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qur'an: translating  
form or meaning?



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1427/2006) Word Repetition in the Qur'an – Translating Form or Meaning?

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13/10/1426 A. H. ; accepted for publication, 04/04/1427 A. H. ) Abstract.

Word repetition is a feature that exists in all languages, and serves different purposes, rhetorical, emphatic, or otherwise.

A problematic issue arises when a translation is attempted of repeated words in a target text. The dilemma is that owing to the different ways of expression and tools available to every language, what fits one language may prove absurd in another. When dealing with the translation of repeated words in a sacred text, this proves to be much more problematic. This paper deals with this specific area as far as repeated words in the Holy Qur'an are concerned.

The present paper argues that each repeated word in the Qur'anic text serves a particular purpose which may be totally defeated, and, perhaps, the whole message distorted if the translator fails to render repetition in the same way. This, by no means, resolves the repetition conundrum. However, to put it in simple terms, the translator could, in an attempt to maintain the accuracy and faithfulness, and at the same time, maintain the flow of the translation, make use of footnotes to draw the attention of the reader/critic to the actual wording of the original.

In this way, the translator minimizes the effect of, at least, the form of the original on the translation. The meaning is (hopefully) preserved, and

thereby, the reader/critic - and most importantly - the believer, is satisfied by accounting for all the words in the text involved. Introduction The problems in translating a text from one language to another are legion. For example, it is quite common to find western critics referring to what they claim to be incoherence, inconsistency or lack of harmony in the Qur'anic style (c. f.

Hyde Park Christian Fellowship [1] and Ghoneim [2]). Such views ignore the fact that: ?? ?? Ahmed Ali \* it is both inconceivable and impossible to judge one language according to the rules of another; \* what might be considered elegant style, or legitimate form, or appropriate function in one language is not necessarily looked upon the same way in another; \* different languages very often express the same thing differently, necessitating different phrasing in expression in translation; \* there is no perfect synonymy or exact equivalence between languages in translation. there will always be a " translation loss" of different degrees as a result of not only linguistic, but also cultural factors. Therefore, no translation can be the original, even when the translation may seem to be " better" than the original. The inherently problematic nature of translation is further complicated when the principal text, as is the case with the Holy Qur'an, is considered to be a sacred one, containing the inspiration for a complete way of life.

In such a case, accuracy in translation becomes a religious and moral duty, not merely a linguistic or logistical exercise. Since it would be impossible here to discuss the complexities encountered by innumerable translators in the field of translating the Qur'an, this paper focuses on one small -- but not inconsiderable -- aspect encountered in the sacred text, that is, the issue of repetition. The Qur'an Muslims believe that the religion preached in Arabia <https://assignbuster.com/word-repetition-in-the-quran-translating-form-or-meaning/>

by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be Allah's (God's) final revelation to humanity.

For Muslims, the Qur'an, which is Allah's words revealed to humankind, supplements and completes the earlier revelations on which all theistic religions are built and corrects the human interference and misinterpretations that corrupted and adulterated those earlier revelations. The whole of the Qur'an is arranged into 114 suwar (singular: surah) of unequal size, though a logical thread of meaning -- of revelation from Allah -- runs through them all. Each surah, which means degree or step, consists of a number of verse divisions, which are called ayat (singular: ayah) which are usually determined by the rhythm and cadence in the Arabic text.

Sometimes, an ayah, meaning a sign, contains many sentences. Sometimes, a sentence is divided by a break in an ayah; but, usually, there is a pause in meaning at the end. The ayah is the true unit of the Qur'an, since " it is a verse of revelation as a sign of God's wisdom and goodness, just as much as God's beautiful handiwork in the material creation or His dealings in history are signs to us" (Ali [3, p. 3]). The Qur'an, therefore, is the Holy Writ, sent down to us, as surah al-Nahl reveals: ???????? ???? ? ? ? ? ? ???? ?????????????? ?????? ?????? ? ??? ?????? ?????????????????????? ?????????? ?????????? ?????????????????? ??? ? ? ? ??? [explaining all things, a guide, a mercy, and glad tidings to Muslim] (Qur'an 16: 89). Word Repetition in the Qur'an - Translating Form or Meaning? ?? The Qur'an exists in its original language, i. e. , Arabic.

