

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ALI 571: History of Quran Translation into English

Session 2: Oct 28, 2020

Let us begin with this Du‘ā

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ * اللَّهُمَّ أَخْرِجْنِي مِنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْوَهْمِ
وَأَكْرِمْنِي بِنُورِ الْفَهْمِ اللَّهُمَّ افْتَحْ عَلَيْنَا أَبْوَابَ رَحْمَتِكَ
وَأَنْشُرْ عَلَيْنَا خَزَائِنَ عُلُومِكَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ *
اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent. O Allah, remove me from the darkness of doubt and error, and favor me with the light of understanding. O Allah, open for us the doors of Your mercy and unfold for us the treasures of Your knowledge. O the Most Merciful of the merciful.

O Allah, bless Muhammad and his family.

Why study the Quran?

3 عنه (ص): إِنَّ أَرْدَيْتُمْ عَيْشَ السُّعَدَاءِ وَمَوْتَ الشُّهَدَاءِ وَالنَّجَاةَ يَوْمَ الْحُسْرَى وَالظِّلَّ يَوْمَ الْحَرُورِ وَالهُدَى يَوْمَ الضَّلَالَةِ فَادْرُسُوا الْقُرْآنَ فَإِنَّهُ كَلَامُ الرَّحْمَنِ وَحِرْزٌ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَرُجْحَانٌ فِي الْمِيزَانِ.

Prophet Muhammad (s): *if you desire :*

Life of the fortunate and those with felicitations, The death of the Martyrs,

Salvation on the Day of Judgment, Security on the Day of Fear,

Light on the Day of Darkness, Shade on the Day of Scorching Heat

Quenching on the Day of Thirst

Weighing [down of good deeds) on the Day of Light (weight of scales)

*Guidance at the occasion of going astray **then study of the Quran.** This is because the Quran is the word of Allah, instrumental in saving you from Shaytān and helpful in increasing the weight of your good deeds.*

(Mīzān-ul-Hikmah, H. 16156; Jami' al-Akhbar of al-Sha'iri, p. 41, Bihar 89:19)

Seven phases of English translation

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- Phase 1: opposition to translating into another language when the Holy Book was in Arabic
- Phase 2: first English translation from French
- Phase 3: first English translation from Arabic followed by two more translations
- Phase 4: the Qadiyani/Ahmadi influence
- Phase 5: Muslim translators' lasting impact
- Phase 6: Orientalists improved translation
- Phase 7: More Muslims attempt the translation
- Future: selecting the 'appropriate' rendering from existing translations

Early Muslim Translators

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1911, Abul-Fadl, *The Quran*. It is the first English translation by a Muslim.

Kidawi writes, ‘both in its conception and execution it is a poor work.’

1916, Hairat Dihlawi, *The Quran*. It claims to present, “a complete and exhaustive reply to the manifold criticism of the Koran by various Christian authors as Drs Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Sir William Muir.” Kidawi comments, “it represents a pious undertaking of some well-meaning, though not competent Muslims.” reprinted only once in 1930.

1920, Ghulam Sarwar, *The Holy Quran*. Another translation, ‘undertaken by a Muslim scholar . . . against the backdrop of the Colonial/Missionary/ Orientalist attacks against Islam.’ Reprinted in 1930 & 1973. He praises the Qadiyani translator Muhammad Ali.

1930, M. Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*. Revised by Arafat K. El-'Ashi in 1996 and by Jane A. McAuliffe in 2017, all without Arabic text. Pickthall became Muslim in 1914 and served as Imam of Woking masjid in 1919. Over 80 editions have appeared in the last twenty-five years.

1934 – 37, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Glorious Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Later reprinted without commentary and with changes to the title *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 1977 and then changing the word God to Allah in 1989. It has been reprinted over 200 times and gained popularity.

1941 – 57, Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *The Holy Qur'an: With English Translation and Commentary*. Revised posthumous edition published in 1981-85 and abridged edition has been issued thrice since 2001.

Shi'i Muslim Translators

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1954, Ali Muhammad Fazel Chinoy, *The Glorious Koran: Translated With Commentary of Divine Lights*. He uses the English translation of *The Glorious Koran* by Syed Maqbool Ahmed to add notes from *Umdatul-Bayan*, an Urdu commentary. Published in 7 sets and available online at www.al-islam.org & www.academyofislam.com

- 1959, M. H. Shakir, *The Quran*. The most popular Shi'i Muslim translator. With numerous footnotes, he brings forth Shi'i Islamic beliefs and links them with Quranic verses. (see next slides about this work).
- 1964, Sajjadi Vafakhani Mir Ahmed Ali and Ayatullah Agha Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi, *The Holy Qur'an: With English Translation of the Arabic Text and Commentary according to the Version of the Holy Ahlul-Bait*. Reprinted several times in Pakistan and USA. The first Shia translation with explanatory notes in English. Its abridged version printed by Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust of Karachi in 1990 Is good for beginners who like to study and comprehend Quranic message.
- 2003, Syd Ali Quli Qarai, *The Qur'an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*. It has a few footnotes but a comprehensive 65 pages Index of Subjects, Names & Terms. It has been printed several times from Iran, UK, USA & from Australia which was 6th revised edition.

