

## **The Effects of Norms on Translation Practice: A case study of Contemporary Translations of the Quran**

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### **Extended abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

According to Toury (1995), translation is a norm-based behavior. In the course of their direct and indirect trainings, translators familiarize themselves with the linguistic, cultural and social norms which are used by the contemporary translators and later, as professional translators, use them consciously or unconsciously in their translations. In other words, translations are written under the influence of the linguistic, cultural and social norms of the target culture. However, Toury believes that translators are free to follow or reject a norm even though they prefer to follow the norms to avoid punishment. The present paper is based on the hypothesis that there has been a change in the style of the Quran translations after the Islamic Revolution. This new style is literary as opposed to the word-for-word translations published before the Revolution. The translation of Elahi Qomsheie was a turning point in that it was neither literary nor word-for-word. The great number of literary translations that followed it showed a strong tendency toward a literary style. It is hypothesized that these translations provide a clear example of the influence of norms on translation. While each new translation is expected to present a new linguistic and stylistic style, the study shows that the translations not only differ in style, but also in their interpretation of the meaning of the Quran.

#### **2. Methodology**

The research hypothesis states that most of the contemporary Persian translations of the Quran show a literary style. In other words, it is hypothesized that the translators of these texts have had literary backgrounds and considered the Quran as a literary text. It is further hypothesized that the trend toward literary translation has gradually established a norm for the new translations to follow. To prove the

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research hypothesis, three different translations of the surah Al-Shams has been selected and compared with each other.

### **3. Discussion**

What are literary features? And how is the literary style defined? The term style has been given various definitions. A literary style has also been described based on various features. To meet the goals of the study, style is defined as comprising three sets of elements: words, figurative language, and syntax. These three elements can be combined in different ways to form different styles. Words provide the most important feature. To a great extent, the translator can change the text style through their choice of words. For example, the high frequency of colloquial words used in a text gives the text a colloquial style. The same is true about literary words. Syntax is probably the second most important element of determining the style of a text. Each language has its own syntactic rules while each language has also syntactic rules marking a certain period. Some of these rules are used in all types of texts while others are used exclusively in literary texts. Finally, figurative expressions are often used with a high frequency in literary texts. To verify the hypotheses of the study, a surah of the Quran was selected, and three contemporary translations of the surah were compared with each other. The basis of the comparison was the literary elements mentioned above. As for the procedure used, first a translation was made of the surah in a stylistically neutral style, and then the translations were compared with this neutral translation.

### **4. Conclusion**

In light of great books such as the Quran, each new translation is expected to be different to justify itself. The difference could be justified in terms of hermeneutics, style or audience. However, both in the past and the present the translations of the Quran have followed suit. The translations appearing before the one done by Elahi Qomshei were word-for-word; they were not meant to be beautiful. In fact, the main goal was to achieve accuracy; by accuracy they meant word-for-word translation, nor were such translations addressed to a particular audience. On the contrary, the contemporary translations do have a particular audience; one that is educated and intellectual appreciating the aesthetic and literary aspects of the translations. The contemporary translators also defined accuracy not in terms of the source, but also the target language. The research hypothesis was that in each period translators may prefer to follow the accepted and established norms rather than present new experiences in translation. This is particularly true in cases where following the norms is politically or economically encouraged. A change of the audience required a new type of the Quran translation; one that happened to be received warmly by the political system. It was no coincidence that almost all the translators who were engaged in the translations of the Quran were literary men,

neither religious scholars nor linguists and translation scholars. The great tendency of these translators towards using a literary language is shown in the analysis of the three translations of the same surah.

**Key words:** Norm, Literary Style, The literal translation, Contemporary translation.

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