Muslim scholars unanimously agree that the Qur'an is only the Qur'an when it is in Arabic, in its original wording as revealed to Prophet Muhammad  
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(peace be upon him). Cook [4, p. 94] refers to Ibn Hizam (d. 1064), a scholar of Muslim Spain, who stated laconically that " NonArabic isn't Arabic, so it's not the Qur'an". This is derived from the fact that there are eleven references in ten Qur'anic suwar Al-Laithy [5, p. 46] confirming exactly this notion. By way of example, surah Fussilat

states: ?? ?????? ?????? ? ? ????? ? ? ? ? ????? ??? ? ??? ????????????????????? ????? ???

??? ?????????? ????????? ????????????????????? ?????????? ??????? ? ? ? ??? ????? ? ?

? [And if We had sent this as a Qur'an in a foreign language (other than

Arabic), they would have said: " Why are not its ayat explained (in our language)? What! (A book) not in Arabic and (the Messenger) an Arab. ]

(Qur'an 41: 44). As Ali [3, p. xi], in his preface to the first edition of his

translation of the Holy Qur'an, states, it is the duty of every Muslim -- man, woman or child -- to read the Qur'an and understand it according to his own capacity. For non-Arabic Muslims, this poses something of a problem. As

Cook [4, p. 8] points out, Arabic is not just the original language of the

Qur'an (as ancient Hebrew was the original language of the Torah); it is the language of the Qur'an. Therefore, talking about " translating the Qur'an", is

problematic. The question that needs to be posed is: Is the Qur'an – as a

sacred text - translatable? On the one hand, the view of the untranslatability of sacred texts is championed by Stiener's comments (in Ali [6, p. 174]) on

the troubles encountered when translating the word of God. He states in his

foreword to Translating Religious Texts [6, p. xiii] " Here we flounder in deep waters.

If a text is ' revealed', if its initial encoding is then transferred into a

mundane and fallible sign-system, that of secular and post-Adamic speech,

to what truth-functions, to what correspondent faithfulness can any translation aspire? " On the other hand, what do we call the well-known " translations" of Ali [3], Pickthal [7]. Arberry [8], Asad [9] and others? It is the view of the present author that if an original text exists in another language, this second product is a translation. The translation of any text is a means of rewriting the meaning/message of the original text using a target language.

Yet, any translation of any text, no matter how immaculate and scholarly, can never be the original, and will always be imperfect and subject to error. Therefore, the Qur'an is translatable, even though the translation might be laden with shortcomings and inaccuracies, and can serve as no more than an introduction to nonArabic speaking audience, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For the Muslim, anything other than the Arabic original will always be merely an interpretation, an attempt at conveying the message of the Qur'an, and will always be an approximation of the original. ?? Ahmed Abdel-Fattah M. Ali

The fact is, though, that conveying the message of the Qur'an has become imperative in the light of global interest – for a variety of reasons – in Islam and in the beliefs and practices of Muslims. As Muslims and Islamic affairs rise more and more to prominence in global politics, the need to access the contents and meaning of the Qur'an, specifically through the medium of English, becomes more pressing. It is how this Holy Writ should be translated that forms the basis of this paper. Original and Translated Text As any translator knows, translating from a source language to a target language presents a minefield of complications.

In his discussion of issues related to the Soviet school of translation, Lauren G. Leighton [10, p. 17] asserts that few Soviet translators would agree with the dogmatic literalist Vladimir Nabokov's assertion that one should dismiss the conventional notion that a translation should "read smoothly", and "should not sound like a translation". Indeed, says Leighton, Nabokov asserts that any translation that does not sound like a translation is bound to be inexact upon inspection. Nabokov's assertion here justifiably raises the following questions: What are the criteria that produce a translation sounding like a translation?

How does a translation, sounding like a translation, sound? There must, by implication, be certain features in the translation itself that makes it sound like one. Does this mean, for example, complete adherence to the linguistic rules of the source language, even at the expense of both the style and the linguistic integrity of the target language? Such an argument raises more questions than answers because 'how a translation should sound' is not defined. Whether a translation should sound like a translation or not, does not mean that 'bad translations' are admissible.

