

Strategies in Translation of Quranic Proper Nouns: A Case Study of Allah's Attributes of Acts

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Abstract

This paper was an attempt so as to study the strategies applied for English translations of Allah's Attributes of Acts in the Holy Qur'an. Thus, the researchers investigated whether each single translator used similar frequencies of the strategies. To this end, as the corpus of the study, six different English translations of the Holy Qur'an by Asad, Pickthall, Saheeh, Arberry, Hilali & Khan, and Mubarakpuri were selected and analyzed on the basis of a revised version of Chesterman's (1997) model. The results of descriptive and inferential statistics indicated that each single translator used different frequencies of the strategies while translating Allah's Attributes of Acts. This revealed the translators' preference for some specific strategies.

Keywords: The Holy Quran, Allah's Attributes of Acts, Translator, Strategy

Introduction

"The Holy Quran is the most widely read book in the history of mankind, a source of immense inspiration, guidance and wisdom for millions of Muslims all over the world" (Qadri, 2007, p. 2). More than eighty percent of about 1.5 billion population of the Muslims do not know Arabic and use translation as a mean to understand the meanings and messages of the Holy Quran (Farahani, 2013, p. 129). A large portion of these Muslims read the English translations of this Holy Book. It, as a result, appears necessary to pay due attention to the way these translations are done.

These days, one of the important problems in field of translation shall be translation of proper nouns. This is a challenging job in translation studies to convey the main essence of the nouns amongst cultures. Personal nouns often constitute a major problem in translating the Holy Quran. Concerning translation of proper nouns, numerous models have been presented thus far. In spite of this fact, none of the proposed

models are complete, and consequently, they don't encompass all strategies employed by translators. Selecting the appropriate model, therefore, is deemed as an important prerequisite to discovery of suitable strategies for translation of proper nouns.

This study aimed to examine the strategies used by translators to render names of Allah, in this case, the Allah's Attributes of Acts, in six English translations of the Holy Quran. Thus, it attempted to find out if each single translator used similar frequencies of the strategies in rendition of these attributes.

Definition of Key terms

Proper nouns: According to Alexander (1988), "A proper noun (sometimes a proper name) is used to label a particular person, place, object or idea which is unique" (p. 38).

Attributes of Acts: According to Misbah Yazdi, these Attributes are ascribed to Allah only with connection to a creature. Such as: The Sustainer, the Provider, the Manager, and the like, which denote Allah's acts. Without thinking of a created thing we cannot say: Allah is the Creator, or He is the Provider without there being someone needing to be provided for.

Research Background

Soltez (1967) divided proper nouns into 3 types namely 'sign names', 'word names' and 'combined names'. Sign names, as proposed by Soltez (1967), have no meaning in the way that a common noun does and are non-descriptive, non-connotative and unmotivated. Word names are characterized as motivated, connotative, and mostly descriptive. Finally, combined names are combinations of sign names and elements from the common word classes.

According to Newmark (1988) proper nouns are divided into three categories. Hereunder, a brief explanation of these categories is presented:

- *People's names*: "Normally, people's first and surnames are transferred, thus preserving their nationality, and assuming that their names have no connotations in the text" (p. 214).
- *Names of objects*: "Names of objects as proper names consist of trademarks, brands or proprietaries" (p. 215).
- *Geographical terms*: "You have to be up to date in your rendering, to check all terms in the most recent atlas or gazetteer and, where necessary, with the embassies concerned. You have to respect a country's wish to determine its own choice of names for its own geographical features" (p. 216).

Literature on Proper Nouns in the World

Al-Omar (2013) in his study investigated the facts and implications of transliterating proper nouns between Arabic and English which has usually proved to be not so simple. To solve the problems of translating proper nouns, Al-Omar suggested a scheme of conventionalized rules. The results showed it might be sufficient for language purists to lay down some transliteration guidelines for the translator. The translator's awareness of the facts and implications of the differences between the two languages assisted them in avoiding any inconsistencies which could have a damaging effect on the linguistic intuition of the native speakers of both languages.

Abu-Mahfouz (2011) investigated problems and semantic issues related to nouns. It was found out that those problems had at least three reasons: The translator used synonyms, transliterated words that had straightforward equivalents, and translated words that needed translation.

Chrestensen (2014) in his study focused on translation of compound nouns in user manuals. He investigated which translation strategies were used for translation of said compound nouns. The foundation of the study consisted of two empirical studies. The results showed that the respondents tended to prefer a direct form of translation over an explanation and the translators generally did a good job when translating compound nouns.

