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Combating the Misrepresentation of Women in Quran Translations: Translational Interventions¹

By Alalddin Al-Tarawneh²

Abstract

The discourse concerning Islam, and in particular the translation of the Quran, has had a profound impact on Western views of Muslim women. Most Quran translations are stained with mistranslations, resulting from translators adopting the literal approach for religious reasons that we will explore. This has an impact on many aspects of meaning, but especially the representation of women. It should be noted that this article is not influenced by the views of feminist groups who focus on seeking new interpretations of the Quran. Instead, it pinpoints the genuine interpretation lost in translation. This article endeavors to identify the translational mistakes, and their influence on the image of women, through a comparison with the original text in terms of linguistic and paralinguistic features found in the Quran. The article adopts the interpretive approach in the form of a multiple-case study to clarify the mistranslated cases and to provide genuine interpretation as understood within the original context, without either addition or omission. The article concludes that many Quran translations instantiate a fertile ground, contributing to the creation of a negative image of Muslim women in the eyes of the West. This is attributed to the translator's lack of knowledge of Quranic scholarship, i.e., the paralinguistic issues and the excessive use of the literal approach that fails to capture the intended meaning of the original text.

Keywords: Quran translation, Women misrepresentation, Linguistic and paralinguistic features, Literal translation, Islam

Introduction

The discourse concerning Islam, and in particular the translation of the Quran, has had a profound impact on Western views of Muslim women. This is due to the many translations of the Quran circulating in the Anglosphere placing women in an inferior position, including presenting them as second-class citizens (Engineer, 1992; Lamrabet, 2016; Nicolau, 2014; Syed, 2004). These negative views have arisen from translations widely circulated in the West, and this study cites the most famous ones in use. Many translators do not apply the appropriate translational measures regarding the linguistic specificity of the Quran, offering an exclusively linguistic rendering of the original context. They also tend to fail to recognize the importance of historical, contextual, Islamic, and Quranic scholarship for attaining the intended meaning. This results in a miscommunication of the intended meaning of the Source Text (ST) and a consequent misrepresentation in the Target Text (TT), which then impacts the image of Muslim women in Western discourse. Such translational anomalies tend to influence views on several issues, including social matters, ideologies, and violence. The current article addresses this misrepresentation of women in translations of the Quran to combat it in Western discourse.

Two levels of misrepresentation of women can be found in the currently available translations of the Quran: firstly, the linguistic aspect of the Quran, which can be lost in

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translation due to the excessive use of the literal approach; and secondly, the paralinguistic specificity of the Quran, which transcends the lexical elements of the Quranic text. Each of these aspects is discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this article. The discussion also aims to respond to the negative views regarding Islam's treatment of women, which tend to originate in translations of the Quran.³ Linguistic barriers mean that many living in the West (both Muslims and non-Muslims) have little access to the Quran. In fact, most Muslims living in the Anglosphere (i.e., the second and third generations of early immigrants) no longer have Arabic as their mother tongue (Peterson, 2005). This leads them to seek information from translations of the Quran which contain a considerable number of mistakes in the translated material. Thus, this article explores the mistranslations that fail to include the full image presented in the original content, particularly those that depict women in TL in a more negative manner than SL. The article therefore focuses on the linguistic misrepresentation resulting from such mistranslations, while at the same time highlighting the need to improve the quality of translations of the Quran to dispel the current negative depiction of women's status in the English language versions.

It should be noted that this article is not influenced by the views of feminist groups who focus on seeking new interpretations of the Quran to meet modern demands. Such interpretations must be honest and fair from the lens of women, not from the man-handled interpretation (Bahar, 2020; de la Fuente, 2015; Hidayatullah, 2014; Muttaqin, 2015). Instead, this article pinpoints the genuine interpretation as understood within the original context, without either addition or omission. This can be seen in the following examples of literal translations of the Quran, indicating the impact these have on the perception of Islam and Muslims in the eyes of non-Arabic speakers, i.e., the negative perception of the status of women in Islam. To those individuals relying on translation, some verses are difficult to understand, even if a literal translation provides an exact and linguistically correct rendition, as this may fail to account for the additional meanings that lie beyond the words themselves.