In other words, a translated text should read well and with no clumsiness of style caused by the interference of, for instance, the linguistic rules of the target (or second) language. Still, the majority of the translations of the meaning of the Qur'an actually do sound like translations. The main reason for this is the inevitable impact of the Qur'anic form on the target language. The division of the Qur'an into ayat; the translator's clear attempt to adhere to the source text's wording; the importance of the source text; the attempts to follow the Arabic style in the translation; the existence of terms that are <https://assignbuster.com/word-repetition-in-the-quran-translating-form-or-meaning/>

untranslatable without detailed footnoting – these are but a few reasons why many Qur'anic translations sound like translations or do not sound natural. This is a difficult problem to tackle. While the aim of translators should be to present the given text in the appropriate style and to conform to the linguistic demands of the target language, in many cases they might find themselves in a situation where the impact of the source language displays itself glaringly – with sometimes unacceptable yet unavoidable results.

Translating Repetition Repetition, as an element of rhetoric, is an important characteristic of Arabic texts (both ancient and modern), as it is in European discourse (Connor [11]). It would not be apposite in a paper on translation to discuss how and why repetition functions as a rhetorical device in Arabic discourse, and the reader should refer to the noteworthy contribution of Al-Jubouri [12] in this regard in the Swales and Mustafa study *English for Specific Purposes in the Arab World*. Suffice it to say that repetition plays a vital role, specifically in the context of attempts to translate the Qur'an accurately.

In the succeeding sections, a brief attempt will be made to locate the incidence of repetition in non-Qur'anic sources merely to show that repetition is a deeply rooted feature in the Arabic discourse. The section after that will discuss repetition in the Qur'an, giving two examples, and then attempt to outline the problems that translating these presents. Repetition in Non-Qur'anic Sources – Examples This dissonance between the source and the target languages refers most particularly (though not uniquely) to the incidence of repetition(1) in Arabic. As an Arabic literary

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critic once wrote: " A man may say to another '؟ :???? ' ?????? Hurry up, says:

"(3) hurry up', and to an archer: '؟ ' :???? ' ?????? Shoot, shoot'. (2) A famous, yet anonymous, poem ????? ????? ??? ?????????? ????? ?? ?? ??? ???????

"?? ?????? ????? ?????? ? ?????? ?? ????? ?????? ??? ? ? ? ???? [How many favors have you had (upon us) how many, how many and how many (favors have you had) and how many] and another says: (1) For more details about ' Repetition', see Holes [13, pp. 269-74]; Nasif [14, p. 21]; Ibn Qutaybah [15, p. 10]; Ibn Faris [16, pp. 177-8]; Al-Jubouri [12, pp. 99-117]; Koch [17]; and Tytler [18]. According to Al-Mulla [19, p. 232] quoted from Al-Maydani, pp. 9-108 on Ibn Qayyim, pp. 159-167: " Ibn Qayyim identifies three types of Repetition in the Qur'an: Repetition with similarity of meaning e. g. Q74: 19-20. Repetition with difference of meaning e. g. Q3: 7. Repetition of meaning with different wording e. g. Q55: 68. " (2) Ibn Qutaybah [15, p. 183]; and Abu Hilal [20, p. 193]. (3) Abu Hilal [20, p. 193]; the poet is not named. This line is also found in Al-Murtada, 'Amali al-Murtada (1954), Vol. 1, p. 84.

'???? ?????????? '????? is, however, missing from this line in Ibn Qutaybah [15, p. 183], and Ibn ? ? Faris [16, p. 177]. ?? "(4)????????????? ?????????? Ahmed Abdel-

Fattah M. Ali ?????????? ?????????? ?????????? ??? ? ? ?? ??? ?????????? ??? ?? ?????? ?????

"?? ? ? ? ????? ? ? ??? [Why do you not ask the masses of (the tribe of) Kindah, when they ran away from the battlefield, where, where (did they run away to)? ] where the underlined words are repeated successively. Muhalhal also repeated the following more than twenty times in one of his poems: (5)

"????????? ? ????? ??? ??? ?????? "????? ??? ??? ?? ?????? ? ??? [It was not fair of (the tribe of) Kulayb to (have done)...] Al-Harith ibn ' Abbad successively

repeated, with great effect, the half-line: (6)

"????? ??? ?????????????????????? ?????? ?????? "????? ?? ? ??? ? ? ?? [Make (you two)

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This is because those very forms and usages are intrinsic in, and an essential part of, the sacred message that Muslims believe is the original, unadulterated and incorruptible Word of God. They therefore invite, not mere literary critique, but metaphysical reflection. Let us cite two examples:

Example one The opening ayat of surah 'Iqra' read: ?