Thanh (2014) studied the machine translation of proper names from English and French into Vietnamese. This study focused on the problems of English-Vietnamese and French-Vietnamese proper noun machine translation systems. The findings showed that the pre-processing solution reduced significantly PNMT errors and contributed to the improvement of the MT systems for Vietnamese.

Literature on Proper Nouns in Iran

Mirza Suzani (2008) in his article on the translation of proper names drew on the problems of translating proper name from English to Persian and suggested some approaches that could be taken in this regard. In the same vein, Mirza Suzani (2009) in his book *Translation of Simple Texts (tarjomeye motune sade)* presented an assortment of classifications of proper nouns in English, considering social, cultural, historical and geopolitical aspects and put forward some various equivalents in Persian.

Delforouz Abdolmaleki (2012) in his paper studied proper names in translation. It aimed to show what happened to proper names in the process of translation, particularly from English into Persian. The study concluded that it was not true to simply claim that proper nouns were untranslatable. Rather, they sometimes needed to be translated, sometimes directly transformed, and sometimes to be coupled with definitions all depending on their specific characteristics and the context where they had been used.

Ahanizadeh (2012) in her study investigated the translation of proper names in children's literature. The study was based on Van Coillie's (2006) model of translation strategies of proper nouns. Through conducting the study, twenty-five English books and their translations in Persian were selected. After extracting and comparing all proper nouns, the results showed that the strategy of 'reproduction' was the most commonly used one in translating proper names from English into Persian.

Farahani (2013) studied the problems and strategies in English translation of Quranic Devine names. First, the problems which the translators met for attaining lexical adequacy and semantic equivalence were explored. Second, the type and extent of strategies adopted by three translators for overcoming the problems were described. The findings of the study showed that the lexical compression of the original Devine nouns and their emotive overtones and effects caused the main body of problems for translators.

Research methodology

Materials

In this study, in order to familiarize themselves with Allah's attributes, the researchers had to consult the Holy Qur'an, traditions, or even common-sense as much as possible. Besides, on the basis of the thesis' aims and also with regard to the clerics' comments, the noble Quran was chosen as the main source to collect the data from. This Holy Book was selected as it is deemed the most important religious book as well as the major source of Allah's Attributes of Acts. Moreover, their English translations along with its original Arabic one are at hand. Forty Allah's Attributes of Acts were extracted with the help of the clerics. In addition, some principal sources related to the field were consulted so as to ensure that no Allah's attributes of acts had been left behind.

Procedure of the Study

To conduct this study, the researchers employed the following procedures. The researchers, first, selected the Holy Quran as the main source of data. Then, he selected six English translations of the Holy Quran. These translations produced by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), Muhammad Asad (1980), Arthur Arberry (1955), Muhammad Sarwar (1981), Muhammad Mohsin Khan & Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali (1999), and Saheeh International (2007) were utilized as the data source through which the English equivalents of Allah's Attributes of Acts were spotted. Altogether, forty Allah's Attributes of Acts (whole sample) were spotted through the Arabic version and accordingly their equivalents from the English versions were extracted. The researchers employed a revised form of Chesterman's (1997) model to make analysis of the data. He recorded all the strategies applied by the translators while translating these forty Allah's Attributes of Acts from Arabic into English in order to be analyzed and input into SPSS (Version 21) for further analysis.

Framework of the Study

The current study made use of a revised version of the taxonomy suggested by Chesterman (1997) for translation strategies as the theoretical framework of the study. The researchers used this model since it encompassed 28 strategies and as a result, could be deemed an almost comprehensive model for translation of proper nouns. Hence, the researchers, for brevity, removed the strategies that were likely to overlap as well as the ones which could concentrate on the translation of whole sentences rather than nouns. In addition, since the model under consideration still did not seem to embody all strategies used by translators in translating proper nouns, the researchers preferred to select some other strategies to the framework: one strategy from Farahzad (1995) and another from Newmark (1998) and then added them to the revised version of Chesterman's (1997) model. As a result, the ultimate strategy types in the revised version of Chesterman's (1997) model were presented as follows:

Literal translation: It means the translator follows the source text form as closely as possible without following the source language structure.

Loan translation: This is the second syntactic strategy in his classification which refers to the borrowing of single terms and following the structure of the source text which is foreign to the target reader.

Transposition: Another term that Chesterman (1997) has borrowed from Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) is *transposition* that refers to any change in word class, for example adjective to noun.

Synonymy: It is the first subcategory in this group. In this strategy the translator selects the closest synonym, which is not the first literal translation of the source text word or phrase.

Antonymy: In this strategy, the translator uses a word with the opposite meaning. This word mostly combines with a negation.

