

# Problems of Transferring AYAAS Describing the Condition of Mountains on The Day of Juagement Mohammad Tahir Sattam\*

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## Abstract

The present paper studies the problems translators encounter in rendering Qur'anic texts into English. It focuses on the translation of Ayaas "Verses" describing the conditions of mountains on the "Doomsday" and the horrific scenes and events occurring then. The paper aims at studying the linguistic structures of expressions describing the conditions of mountains on the Day of Judgment in the SL Arabic Qur'anic texts. It analyzes the renderings of those texts into English by four translators showing the differences between their renderings and the areas of their success and/or failure.

It is hypothesized that there is no one to one correspondence between the SL Qur'anic texts and their renderings into English. Therefore, communicative translation is better suited to translating those texts.

The findings of this paper reveal that communicative translation is the best method adopted in rendering Qur'anic texts.

## **Introduction:**

Religious texts have their own features which impose certain difficulties on a translator of such texts. Religious texts appeared in the remote past. Therefore, the meaning of a religious text cannot be determined easily. Religious texts are characterized by lexical and grammatical ambiguities. (Ilyas, 1989: 89)

Sanctity is another important feature of religious texts which require additional consideration on the part of translators. It is a difficult task to translate the religious texts (e.g. the glorious Qur'an texts) which have specific features and cannot be treated easily and superficially. (Al-Khafaji, 1998: 11).

The Glorious Qur'an contains texts which have their own features and characteristics. The Qur'an is artistically constructed and includes an inimitable rhetorical language in comparison with ordinary prose. It is characterized with highly beautiful rhythm that charms the listener (see Wahba and Al-Muhandis, 1984: 50) (see also Al-Jurjany, 1989). The inimitability and other distinctive features of the Glorious Qur'anic texts create so many difficulties for the translators. (Darweesh, 1996: 1)

Raof (2001-cited in Abdelwali (2007) describes the Qur'anic discourse as a linguistic scenery characterized by a rainbow of syntactic, rhetorical, phonetic and cultural features that are unusual to the linguistic norms of other languages. The Glorious Quranic discourse uses different types of shifts; a shift in nominal/verbal balance, a tense shift, a shift from third person to second person back to first person; a shift from plural to singular within a given person or by using rhetorical questions. The aim of such style is to achieve a heightened vividness, a sublime style and mental preparedness.

Some Qur'anic items are rich with emotive overtones which in turn create lexical voids in translation. This lexical compression of Qur'anic expressions can be tackled by componential analysis. The problems encountered by the translators may be solved by semantic decomposition of the words.

The Qur'anic lexical and morphological core senses are difficult for understanding. Thus, a translator is advised to resort to paraphrasing in such cases. (Abdelwali, 2007)

Another characteristic of the Qur'anic lexemes is the referential versatility. Some translators restrict the sense of the lexical words as they transfer them from Arabic into English. They tend to transfer Qur'anic terms according to the core sense they possess within the language system. Part of the difficulty in translating Qur'anic texts is the presence of a huge number of difficult and archaic words with a wide range of contextual meaning. (ibid)

The language of the Glorious Qur'an has its specific syntactic and lexical items. The word order and the selection of specific lexical items are semantically oriented. Each language has its specific stylistic and syntactic properties. For example, foregrounding of some constituents in Qur'anic discourse has a special communicative function. Foregrounding is a syntactic operation which puts one or more constituents at the beginning of the sentence for effective stylistic reasons. Syntax and style together achieve the communicative goal of language. (Al-Suyouti, 1988: vol. 1: 3-5).

Word order in Qur'anic discourse is linked with the semantic property of the discourse. Generally, the syntactic norms of the target language fail to match those of Qur'anic discourse (Ibid).

Some Muslim scholars oppose the idea of translating the Glorious Qur'an into foreign languages, since they believe that an entirely adequate translation is impossible. They believe that the change in word order will result in semantic change in the target language (Toury, 1980: 49).