(? )? ?????? ????? ??? ??????? ????? ?)?

( ??? ?????????????? ????????????????? ?????? ??? ?????? ? ????? ? ? ? ? ??? ????? [Read in the name of your Lord who created (1) Created Man of a blood-clot (2)] (Q96: 1-2) In this example, the word ???????? (created) is repeated twice; and while Read in the ? ????? ame of your Lord who created Man of a blood-clot would read smoothly in English without the reader feeling that something more is needed to make the sentence sound like good English, the result is that the translator has omitted part of the original text. Whether such omission affects the meaning or not, it does not alter the fact that the translation did not cater for an ' item' in the original. One might conjecture, therefore, that, in the science of translation, even if the meaning does not suffer as a result of such omission, all texts are words put together and translators must not forget that they translate on the basis of these words.

Newmark [23, pp. 36-37] states: " Many translators say you should never translate words. You translate sentences or ideas or messages. I think they are fooling themselves. The SL [source language] text consists of words. That is all that is there, on the page. Finally, all you have is words to translate, and you have to account for each of them somewhere in your TL [target language] text, sometimes by deliberately not translating them [... ], or by compensating for them, because if translated cold you inevitably over-

translate them. In the example from Surah 'Iqra' cited above, Q96: 1 ends with the word ??????? , ? ???? and does not require a complement -- unlike create which requires an object. Also, ?? ??? Q96: 2, due to the Arabic structure and rules of grammar ?????? ??? ?????????? ?????????? is a ?? ??? ? ????? complete and meaningful sentence. Yet, if we compare this to English, we find that it goes against the rules of English to start a sentence in the way ayah 2 has been translated, i. e. Created Man of a blood-clot. ???? While the fa' il '???? ?( ' ??? subject) position can be filled in Arabic with no other pronoun but He, seven options are available in English to choose from (i. e. I, you, he, ?? Ahmed Abdel-Fattah M. Ali she, it, we and they). Considering the context of Q96: 1-2, the translator will have to relate the two ayat together in his translation in order to make sense. The significant difference in Arabic is that each ayah can also stand on its own, separately, as complete and meaningful in itself. The Qur'anic text indicates that the Lord created -- that is, He created all things, known and unknown, tangible and intangible, visible and invisible.

This sense is conveyed in ayah 1. The vision of the power of creation is then narrowed, in ayah 2, to one specific item, where we are told what He created -- indeed, He created mankind. In the Arabic, it is clear that what we have here is a movement in focus between creation in general, and creation in particular. The translated text, without the repetition, reads: Read in the name of your Lord who created man of a blood-clot. This makes the ayat lose the important dimension of generality. It loses, too, the dimension of specificity.

Furthermore, the Qur'anic text clearly indicates parallel rhetorical movements -between generality and particularity on the one hand, and between basic and complex on the other. But, these rhetorical movements have metaphysical implications. As has been shown above, the text your Lord who created shows the power of the Lord in His creation of all things. The text Created man is a movement to the particular, showing the power of the Lord in His creation of specific things. At the same time, we must be aware that humankind -- one of a host of Allah's creations -- is itself a composite of complex organisms, mechanisms and systems.

The uniqueness of humankind (its generality) rests not only in being one of many, but, at the same time, the quintessence of creation (its specificity). Similarly, reference to the blood-clot indicates the basic-to-complex shift. Blood is a basic component in the functioning of the human organism, but is also a complex component in itself. The blood-clot referred to is merely a speck on the lining of the ?? ??? womb, represented by the word ????????, which, apart from meaning blood-clot also carries the meaning of ' leech-like', ' hanging' and/or ' clinging' (c. f. Ibrahim [24, p. 6] and Al-Rehaili [25, p. 1]). Yet, in spite of being so basic a component, and so basic a stage of development, it still comprises all the elements of the complex human embryo. The dynamic between the poles of general-to-specific and the complex-to-basic, is reinforced in the Arabic text by the repetition, that is, the repetition of the word created ? ???? ????????. The repetition acts as a catalyst whereby the two movements are activated. The Arabic reader, reading the original, is immediately aware of the synonymy. The nonArabic speaker, reading a translation where the repetition has been left out, is not.