Hyponymy: It means using a member of larger category (e.g. *rose* is a hyponym in relation to *flower*), and also hypernym is a related superordinate term, which describes the entire category with a broader term (e.g. *flower* is a hypernym in relation to *rose*).

Paraphrase: According to the overall meaning of the source text, it creates a liberal approximate translation, some lexical items may be ignored in this sort of strategy.

Emphasis change: This strategy increases, decreases or changes the emphasis of thematic focus of the translated text in comparison to the original.

Transliteration: It occurs when the letter of the target language shows the pronunciation of the PN in the source language. (Farahzad, 1995).

Expansion: adding elements in translation (Newmark, 1998).

The Issue of Reliability

In doing this study in order to decrease rater errors during analysis of the data, the researchers used inter-rater reliability. To do so, two raters took part in labeling the data, that is, the two researchers of the study. After the two raters labeled the data, the labels were compared with one another. A comparison of the labels generated through the application of correlation revealed a reliability of ($r=.80$) between the two raters. Finally, areas of differences were discussed between the two raters to reduce the discrepancies.

The Analysis of Data

The researchers used Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Chi-Square Test) for analyzing the present study's data.

Research Findings

Descriptive Statistics

In this section, strategies employed by translators while rendering Allah's Attributes of Acts from Arabic into English (on the basis of the revised model of Chesterman (1997)) have been presented. As shown in Table 1, ten strategies were recognized. In what follows, for brevity, Roman numbers are used instead of each strategy's name. The sample embodied 40 items rendered by six English translators.

Table 1: List of Strategies Employed to Analyse the Data

No.	Strategy
I	Literal translation
II	Loan translation
III	Transposition
IV	Synonymy
V	Antonymy
VI	Hyponymy
VII	Paraphrase
VIII	Emphasis change
IX	Transliteration

X	Expansion
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In the following, the frequencies of strategies as they were applied by translators during the rendition of Allah's Attributes of Acts from Arabic into English have been reported. Each translator was considered separately and frequencies of the ten strategies were reported for each translator.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Employed by Asad

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
III	2	5
IV	14	35
VII	18	45
VIII	1	2.5
X	5	12.5
Total	40	100

As presented in Table 2, strategy VII, paraphrase, was the most frequent strategy used by Asad (18 times, corresponding to 45%). Strategy IV (synonymy) was the next mostly used strategy (14 times, corresponding to 35%). Strategy X (expansion), being used 5 times (15.5%) took the third place. Asad used strategy III, transposition, (2 times, corresponding to 5%) and strategy VIII, emphasis change, (1 time, corresponding to 2.5%) to a much lower extent. Other strategies were not used by him.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Employed by Pickthall

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
IV	31	77.5
VII	5	12.5
X	4	10
Total	40	100

As illustrated in Table 3, Strategy IV (synonymy), being used 31 times (77.5%), was the most frequent strategy used by Pickthall. strategies VII (paraphrase), and X (expansion) ranked second and third with 5 times (12.5%) and 4 times (10%) respectively. Other strategies were not used by pickthall.

Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Employed by Saheeh

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
IV	30	75
VII	4	10
VIII	2	5
IX	1	2.5
X	3	7.5
Total	40	100

As the Table 4. shows, strategy IV (synonymy) was the most frequent strategy employed by saheeh (30 times, corresponding to 75%). Strategies VII, paraphrase, (4 times, corresponding to 10%), X, expansion, (3 times, corresponding to 7.5%), VIII, emphasis change, 2 times (5%), and IX, transliteration, (1 time, corresponding to 2.5%) resulted second to fifth respectively. Other strategies were not employed by Saheeh.

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Employed by Arberry

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
IV	21	52.5
VII	2	5
X	17	42.5
Total	40	100

As seen in Table 5, strategy IV (synonymy) with 21 times corresponding to 52.5% was the most frequent strategy employed by Arberry. Next to it, strategy X, expansion, (17 times, corresponding to 45.5) was the most frequent strategy. Strategy VII, paraphrase, was the least frequent strategy applied by him. He did not use other strategies.

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Employed by Khan & Hilali

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
III	1	2.5
IV	18	45
VII	10	25
VIII	4	10
IX	1	2.5
X	6	15
Total	40	100

As presented in Table 6, Khan & Hilali employed strategy IV, synonymy, (18 times, corresponding to 45%) much more frequently than the other five strategies. Strategies VII, paraphrase, (10 times, corresponding to 25%), X, expansion, (6 times, corresponding to 15%), VIII, emphasis change, (4 times, corresponding to 10%) resulted second to fourth. Both strategies III, transposition, (2.5%), as well as IX, transliteration, (2.5%) were used the least by these translators. They did not adopt other strategies.