The Quranic verse 36, chapter 3 refers to Mary's mother at the time Mary was born. In the translation by Sahih International (1997), Mary's mother says: "My Lord, I have delivered a female [...] and the male is not like the female. And I have named her Mary..." (Dukes, 2017). From a linguistic perspective, this literal translation is unproblematic and uncontroversial. However, it raises several questions in both contextual and cultural terms. Mary's mother was looking for a male child but was disappointed with a female one. Reading this verse within that context or the current one, it can be said that this culture prefers males over females. Taken at face value, it could be seen to imply that the Quran is sexist, as it differentiates between the status of females and males, while at the same time giving preference to the latter. For this reason, the Quran and its translation thereof could be accused of supporting this tendency. But on the contrary, this verse is contextually rooted in hints to the fact that Mary's mother wished for a male servant who would dedicate himself to serving a place of worship—it is all about the physical strength needed for the service of God (Al-Tarawneh, 2019). Such dedication requires substantial physical strength to execute heavy tasks (i.e., lifting heavy weights) or spending nights away from home, including being absent for several days, all of which are duties more easily fulfilled by men than women, particularly taking into consideration both the cultural and historical context. Therefore, in ST, this verse does not indicate any inherent superiority of, or preference for, males as opposed to females.

This article endeavors to identify such translational mistakes and their impact on the image of women through a comparison with the original. This is undertaken by means of an interpretive paradigm in the form of a multiple-case study. The approach is appropriate for an

³ This article does not want to insinuate that such mistreatments do not exist within Arabic-speaking communities. Unfortunately, many of those reading the Quran literally may reach the same misunderstanding that one finds in the texts that are translated into other languages due to the blunt approach of literal translation.

in-depth exploration of issues and an understanding of context-related problems. After interpreting the chosen cases based on Quran exegeses, this study employs the translations to undertake a comparison with the original text, to contrast the way women are depicted in the translation as opposed to the original version.

The translations used in this article for the sake of discussion and comparison are as follows: (1) *The Holy Quran: Translation and Commentary* (Ali, 2001); (2) *The Noble Quran in the English Language* (Khan, 1996); (3) *The Holy Quran Translated* (Shakir, 1999); and (4) *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* (Arberry, 1996).⁴ The evidence and interpretations employed in this article are sought from Quranic scholarship, particularly the Quranic exegeses, which are overlooked by many translators due to the influence of the formal (i.e. literal) approach.

This article discusses several linguistic and paralinguistic examples, comparing them with a selection of translations currently in use. This is followed by concluding remarks. It should be noted that due to limitations of time and space, this paper is unable to address all cases of misrepresentation of women in translation. It therefore recommends that the remaining examples should be the subject of future research.

The Quran and Translations of the Quran: The Misrepresentation of Women

In Islam, the Quran (also known as the Koran or Qur'an) is viewed as the unchanged and literal word of God (Allah), as revealed to Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, through the agency of Archangel Gabriel. For any Muslim, this belief is beyond question. It is taken from the definition that the sacredness of the Quran is only established in Arabic, with any other version deemed unholy. Therefore, a translation of the Quran does not equate with the Quran itself, i.e., the former, unlike the latter, is deemed theologically sacred and holy. This issue relating to translation of the Quran has now become significant, particularly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, along with the various subsequent events. There is currently a considerable global demand for translations of the Quran, with Index Translationum–World Bibliography of Translation stating that it has now become the book most frequently translated from Arabic into different languages (UNESCO, 2003).

Despite this popularity, the process of translating the Quran is significantly influenced by the fact that most of the translations are highly literal. This is due to the belief that the Quran is the literal word of God, which drives many translators to espouse the literal approach in an attempt to maintain its holiness (Abdul-Raof, 2010). This can lead to an excessive use of this approach, resulting in creating translations that, while superficially appearing to present the original in terms of wording, fail to represent its content.