Word Repetition in the Qur'an - Translating Form or Meaning? ?? Therefore, the string of complexities in meaning having occurred with the use of a repeated word that ties all the involved strings together is lost. Also, the word created ? ????? ??????? ends (in the Arabic) with a syllable that rhymes with the last word in ayah 2. As a result, a rhythmic effect is created; it possesses a poetic beat at short intervals emerging from a powerful, intense and meaning-laded pattern. ? ????? This shows clearly the importance of repeating the word ??????? ith regard to meaning and rhythm. The translator might not be able to achieve such an effect in the translation because of the target language rules of grammar and the difference in assonance -- the sound gap -- between the source language and the target language. The wording of the Qur'an is deliberate and every word serves a purpose. Therefore, it is justifiable to say that if a word is repeated in the original it should, if possible, be repeated in the translation, unless of course the context dictates a different rendering for the repeated word.

Unlike other texts (be they sacred or not), when it comes to translating the Holy Qur'an, every word must be catered for. The translator has to account for each and every word in the original text, in addition to considering their meaning in context. Example two Another example, of the literally hundreds to choose from, that can be cited is in Surah Yusuf, which relates the story of Prophet Joseph, may peace be upon him, who

says: ? ?? ??? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??? ?????????????? ?????????????? ?????? ????? ???  
 ? ??? ?????? ?????? ?????????????? ? ? ????? ? ? ? ??? ? ? ? ??? ? ????? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

[I saw eleven planets and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves to me](7) (Qur'an 12: 4) (7) Many translations, such as most of

the ones used in this work render ?????????? as 'star' not 'planet' (see???? Pickthall [7]); perhaps the translators have been influenced by Genesis 37: 9 where Prophet Joseph told his brothers and father about his dream: "... the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me". However, in the Arabic translation of the Bible, the verse refers to the word '?????????' which is the same as in???? the Qur'an.

One wonders where the translator of this Biblical verse into English, assuming the correctness of the Arabic, got the word 'star' from? Genesis 37: 9 in Arabic reads: .«????????? ???? ?????? ??? ?????? ??? ?????????????? ??? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? : »????? ? ??? ? ? ??? ? ??? ? ? ? ? ? ????? ? ??? ? ? ??? ? ? ??? ????? ?????? c. f. [26]. On the other hand, Al-Nuwayri [27, pp. 38-9 & pp. 61-70] talks about and quotes lines of Arabic poetry where the word kawkab '?????' is used to refer to both planets and stars. The Qur'an uses the word kawkab ?? to refer to a shining body as in Q6: 76, Q24: 35.

See also, the plural form kawakib in Q37: 6 and Q82: 2. ?? Ahmed Abdel-Fattah M. Ali The verb '?' ( '???? saw) is repeated twice in the Arabic as well as in the translation, although the translation could have done without such repetition. It would have still made perfect sense if the translation had been: I saw eleven planets, the sun and the moon prostrating themselves to me. (8) We have already said that: the wording of the Qur'an is deliberate; every word serves a purpose; and deformation of the text's original meaning can occur if the repetition is not adequately catered for in the translation.

The above should not be interpreted as a defence of literal translation (see the discussion on Nabokov above) for all kinds of text. Still, it cannot be

denied that literal translation can sometimes be a most effective form of translation, therefore its value for certain texts -- the Qur'an in particular -- should not be devalued. However, if adopting such a method results in inaccuracy, or deviation from the original sense and intent of the source language text, it should be abandoned. Baker [28, p. ] puts it like this: "[...] text is a meaning unit, not a form unit, but meaning is realized through form and without understanding the meanings of individual forms one cannot interpret the meaning of the text as a whole. Translating words and phrases out of context is certainly a futile exercise, but it is equally unhelpful to expect a student to appreciate translation decisions made at the level of text without a reasonable understanding of how the lower levels, the individual words, phrases, and grammatical structures, control and shape the overall meaning of the text. "

After quoting and analyzing many Arabic texts, Johnstone [29, p. 177] concludes: " An arguer presents truths by making them present in discourse: by repeating them, paraphrasing them, doubling them, calling attention to them with external particles. [...] Argumentation by presentation has its roots in the history of Arab society [...] Arabic argumentation is structured by the notion that it is the presentation of an idea -- the linguistic forms and the very words that are used to describe it -- that is persuasive, not the logical structure of proof which Westerners see behind the words. "