Table 7: Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Employed by Mubarakpuri

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
III	1	2.5
IV	12	30
VII	4	10
VIII	5	12.5

IX	12	30
X	6	15
Total	40	100

As illustrated in Table 7, Mubarakpuri has employed the strategies IV, synonymy, (30%), and IX, transliteration, (30%), to an equal extent. Next to them, the strategies X (expansion), and VIII (emphasis change) with 6 times (15%) and 5 times (12.5%) were respectively the most frequent strategies. Mubarakpuri used strategy VII (paraphrase) 4 times corresponding to 10%. Strategy III, transposition, (2.5%) was the least strategy used by him. This translator never used other four strategies.

To answer the study's research question, the researchers used Chi-Square test as illustrated in the following tables (Table 8-13). To do so, the Chi-Square test was applied to examine if the obtained frequencies of the strategies were significantly different. It was done for each translator separately.

- Asad

Table 8: The Chi-Square Test: Comparison of Different Strategies Employed by Asad

Strategy	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
III	2	8.0	28.750	4	.000
IV	14	8.0			
VII	18	8.0			
VIII	1	8.0			
X	5	8.0			
Total	40				

Results of the Chi-Square in the Table 8, showed that the frequency difference among the strategies was significant (Sig. <0.05). On the basis of the observed frequency, strategy VII (paraphrase) was employed significantly more frequently than other strategies by Asad.

- Pickthall

Table 9: The Chi-Square Test: Comparison of Different Strategies Employed by Pickthall

Strategy	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
IV	31	13.3	35.150	2	.000
VII	5	13.3			
X	4	13.3			
Total	40				

As illustrated in Table 9, the results of the Chi-Square showed that the frequency difference among the strategies was significant (Sig. <0.05). According to the observed frequency, strategy IV (synonymy) was applied significantly more frequently than the others by Pickthall.

- Saheeh

Table 10: The Chi-Square Test: Comparison of Different Strategies Employed by saheeh

Strategy	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
IV	30	8.0	76.250	4	.000
VII	4	8.0			
VIII	2	8.0			
IX	1	8.0			
X	3	8.0			
Total	40				

According to the results of the Chi-Square test demonstrated in Table 10, the frequency difference among the strategies was significant (Sig. <0.05) meaning that strategy IV (synonymy) was adopted significantly more frequently than other four strategies by Saheeh

- Arberry

Table 11: The Chi-Square Test: Comparison of Different Strategies Employed by Arberry

Strategy	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
IV	21	13.3	15.050	2	.001
VII	2	13.3			
X	17	13.3			
Total	40				

Results of the Chi-Square in Table 11 indicated that the frequency difference among the strategies was significant (Sig. <0.05) that is Arberry had used strategy IV (synonymy) significantly more frequently than other strategies

- Khan & Hilali

Table 12: The Chi-Square Test: Comparison of Different Strategies Employed by by Khan & Hilali

Strategy	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
III	1	6.7	31.700	5	.000
IV	18	6.7			
VII	10	6.7			

VIII	4	6.7			
IX	1	6.7			
X	6	6.7			
Total	40				

The Chi-Square results depicted in Table 12 showed that the frequency difference of strategies was significant (Sig. <0.05). Based on the observed frequency, strategy IV (synonymy) was employed significantly more frequently than other strategies by Khan & Hilali.

Table 13: The Chi-Square Test: Comparison of Different Strategies Employed by Mubarakpuri

Strategy	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
III	1	6.7	14.900	5	.011
IV	12	6.7			
VII	4	6.7			
VIII	5	6.7			
IX	12	6.7			
X	6	6.7			
Total	40				

Results of the Chi-Square in table 13 demonstrated that the frequency difference among strategies is significant (Sig. <0.05). On the basis of the observed frequency it can be inferred that both strategies IV (synonymy) as well as IX (transliteration) were used significantly more frequently than other strategies by Mubarakpuri.

Conclusion:

The current study aimed to examine if each single translator used similar frequencies of the strategies while translating Allah's Attributes of Acts in the Holy Quran on the basis of a revised version of the model proposed by Chesterman (1997). Based on the obtained results, it was revealed that each single translator had employed different frequencies of the strategies while rendering these attributes. In other words, there was no single translator using similar frequencies of the strategies while rendering Allah's Attributes of Acts. The results were consistent with those reported by Amjad (2013, p. 5) examining the strategies used for rendering divine names. In that study, each single translator had employed a strategy more frequently than other strategies. Amjad concluded that the extent of adoption of each translation strategy was different from one translator to another. This revealed that translators preferred to apply some strategies more frequently than others. In the current study, Strategy IV (synonymy), for instance, was preferred by four out of six translators.

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