This also results in many readers of the Quran and its translations holding contrasting views because the translation fails to communicate the original ideas. The miscommunication is instantiated by many aspects, one of which concerns a misunderstanding of the status of women presented in translations of the Quran. Women are frequently described as being subjugated to men, with the Quran allegedly putting forward the belief that “a woman is an inferior being, heartless, who must unconditionally bow to the man, having the purpose to keep the house clean and to procreate” (Nicolau, 2014). Such allegations are most likely to be drawn from translations that do not represent the original meaning. Indeed, much of the debate relating to the empowerment of women is highly informed by Western discourse, which adopts its ideas from the many translations of the Quran (Ismail, 2017). Thus, the West tends to think Muslim women live in a backward and male-dominated world, where a woman's value is considered

⁴ The choice of these translations is based on the result of a questionnaire submitted to several Islamic institutions based in English-speaking countries, particularly in the USA and the UK. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked via emails about the most frequently used Quran translations within their institutions. Accordingly, the choice was made.

to be half that of a man (i.e., referring to the Quran and the translation with regard to inheritance in verse 11, chapter 4) (Saiffee et al., 2012). This claim might be partially justified but has not yet been carefully investigated. Sahih translates the verse in question as follows: “Allah instructs you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the share of two females...” This translation is not linguistically problematic, yet it does not provide a full mapping of the relevant information. This is due to a failure to accompany the translation by the interpretation of the verse made by various well-known Muslim scholars, as found in many Quranic exegeses. This unequal division of shares needs to be viewed from the original Quranic context, which considers men as holding sole financial responsibility for their families, including parents and sisters, even if these are independently wealthy (Barlas, 2001). It shows that the portion given to the man is also intended to be shared with other dependents, whereas the female is not required to spend from her wealth.

This verse therefore reveals that decontextualizing a translation of the Quran paves the way for false claims about Islam, as well as misrepresenting its attitude towards women. Furthermore, it also creates a stereotype view of the laws of Islam (which are derived from the Quran) as depriving women of their basic human rights and ensuring male supremacy, as if this is the will of God. This consequently presents Islam as the enemy of women (Kamguian, 2018). However, such allegations could be easily refuted if translators of the Quran were made aware of the Quranic linguistic and paralinguistic features.

Linguistic and Paralinguistic Features of the Quran: Discussion

The language of the Quran is unique, due to it being composed of a language known to its native speakers, while at the same time outstripping its finest poetry (Larcher, 2013). Thus, the Quran does not focus on the language itself, but rather on how it is employed to deliver the message. The uniqueness lies in the fact that “Quranic Arabic is usually deemed to be neither prose nor poetry, but rather a heightened form that blends both” (Al-Tarawneh, 2019). This distinction is based on linguistic and paralinguistic characteristics that need to be understood in order to penetrate the content of the Quran. Such linguistic specificities have been covered by many books and various lines of research, including those examining syntactic, semantic, phonetic/prosodic, and rhetorical features. When it comes to paralinguistic features, an understanding of the Quran can, at times, prove inaccessible even to native Arabic speakers for reasons that exist beyond the language, particularly in relation to the historical and contextual aspects. This is a result of the revelation of the Quran taking a period of 23 years to complete and not being revealed in the form of a book on one single occasion.

Due to limitations of space, this article focuses on two linguistic and two paralinguistic features, concomitant with the theme of the misrepresentation of women in translation of the Quran. The linguistic features consist of polysemy and euphemism, while the paralinguistic ones include the causes of revelation and abrogating and abrogated verses.

Polysemy

Polysemy is known in English as a word possessing a network of possible, multiple, but ‘related’ meanings (Neriich & Clarke, 2003). However, in Arabic, polysemy is considered to be a word with multiple but ‘different’ meanings (Alwan & Albabili, 2018). The Arabic Quranic perspective is employed in the current discussion due to the misunderstood cases under consideration being originally in Arabic. The Quran is assumed to be abundant with words whose meanings are to be understood from the context, i.e., the linguistic environment. Therefore, a misunderstanding of the context of such a word can result in mistranslation. This can be illustrated by the following: the Quranic verse 14, chapter 3 tends to be mistranslated in a manner that strips women of their equal status with men, while at the same time depicting

them as fulfilling desires or lusts tailored to men. This can be seen in various well-known translations:

1. Ali: "Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons..."
2. Shakir: "The love of desires, of women and sons [...] is made to seem fair to men."
3. Khan: "Beautified for men is the love of things they covet; women, children..."
4. Arberry: "Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts—women, children..." (Dukes, 2017)

In each translation, the underlined words, i.e. 'men' and 'women', represent the mistranslation of the original words ناس (*naas*) and النساء (*alnissa*), respectively. The former is a mistaken assumption resulting from missing the polysemous nature of the latter. The original word representing 'men' in the above translations is ناس (*naas*), which dictionaries confirm as referring to 'people'. Although 'people' includes men and women, it appears the translators have chosen to use 'men' due to an assumption that desires and lusts are limited to males.⁵ However, a translation undertaken by women (i.e. Sahih International) results in the following translation: "beautified for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and sons..." (Dukes, 2017).

Unlike previous translations, that of Sahih International employs the term 'people' in place of 'women', which can be seen as being halfway to attaining the correct translation. However, all of these translations have failed to capture the meaning of the second word in question, النساء (*alnissa*), which dictionaries state as representing 'women.' This can be attributed to the limited scope of the translators, who have failed to recognize the wider picture relating to the semantic potential. However, advanced Arabic dictionaries also reveal that the original word has an additional meaning, i.e., it also represents the plural form and additionally means 'the latest of everything or the most modern and sophisticated' (Mas'oud, 1992; Omar, 2008). Such recognition reveals the presence of two semantic options: (1) 'women' or (2) 'the most recent or sophisticated'. An accurate choice is determined through the 'semotactic' environment or 'co-text', which observes the surrounding words as disambiguating and determining the ST meaning (Basil & Jeremy, 2004). Depending on the linguistic environment or context, a semantic analysis is then applied to select the word most appropriate for the context. In this regard, God mentions the delights He puts in this life for 'people' (i.e., males and females) that, generally speaking, represent the objects of mankind's natural instinct. These delights or desires commence by seeking out the latest and most sophisticated things, such as children (i.e., an indirect reference to sex), collecting and saving wealth, and property. In other words, God addressed 'people', rather than solely 'men', stating that you (i.e., males and females) love and tend towards fulfilling needs and desires, as noted above. To stress this fact, Arabic, unlike English, only employs masculine or feminine cases on words; nonetheless, the tendency to use the male form is dominant amongst both male and female Arabic speakers. Indeed, this tendency is common and known in Arabic as *altaghleeb* or the predominance rule. In this regard, Dr. Amina Wadud draws an example of the tendency amongst Arabic speakers

⁵ The same translators are not consistent when it comes to translating the same word in different places. In fact, the Quran uses the word, ناس (*naas*), with the inclusive sense of addressing 'people' as in the Quranic verse 1, chapter 4: Ali: "O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person..."; Shakir: "O people! be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single being..."; Khan: "People, have fear of your Lord who has created you from a single soul..."; and Arberry: "Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul..." (Dukes, 2017).

to use the male form for God, which is a mistake and contradicts Islam, which states that God is removed from similitude to humans (Fiedler, 2010). If this was not the case, the Quran might be accused of objectifying women, treating them as commodities like other desirable materials, or simply as rewards to satisfy sexual needs.

Euphemism

Euphemism is a rhetorical linguistic feature whose function is to replace a linguistic element considered offensive, or which suggests something unpleasant. Euphemism in the Quran is interesting, particularly when investigated from a translational perspective, due to the potential for this device to be lost in translation in the face of literal handling. As stated earlier, the literal approach to the translation of the Quran generally fails to capture the intended meaning in TL. Not only does such a translation fail to communicate the original meaning, but it may also result in proposing an opposite perception. This can be demonstrated by Quranic verse 43, chapter 4, which views women as ‘dirty’ creatures, with men being required to cleanse themselves whenever they ‘touch’ them, particularly prior to going through any religious ritual, i.e., reciting the Quran or performing the prayer. This misleading perception is based on a mistranslation that contributes to the propagation of the allegedly sexist bias of Islam when it comes to women. To illustrate, the verse is translated as follows:

1. Ali: “...If ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women, and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands...”
2. Shakir: “...if you are sick, or on a journey, or one of you come from the privy or you have touched the women, and you cannot find water, betake yourselves to pure earth, then wipe your faces and your hands...”
3. Khan: “...if you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you comes after answering the call of nature, or you have been in contact with women and you find no water, perform Tayammum with clean earth and rub therewith your faces and hands (Tayammum)...”
4. Arberry: “...if you are sick, or on a journey, or if any of you comes from the privy, or you have touched women, and you can find no water, then have recourse to wholesome dust and wipe your faces and your hands...” (Dukes, 2017)

Such translations provide a fertile ground for those accusing Islam of mistreating women. For example, *Islam: Evil in the Name of God*, which relies on such translations, states the following negative view: “Muslim women are dirty polluting creatures” (Neuman, 2009). It should be recognized that, according to all dictionaries, the words ‘touch’ or ‘in contact’ are the correct literal translations of the original word لامستم (*lamastum*). Nevertheless, the translators have overlooked the euphemistic function that stands for sexual intercourse. This indicates that it is not the accidental ‘touch’ that nullifies a man’s ablution, but rather it is the act of sexual intercourse that necessitates the renewal of ablution before performing religious rituals (Ibn Kathir, 1999). The translators should therefore acknowledge the euphemistic function of the expression, rather than placing the exact wording in TT.

Causes of Revelation

As noted above, the revelation of the Quran was completed over a period of 23 years. In addition, some verses were revealed as a response to a specific incident or a situation, highlighting that an awareness of the specific triggering event is vital to the understanding of the relevant verses in order to prevent their meaning from appearing ambiguous or incomplete.

However, it should also be recognized that proficiency in SL and TL is insufficient for the translation of such verses, and that the translator needs to be aware of their context. In addition, the context is not solely linguistic, but also includes the physical situational one encompassing various factors, including time, place, and the different parties involved.

Thus: “context plays a crucial role throughout the Qur’an in understanding, interpreting, and translating it into another language... (while) insufficient regard has been paid to context in most translations of the Qur’an into English” (Abdel Haleem, 2018). Overlooking this feature results in women being misrepresented in translations of the Quran. One example is the issue of testimony (eyewitness) of women, as presented in existing translations of the Quran. In different parts within the Quran (but not in its various translations), women and men are treated equally in terms of creation⁶ (i.e., being created from the same entity), along with their rewards and punishments.⁷ In the Quran, the words ‘man’ and ‘woman’ appear on 24 occasions (Nicolau, 2014). However, translations that lack the overall picture can disregard women, portraying them as inferior to men, particularly in the case of testimony. The Quran contains a verse regarding the testimony of women that can be seen to devalue women in comparison to their counterparts. The Quranic verse 282, chapter 2 states:

1. Ali: “...and get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her...”
2. Shakir: “...and call in to witness from among your men two witnesses; but if there are not two men, then one man and two women from among those whom you choose to be witnesses, so that if one of the two errs, the second of the two may remind the other...”
3. Khan: “...and get two witnesses out of your own men. And if there are not two men (available), then a man and two women, such as you agree for witnesses, so that if one of them (two women) errs, the other can remind her...”
4. Arberry: “...And call in to witness two witnesses, men; or if the two be not men, then one man and two women, such witnesses as you approve of, that if one of the two women errs the other will remind her...” (Dukes, 2017)

These translations are denotative and void of any idiomatic, metaphorical, or indirect meaning, stating clearly that the testimony of one man is equal to that of two women. However, these translations fail to recognize that this verse is context-dependent and so cannot be interpreted without knowing the situation leading to the revelation, which ensures the verse is valid in relation to a specific time and place.⁸ This is the only occasion in the Quran where women are viewed as unequal to men when it comes to testimony, and it is only limited and restricted to a specific financial situation, i.e. the issue of loans with which women were unfamiliar at that particular time (Iqbal & Jaami, 2016). This was due to the fact that, at the time of the revelation, trade was being conducted by camel caravans between the Levant and the southern Arabian Peninsula. This passage through desert regions, with its perilous terrain and high temperatures potentially reaching 50°C, was assigned to male members of the community, resulting in men being more familiar than women with issues such as loans, debts,

⁶ God insists that men and women are created equally from the same Soul. The biblical idea circulated amongst many (and sometimes found in translations) does not match the Quran, i.e., Eve comes from Adam. This is known in Islam as the Israelite accounts (Roded, 2015).