The present author challenges Johnstone's assertion that Arabic resorts to linguistic forms rather than logical structure of proof in the science of persuasion. Such an assertion ignores the fact that it is impossible to prove the truth of anything by merely presenting it as a rhetorical structure like <https://assignbuster.com/word-repetition-in-the-quran-translating-form-or-meaning/>



repetition, paraphrase and so forth. Linguistic features of this kind are merely elements of style and discourse, not elements of deductive or inductive argument. Linguistic devices for the purposes of persuasion are (8) It is clear that the connective 'wa' is also repeated which is one of the features of Arabic. For details about the uses and functions of the wa, see Holes [13, pp. 217-20]. Word Repetition in the Qur'an - Translating Form or Meaning? used in every language (which, essentially, is what the art of rhetoric is all about). Rhetoric, however, can never substitute for proof -- neither in English nor Arabic! What Johnstone's argument does do, however, is to shed light on the importance of repetition in Arabic and that, as a feature, it is deeply rooted in the language itself. The example in surah Yusuf cited above provides a relevant dimension to this argument.

It is understood that Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him), saw what he believed was real in a dream although he did not say this himself. This is understood from his father's answer not to tell his brothers about his dream (your dream) (Q12: 5). The repetition of 'I saw' indicates that there was not the least doubt in the dreamer's mind that what he saw was real; it was at least a bit more than just a normal dream. He, of course, could not prove that he saw what he claimed, owing to the very nature of dreams. Therefore, he resorted to that feature in the language that gave his argument the confirmation it needed -- and that was repeating the key word 'I saw'. In this ayah, the reason Prophet Joseph repeated the verb was not to persuade his listeners, but to emphasize that, what he saw, was true. This example shows recourse to a

feature of the language when concrete proof cannot be provided. The proof of the veracity of what Prophet Joseph ' saw' lay, not in his linguistic presentation of simply saying it again and again (as claimed by Johnstone [29, p. 155]), but in the physical coming true of his claim - his dream - near the end of the narrative.

There is no doubt in the mind of the Arabic-speaking reader of the Qur'an that the repetitive nature of Prophet Joseph's language is verbally precursive to, and predictive of, an actual event fated to occur by the virtue of God's divine will. This is not, as Johnstone [29] would have us believe, mere linguistic form in order to persuade or convince, devoid of logical proof. The Prophet's convictions, emphasized by repetition, serve as testimony to his faith, and to his submission (Islam) to his God. His visions cited by repeated words, confirm his prophethood.

The repetition here is no mere rhetorical device -- it serves, instead, to confirm the Divine Hand behind the Prophet's visions and what subsequently occurred. The rational argumentation for the actuality and the veracity of the events is implicit, rather than explicit -- and is vested in the repetition.

Translating this implicit rational argumentation is not easy. Of course, in cases where explicit rational argumentation (" logical proof") is needed, we find that repetition becomes a means that communicates the truth and supports the proof. Ample examples can be found in Surah al-

Naml. ??? ??? ?)?? ????? ?????? ????? ??? ?????? ??? ??? ?????? ????????????? ?????????  
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not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them. (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, they are a people who swerve from justice. (60) Or, who has made the earth firm to live in; made rivers in its midst; set thereon mountains immovable, and made a separating bar between the two bodies of flowing water? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, most of them know not. 61) Or, who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him, and who relieves its suffering, and makes you (mankind) inheritors of the earth? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Little it is that ye heed! (62) Or, who guides you through the depths of darkness on land and sea, and who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? High is Allah above what they associate with Him! (63) Or, who originates Creation, then repeats it, and who gives you sustenance from heaven and earth? (Can there be another) god besides Allah?

Say, " Bring forth your evidence, if ye are telling the truth! " (64) Say: None in the heavens or on earth, except Allah, knows what is hidden: nor can they perceive when they shall be raised up (for Judgment). (65)] (Q27: 59-65)

Word Repetition in the Qur'an - Translating Form or Meaning? ?? Generally speaking, one of the functions of repetition in Arabic is to give force to the point made, and to add emphasis to the argument; in most cases, the repeated words are not redundant nor do they affect the style in a way that makes it gauche or clumsy. Consider, for example, the different translations for Surah al-Rahman where the word *almizan* ?????? ?????? ?????? (balance) is repeated three times. (9) The English translations, do, to the ??? ?? English ear, have a tiresome, repetitive quality which is absent in the Arabic: ????????