M. H. Shakir – A translator or an editor?

7 His translation was first printed in early 1950s from Karachi. It was widely used by English speaking Shi'i Muslims in Pakistan, India, Iran, UK, & East Africa. Its also found in most Western libraries. He uses Shi'i beliefs to understand various Quranic verses and includes them in footnotes. It is said that he used an existing translation/s and made required changes in line with his belief and presented to the work to English speaking audience – especially youths. Yasin Jibouri said in his email (Oct 26, 2020): *I found Shakir's translation to be the best simply because its English is closer to today's current usage of this language contrarily to other such translations. I found this translation easy to understand and more acceptable to those who speak English as a native language. As regarding the charge of plagiarism . . . this charge was publicized and promoted by some members of the Ahmadi group. . . . I reject it, and surely Allah knows best.*

Criticism against M.H. Shakir

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John Olsson in his study commissioned by Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, (Lahore) USA writes that, 'It is simply not possible to doubt that Maulana Muhammad Ali's (1917 & 1951) translation was plagiarized by Shakir.

- Abdur Raheem Kidawi claims that, 'M. H. Shakir is an *ad verbatim* plagiarized version, bodily lifted word by word from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's earlier rendering (1934 – 1937). He then quotes ten passages from the two translations saying that they 'unmistakably point to Shakir's unscrupulous, unacknowledged borrowing from A. Yusufali's work.
- Most probably M H Shakir has used available translations and simplified with footnotes to assist English speaking Shi'i Muslims, especially the youths. No where does he claim to have personally translated from Arabic, Urdu or Persian. Allah (swt) knows the best.
- Interestingly it has been published over 50 times since 1968.

Arab translators of the Quran

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1956, Nessim Joseph Dawood, *The Koran*. He was an Iraqi Jew and the first 'Arab' to translate the Quran into English at the age of 29 years. The first edition by Penguin was published simultaneously from US, UK and Canada. Since then it has been reprinted 50 times.

- ▶ 2004, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Quran: A New Translation*. Paperback edition by Oxford it contains important info on Islam: articles of faith, history of revelation, compilation and English translations of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad's exemplary life. The translation is in, 'refreshingly clear and simple English' and free of archaic, biblical expressions. However, he imposes modern ideas into the translations saying that cultural context is different today compared when the Quran was revealed.
- ▶ 2008, Tarif Khalid, *The Quran: A New Translation*. Paperback edition by Penguin has a good Introduction covering the Muslim belief about the Quran being of Divine origin, its recipient, the Prophet Muhammad, its definitive collection, its content and style, its internal consistency and the recurrent themes – especially the Hereafter. He states that the Quran is, 'among the most gender-conscious of all sacred texts.' The translation is, 'on the whole, refreshing and accurate, . . . reader-friendly.'

Orientalists' improved translations

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1955, Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. Published in paperback by Oxford it enjoys immense popularity and reprinted around 30 times. Having the experience of translating dozens of Arabic, Persian and Urdu masterpieces. It uses archaic language and does not include any explanatory notes. Kidawi says, 'Arberry's translation, rich in stylistic qualities and sympathetic in its stance on Islam, is superior to other translations of the Quran rendered by Orientalists.'

- ▶ 2004, Thomas Cleary, *The Quran: A New Translation*. Kidawi observes, 'Both the translator and the publisher deserves every credit for this excellent work which is destined to go a long way in conveying some of the hallmarks of the Quran, especially to non-Muslim readers. Paperback edition.
- ▶ 2012, Talal Itani, *The Quran: Translated to English*. Kidawi's review says that, 'it is, on the whole, a faithful rendering of the Quran in simple English'.

Contemporary Muslim translators

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2007, Ahmad Zaki Hammad, *The Glorious Quran: A Modern Phrased Interpretation in English*. Consists of 2 volumes. An abridged one volume was published in 2014.

- ▶ 2011, Tahirul Qadri, *The Glorious Quran*. It is an English version of Urdu *Irfan al-Quran* by a Pakistani scholar of Barlevi sect
- ▶ 2012, International Saheeh, *The Quran: English Meanings and Notes*. It is meant to address both Muslims and non-Muslims. Most explanatory notes and Ahadith are based on the beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunnah*. This translation is widely available on internet.
- ▶ 2016, Mustafa Khattab, *The Clear Quran: A Thematic English, Translation of the Message of the Final Revelation*. Based in Canada, Khattab has heavily promoted his translation widely in North America and has recently (2019) produced fully illustrated *The Clear Quran: For Kids, Surah 1, and 49 – 114* published by Furqaan Institute of Quranic Education.

Translations that we recommend

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- 1990, S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Quran* text and translation published by Peer Mahomed Trust, Karachi.
- 2004, Thomas Cleary, *The Quran: A New Translation*
- 2008, Tarif Khalid, *The Quran: A New Translation.*
- 2017, Ali Quli Qarai, *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*, third US Edition, published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, NY

Interesting Websites

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1. Three translations and a brief commentary

www.al-islam.org/quran

2. Five Translations with Text and transliteration of each verse

<http://www.alim.org/library/quran/ayah/compare/1/1>

3. Seven translations with word-by-word explanation

<http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp>

4. Text of the Quran with a choice of 18 English translations and recitations by 26 Qaris

<http://tanzil.net/#1:1>

5. List of English translations of the Quran

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_translations_of_the_Quran#English

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/k/koran/browse.html>

References: For further reading

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Khan, Ja'far Razi, "A Critical Review of English Translations of the Quran", n.d., (online copy at: www.academyofislam.com//quran/select-articles/)

Ali, Muhammad Mohar, *The Quran and the Orientalists*, Norwich, UK, Jamiyat Ihyaa Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 2004.

Kidawi, Abdur Raheem, *Translating The Untranslatable*, New Delhi, India, Sarup Book Publishers Ltd, 2011.

Kidawi, Abdur Raheem, *God's Word, Man's Interpretations*, New Delhi, India, K.A. Nizami Center for Quranic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 2018

Lawrance, Bruce B., *The Koran in English*, New Jersey, USA, Princeton University, 2017.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Habib_Shakir