⁷ Arberry: “And their Lord answers them: 'I waste not the labor of any that labors among you, be you male or female - the one of you is as the other...'” (Dukes, 2017).

⁸ Such verses exercise a specific function, one that was valid at the time of revelation but not necessarily generalized subsequently, despite remaining a part of the Quran.

or payments (Ali, 2004). Financial experience is now equally accessible to women and men, with both being well-educated, and enjoying the same rights, resulting in the testimony of a woman being equal to that of a man (Esposito, 2011).

To accentuate this point, apart from this single context-dependent situation, the Quran never differentiates between the testimony of women and men. For example, the Quran states that the testimony of a woman is equal to that of a man in context-independent verses, such as the issue of fornication. In verse 6, chapter 24, if a woman is accused of committing adultery in the absence of four witnesses capable of confirming the act, the husband is required to bear witness, i.e., testify by taking an oath four times that he speaks the truth. The woman is also required to defend herself by bearing the same witness, i.e., testify by taking an oath four times that the claim is baseless. This then draws the issue to a conclusion, as the injunction is considered valid both at the time of revelation and for many centuries afterwards. It is important to highlight this aspect to avoid the Quran being seen as contradicting itself in relation to the testimony of men and women.

The intervention that needs to be incorporated into translations of the Quran concerning this point generally consists of glossing (or thickening) the text. Providing only the literal translation, even when linguistically correct, is simply communicative and therefore demands insertion of the contextual information in order to elaborate the specificity of this situation. It would then be able to dispel the current negative representation of women in the Quran and Islam.

Glossing or thickening of translation is a technique employed to expand the text by means of additional information not present in ST. It is an interpretive tool that locates the text within a rich cultural or linguistic context (Appiah, 1993), and proves enlightening by:

(Leading) the target readers into a thicker context of the original and informing them of the shared knowledge between the original author and his/her readers, thick translation represents the original culture in a deeper and fuller manner, helping to reduce, even avoid, misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. (Minhui, 2014)

In his attempt to translate into English the texts from Melanesian tribes living in Eastern New Guinea, renowned anthropologist Malinowski (1923) stated that it is “helpless to open up the meaning of a statement by mere linguistic means.” This confirms the need for the contextual explanation noted above to be inserted in the translation, to clarify the situation. The manner of insertion can conform to the style selected by the translator, i.e., footnotes, endnotes, or parentheses.

Abrogating and Abrogated Verses

The Quran was revealed in an order that differs from that found in current printed versions, i.e. the first part to be revealed is not found in the first chapter, but in chapter 96, verse 1. During the course of the revelation, some verses came to nullify the function of previous ones, yet both are considered indispensable to the overall Quran. The older ones are known as the abrogated verses, while the more recent as the abrogating verses (Āzmāyish, 2015). This can be illustrated by the fact that, prior to Islam, Arabs were heavy consumers of alcohol, which made it impractical to initially place a complete ban on it. Therefore, a gradual process of prohibition was executed through successive Quranic pronouncements, taking place over three years. This process commenced with verse 219, chapter 2: “they ask you about wine and gambling. Say, ‘in them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit’” (Dukes, 2017). Verse 43, chapter 4 was subsequently revealed to abrogate the previous verse, by expanding the restriction to cover practicing rituals: “O you

who have believed, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying” (*ibid*). Finally, the prohibition of alcohol was culminated by the revelation found in verse 90, chapter 5: “O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants [...] are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful” (*ibid*). Thus, the latter abrogated and nullified the previous verses, declaring the strict prohibition of alcohol consumption (Al-Tarawneh, 2019).