?????? ?????????? ??? ????????? )? ( ?????????????????? ?????????? ?????????????? ??? )?  
 ( ?????????????????? ????? ?????????????? ?????????????????????????? ? ? ? ? ????? ? ??? ? ????? ? ? ?  
 ? ? ????? ? ? ? ( ? ) ?????? ?????? ??? ?????? ?????? ? ?? ?? ? ??? ??? (Q55: 7-9) From  
 Khan & Helali [30] 7. And the heaven He has raised high, and He has set up  
 the balance. 8. In order that you may not transgress (due) balance. 9.

And observe the weight with equity and do not make the balance deficient.  
 From Ali [3] 7. And the firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the  
 balance (of justice). 8. In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. 9.  
 So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. We can see  
 from such examples that the original (source) language text does have a  
 clear impact on the translation. This impact, especially when dealing with  
 religious and sacred texts, is inescapable. It shows further how important the  
 form is; what considerable influence form exercises on translated text; and  
 what effect form has when translated. ?????????? ?????????????????????????? ?????? ???  
 is repeated 31 times, Q30: 20-25 ? ? ? ????? ? ? ????? ?????? ? ? ??? ? ? ? ??????????  
 where ?? ?????????????? ????? is repeated six times in six successive ayat. See also  
 Q54: 15, 17, 22, 32, 40 and 5 ? ?????? ?? ?????????????????? , Q69: 1-3 ????? ??????????????????  
 , Q74: 19-20 ????? ?????????????? ?????????? , Q75: 34-3 ?????????????? ??? ?????????????? , Q76:  
 15-16 ????? ? ? ?????? ?? ? ??? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?????? ? ?????????????????????????????????????? , Q82: 17-  
 18 ?????????? ? ?????? ?????????? ?????????? ?????????? ?????????????????? , Q95: 5-  
 6 ?????????????????? ??? ? ?? ?????????????? , Q101: 1-3 ?????????????????? ??? , Q102: 3???? ?? ???  
 ? ? ? ?????? ? ? ? ??? ?????? ??? ?????? ??? ? ?? ??? ?????? , Q109,  
 etc. ??? ??? ? ? ? ? ???? (9) Other examples are also found in Q55 where ??

Ahmed Abdel-Fattah M. Ali Conclusion The most difficult problem to resolve  
 in translating Holy Writ is, certainly for Muslims, a moral one. This paper has

focused on the debate of whether or not to translate repeated words which appear in the Arabic Qur'an into the target language. It has been shown that if translators choose to deliberately ignore the repeated words, they have actually failed to cater for all the words -- and, thereby, all the meanings -- in the original.

It is of secondary importance whether the translator may be justified or not for not translating repeated (or unrepeated) words as long as the meaning is not affected. This is because every word in the Qur'an (repeated as well as unrepeated) serves a purpose; and if translators fail to see this, it is not for them to decide that the reader, too, will not see what they have failed to translate. (10) This brings one to the opinion that what the translator of the Qur'an should do is opt for the straight translation. This does not preclude the fact that translators might labor in vain.

They might be genuinely sincere in preserving the stylistic features of the original text, hoping always to maintain, as best they can, the stylistic beauty of the repetition they find there. Yet, there is always the possibility that those very labors might be doomed to failure owing to the differences between the source and target language systems of meaning-making and functioning. (11) (10) (11) This is explained clearly in the Arabic saying

"? ?????? ??? ?? ?????? ?????? ??? ? ?????? ??? ?.

"?? ? ??? ? ? ????? ? ??? ? ? ? ??? ????? ????? The following examples are meant to shed some more light on this point.

According to Nasif [14, p. 22], ?????????? Si: bawayh says: " The Arabs say:

'? ?????? ?????????????? ?????? ?????? '????? and '????????????? ?????????? ?????? ? .

'???? The former is used when ? ?? ??? ? ????? ? ? ? ? ??? ? ? something good happens and as a result one praises Allah, while the latter is used when one expresses how he is". In his own

words: ."????????????? ??????? ??????? ?????????????? ?? ????????????????? ?????????? ?? ?????? ??? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??? ??? ??? ??? ????? ?"??? ????? ? ????? ?? ? ? ?

