100 members of the world’s top Islamic scholars, who meet or correspond on a regular basis. It is a non-political (sic) and recognizes all seven traditional madhhabs (or legal schools) of Islam. It was established in 1980 by the late H.M. King Hussein of Jordan” (official website http://www.altafsir.com/AboutFoundation.asp)

(3) Ghali

Mohamed Mahmoud Ghali was born in 1920 in Egypt. He got his BA in English Language in 1940 from King Fouad I University, now Cairo University, and an MA from Michigan University. He got his PhD in Linguistics and Phonetics from Michigan University in 1960. He wrote and translated about 16 books including his translation of the Qur’an. (Al Khatib 2014, 384–385).

(4) Bakhtiar

Laleh Bakhtiar was born in New York in 1938 from an Iranian father and an American mother. She became Catholic when she was 8 years old in her Catholic school and when she turned 24 she traveled with her husband and four children to Iran for the first time. There she joined Tehran University where she learnt Persian and Arabic. She also studied Islamic civilization. In Iran she embraced Islam in 1964 and went back to America in 1988. She has authored more than 25 books on Islam and Sufism. In her books she tries to encourage dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. After 9/11/2001 she refused to wear the hijab because she thought that it does not represent moderation and it unnecessarily attracts people’s attention more than it is a hijab, (Al Khatib 2014, 363).

Appendix (2)

Qur’anic verses and their translations

(1) فَوَيَسَأَلُوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَحْيَضِ قَلْ هُوَ أَنْثَى فَاعْتِزَّلُوا النَّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحْيَضِ وَلَا تَقْطَنُوْنَ حَتَّى يَطْهُرُنَّ فَإِذَا تَطْهَرُنَّ فَأَنْتُوْنَ مِنْ حَيْثُ أُمْرَكُ اللهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْتَوَابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ. نَسَأَكُمُ حَرْثَكُمْ حَرْثِكُمْ فَأَنْتُوْنَ حَرْثَكُمْ إِنَّ شَهِيْدًا. [222, 223]: البقرة. 222

Ross: They will enquire of thee concerning the monthly terms of women; answer, that they are unclean; separate your selves from your wives when they are menstrous, and come not nigh them until they be purified; when they shall be clean, approach them, according to what God hath commanded; he loveth them that repent of their errors, that are clean and purified. Your wives are your tillage, go to your tillage at your pleasure (P. 21).

RABIIT: They will ask you about the monthly period. Say: 'It is an ailment; so part with women in the monthly period, and do not approach them until they are pure; when they have cleansed themselves, then come to them, as God has commanded you'. Truly, God loves those who repent, and He loves those
who cleanse themselves. Your women are a tillage for you; so come to your tillage as you wish. [2:222,223].

Ghali: And they ask you concerning menstruation. Say, “It is hurt; keep apart women during menstruation, and do not draw near them till they are pure. So, when they have purified themselves, then come upon them from where Allah has commanded you.” Surely Allah loves the ones constantly repenting, and He loves the ones constantly purifying themselves. Your women are a tillage for you; so come up to your tillage however you decide. [2:222,223].

Bakhtiar: They ask thee about menstruation. Say: It is an impurity, so withdraw from your wives during menstruation. Come not near them (f) until they cleanse themselves. And then when they (f) cleansed themselves, approach them (f) as God commanded you. Truly, God loves the contrite and He loves the ones who cleanse themselves. Your wives are a place of cultivation for you, so approach your cultivation whenever you willed [2:222,223].