The Glorious Qur'an has been translated into many languages including English. The translator has to consult his ideas and ability to show his aesthetic sense in trying to render a certain Qur'anic text into another language. This process will, in most cases, result in altering the original text. (Hasan, N.D.: 143)

According to Catford (1965: 29), when there is no lexical substitutes in the target language, equivalence is not achieved. So, it can be said that some Qur'anic terms are untranslatable.

On the following pages, eight Glorious Qur'anic texts describing the condition of mountains on the Day of Judgement will be studied. Each text will be followed by its renderings by four translators:

- 1- Ahmed Ali
- 2- Pickthall
- 3- Qarib & Darwish
- 4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed

The renderings will be followed by interpretations then discussions of the renderings to pinpoint areas of success or failure.

### **Texts interpretation and Discussion:**

#### **SLT1:**

(وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنْتِفِئُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا لَا تَرَى فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَا أَمْتًا) \* (طه/105-107)

#### **Interpretation**

This text involves a question about the condition of mountains on the Judgement Day followed by an answer preceded by the conjunction 'الفاء' 'ف'. Being so, the text has the function of a conditional sentence: "if/when they ask you about the mountains tell them" .... This is followed by another clause starting with another conjunction 'الفاء' : "And leave them/it (the mountains/the earth) as an empty plain." (Al-Qurtuby, 1967: vol.11: 246-7) see also (Makhloof, 1957: vol. 2: 25)

#### **TLTs**

##### **1- Ahmed Ali:**

105. They will ask you about the mountains. Tell them: "My Lord will uproot them from the base,  
106. And turn them into a level plain,  
107. Over which you will see no curves or elevations.

##### **2- Pickthall:**

105. They will ask thee of the mountains (on that day). Say: My Lord will break them into scattered dust.

106. And leave it as an empty plain,  
107. Wherein thou seest neither curve nor ruggedness.

### **3- Qarib & Darwish:**

105. They will question you about the mountains. Say: 'My Lord will  
scatter them as ashes  
106. and leave them a desolate waste,  
107. with neither crookedness nor any curving to be seen therein' .

### **4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

105. And they ask/question you about the mountains, so say:  
"My Lord explodes/destroys it explosion/destruction."  
106. "So He leaves it a plain and safe land even/level.  
107. "You do not see in it crookedness/indirectness\* and nor difference in elevation/fault.

### **Discussion:**

Looking at the renderings, one can recognize the following:

All translators failed to convey the sense of condition in the first sentence. Consequently, their renderings consist of two independent clauses, except for translators 4 who have used the coordinator 'so'. None has used 'if' or 'when'. Instead, translators 1,2 and 3 have used the modal auxiliary 'will' while translators 4 have used the conjunction 'and'.

Translators 1,2 and 3 have used the object pronoun 'them' in the first text to refer to the mountains. Translators 4 have used the singular pronoun 'it' which is literal as the reference in the source text is to the 'mountains'.

As for the second clause *فيذرها قاعا صفصفا*, one can note that translators 1,2 and 3 have ellipted the conjunction 'فاء ف' which gives the meaning of result or consequence. Instead, they have used new sentences starting with 'say/tell them'. Translators 4 , however, have used the coordinator 'so' to reflect that meaning. As for objective pronoun 'ها' in the verbal phrase 'ينسفها', it can be noted that the translators' choices differ in expressing the force and abruptness of the action of 'نسف'

'blasting' or 'blowing up' the mountains. The expression 'uproot from the base' does not give the sense of the impact of the SLT, neither does the expression 'break into scattered dust' which has been used by translators 3. The word 'ashes' rendered by translators 3 is inappropriate here because it denotes the remains of burned up things or dead bodies.

As for translators 4, they have provided the alternatives 'explodes/destroys and explosion/destruction. These are literal equivalents to the expression 'ينسفها نسفا' which leave a non-Arabic speaker at a loss as in Arabic 'نسفا' is used for emphasis and English does not allow such a style.