The example cited above highlights that the status of women is likely to be misrepresented if this aspect of the Quran is not taken into consideration during translation. It not only impacts women, but also represents the Quran as hosting a number of contradictory rulings. This can be seen in the verse addressing the issue of women found guilty of sexual intercourse. Verse 15, chapter 4 is translated as follows:

1. Ali: “If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, take the evidence of four (reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them...”
2. Khan: “Those of your women who commit fornication, let four (Muslim) witnesses testify to their act. If there is sufficient testimony, confine them to their homes until they die...”
3. Shakir: “And as for those who are guilty of an indecency from among your women, call to witnesses against them four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness confine them to the houses until death takes them away.”
4. Arberry: “Such of your women as commit indecency, call four of you to witness against them; and if they witness, then detain them in their houses until death takes them...” (Dukes, 2017)

In reality, it is unlikely to find four witnesses to what is assumed to be a very private act—it is a legal ruling, yet it is not applicable. Moreover, this punishment is made against the spirit of the Quran which, on several occasions, states that God forgives everything except associating anything with God-worshipping. However, these translations present this as demanding a life-long punishment. The function of this verse was abrogated by the revelation of verse 2, chapter 24, which replaces this punishment as follows:

1. Ali: “The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication—flog each of them with a hundred stripes...”
2. Khan: “The woman and the man guilty of illegal sexual intercourse, flog each of them with a hundred stripes...”
3. Shakir: “the fornicatress and the fornicator, flog each of them, (giving) a hundred stripes...”
4. Arberry: “The fornicatress and the fornicator—scourge each one of them a hundred stripes...” (Dukes, 2017)

As noted above, the issue of abrogated and abrogating verses is not fully comprehended by many Muslims, including native speakers of Arabic (Usta, 2019). However, the translational intervention that would help defog this ambiguity is the same used in the verses containing the causes of revelation, i.e., thickening or gloss translation. In such cases, it is recommended that the translator adds the relevant information accompanied by cross-references to demonstrate the aspects that are abrogated and those that are abrogating. Such additional information is beneficial for guiding readers, particularly those unfamiliar with Arabic and who therefore rely on translations for the correct interpretation.

Conclusion

This article has examined the misrepresentation of women in the English language translations of the Quran, including highlighting how this contradicts their image as presented in the original text. It also discussed how this misrepresentation has contributed to the creation of negative images of Muslim women in the eyes of the West, which relies on translations of the Quran. In addition, it examined how such information can then be used to create the West's discourse concerning Muslim women, including that they are seen as: (1) a means of satisfying men's lusts; (2) 'dirty' creatures not worthy of touching; (3) being determined by God as unequal to men; and (4) subject to harsh punishments, as ordained by God and exercised only on women. In addition, there are several further accusations of the negative treatment of women that lie outside the scope of this paper.

The current article concludes that such allegations can be seen to arise from the mistranslation of the Quran and the current lack of knowledge when it comes to Quranic scholarship. This includes most translations of the Quran being inadequate, particularly because the meaning found in the translation fails to match that of the original. Generally speaking, this can be attributed to a tendency to rely heavily on literal translation, which does not give due weight to meaning, and as a result it is unable to address many of the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the Quran.

For any translation of the Quran to form the bridge between SL and TL, there is a need for careful analysis of the language employed, in particular due to the fact that the language of the Quran differs from modern Arabic. This leads to the need for a non-literal approach in order to capture the intended meaning and the function of language, rather than language in general, i.e., the use of euphemism and polysemy. Moreover, this article has identified that translators tend to abstract themselves from Quranic scholarship because of viewing translation as merely a linguistic process while forgetting that it entails specialized knowledge that may not be accessible to all translators. It is therefore vital to understand the cultural, historical, and contextual information of the Quran and ensure that this becomes an aspect of any translation, even if it is not obviously a Quranic text. Thus, any Quranic source can prove beneficial when seeking such information, with the outcome incorporated in TL through thickening the text (i.e., by means of footnotes, endnotes, or parentheses). Any translation of the Quran cannot be made to correspond word-for-word with the original text; rather, it is an issue of understanding it in context. This can help to dispel many mistakes occurring in TL. In particular, it avoids the air of mystery, along with a considerable degree of disinformation concerning Muslim women, found in many inaccurate translations currently in circulation.

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