???? ? ? ? ? ????? ? ????? ? ????? ? ??? ? ?? By way of example, Dickins [31] also suggests comparing '????? ??? ??? ? ' ? ?? ??? with

' ????? ?? ? ?? ????? ? ????? ? ??? ?? ??? ?? ??? ????? ????? ?????? .'????? He says: "

Clearly, these two are distinct in Arabic, and in some contexts it might be

possible in ? ? English to translate ' ? ????? ?? ????? ? ' ? ? ?? ????? as ' This

man is indeed great'. In many contexts, however, ?? ??? ?? ? ??? ????? ?????

both ' ? ????? ??? ??? ? ' ? ?? ??? and ' ? ????? ?? ????? ? ' ? ? ?? ????? would have

to be translated as ' This man is

great' ?? ??? ? ??? ?? ??? ?? ??? ?? ? ??? ????? ????? (etc. ); the very real

difference between the two sentences simply cannot be relayed in English".

Word Repetition in the Qur'an - Translating Form or Meaning? ? Several

sincere attempts have been made in the past to minimize the effect of these differences, which result in unnatural sounding translations of the Qur'an.

However, the result is always at the expense of something else. Arberry [8, p. x], for example, compares the Qur'anic translations prior to his own,

saying: " In making the present attempt to improve on the performance of many of my predecessors, and to produce something which might be

accepted as echoing however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic

Koran, I have been at pains to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms

hich -- apart from the message itself -- constitute the Koran's undeniable

claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind. [... ]

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This very characteristic feature [...] has been almost totally ignored by previous translators; it is therefore not surprising that what they have wrought sounds dull and flat indeed in comparison with the splendidly decorated original. [...] I have striven to devise rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings in correspondence with what the Arabic presents, paragraphing the grouped sequences as they seem to form original units of revelation. As is clear from his comments above (as well as in many other places in the introduction to his translation of the Qur'an), much has been lost in previous translations and even his own attempt is but a faint echo of the "sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran". The question of what to do about translating repetition becomes consequent on recognizing the limitations of translating (or not translating) repetition in the Qur'an. Gaining a better understanding of the Arabic language definitely diminishes such misperceptions of incoherence.

Since Arabic is spoken by approximately one billion people, Muslims can hope for a greater awareness of Arabic as a religious, cultural and social force on the planet on the part of non-Arabic and/or non-Muslim countries. Where Arabic is recognized as the world language it is, the study thereof could conceivably be introduced throughout the various tiers of education in the rest of the world, and through that, attune non-Arabic speakers throughout the world to the differences and uniqueness inherent in the language.

This would aid readers of the Qur'an - believers or otherwise - to make the necessary mindshift from the rhetoric and discourse of their mother tongue to the translated text. In his "The Qur'an: A New Interpretation", Colin Turner says: "When one considers the complexities involved in translating a work <https://assignbuster.com/word-repetition-in-the-quran-translating-form-or-meaning/>



such as the Quran, one often wonders whether it might not be easier for the whole English-speaking world to learn Arabic in order to read the Quran than for one translator to bring the Quran to the whole of the English-speaking world.

As far-fetched as this option might sound, it is the one favoured by most Muslim scholars, whose opinion it is that the Quran is only the Quran if it is in Arabic and that however much it is translated, and into however many languages, the product which emerges on the other side can never be anything more than one man's humble - and, it goes without saying, fallible - interpretation". (Turner & Bahbudi [32, p. xiii]) In the meantime, until Arabic becomes more widely studied, the answer to the conundrum of how to translate repetition extant in the Qur'an must be a simple one.

The translator could, in an attempt to maintain the accuracy and faithfulness, and at the same time maintain the flow of the translation, make use of footnotes to draw the attention of the reader/critic to the actual wording of the original. In this way, the translator ?? Ahmed Abdel-Fattah M. Ali minimizes the effect of, at least, the form of the original on the translation. The meaning is (hopefully) preserved, and thereby, the reader/critic - and most importantly - the believer, is satisfied by accounting for all the words in the text involved. References 1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15] Hyde Park Christian Fellowship. Downloaded 5th June, 2002 from the Internet at: <http://debate.org.uk> Ghoneim, M. Some Answers to the Claimed Grammatical Errors in the Holy Quran. Downloaded 5th June, 2002 from the Internet at: <http://www.angelfire.com/mo/Alborhaan/Gram.html>

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K??? Word Repetition in the Qur'an -

Translating Form or Meaning? [21] ?? ??

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