The objective pronoun 'ها' in 'ينزرها' which is used in Arabic to refer to singular or plural nouns, has been in turn rendered differently. Translators 1 and 3 have provided 'them' as an equivalent to 'ها' and reference here is made to 'mountains' whereas the rest of the translators have provided 'it' and reference here is to the earth, i.e. the place of the mountains. As for the expression 'قاعا صاففا', the expression 'level plain' seems to be the most acceptable rendering, as 'empty plain' does not mean 'level' precisely, neither does the expression 'desolated waste'. Translators 4 have provided a redundant translation using 'a plain and safe land even/level' which is rather confusing for the reader.

**Proposed rendering:** "When they ask you about mountains, tell them that My Lord WILL blow them up" (105) "leaving them as a level plain"

(106) " over which you see no curves or elevations" (107).

### **SLT 2:**

وتسير الجبال سيرا (الطور/ 10)

### **Interpretation:**

On the Day of Judgement, the mountains move, as mentioned in this Glorious Aya. Interpreters say that they move and become level with earth or they move like the movement of clouds.(Al-Qurtuby, 1967: vol.17: 63)

### **TLTs:**

#### **1- Ahmed Ali:**

10. The mountains move and fly away,

#### **2- Pickthall:**

10. And the mountains move away with (awful) movement,

**3- Qarib & Darwish:**

10. and the mountains move, moving.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

10. And the mountains moves movement/manipulation.

**Discussion:**

Translator No.1 has used the verbal phrase 'move' which is appropriate and added the verb 'fly away' which is thought to be inappropriate, as 'fly away' means 'to fly and scatter'.

Translator 2 has used the verb phrase 'move away' which is appropriate. He has added the adjective 'awful' to his rendering which does not exist in the source text.

Translators 3 have provided a 'word to word' translation in using 'move movement' as an equivalent to 'تسير سيرا'. Their intention is to emphasize the verb 'move' but they could have been successful if they have used the emphatic auxiliary verb 'do'.

Translators 4 have provided a rather strange rendering as they have used the third person singular 's' to the verb 'move' as an equivalent to the verb 'تسير' and added the noun 'movement/manipulation' which are redundant. Thus, their translation is inappropriate. Probably they have added these nouns for emphasis, but they could have used the emphatic auxiliary 'do' to reach this end.

**Proposed rendering:** "And the mountains do move away"

**SLT 3:**

(وَبُسَّتِ الْجِبَالُ بَسًّا) (الواقعة/5)

**Interpretation:**

This text gives another image of the mountains on the Day of the Judgement as they are pictured as ground to powder.(Al-Qurtuby, 1967: vol.17: 196)

**TLTs:**

**1- Ahmed Ali:**

5. The mountains bruised and crushed.

**2- Pickthall:**

5. And the hills are ground to powder.

**3- Qarib & Darwish:**

5. and the mountains fragmented.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

5. And the mountains was crumbled/scattered, crumbling/scattering.

**Discussion:**

Looking at rendering 1, one can see that the sentence is in the passive voice just like the SLT, but the auxiliary is absent as this sentence is coordinated with the previous ones. On the other hand, the verb 'bruised' is inappropriate because it does not give the meaning of 'grinding'.

The second rendering is appropriate though the translator has used 'hills' instead of mountains.

Translators 3 have used the verb 'fragmented' in the passive voice without using the auxiliary, which is the case in rendering 1. Yet 'fragment' does not give the sense of 'grinding' which is more fearful and powerful. As for translators 4, again they have been redundant in using two verbs and two nouns to describe the action, and, to add, the words 'crumbled/scattered, crumbling/scattering do not give the real sense of the text.

**Proposed rendering:** "And the mountains are ground to powder"

**SLT 4:**

(وَحُمِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ فَدُكَّتَا دَكَّةً وَاحِدَةً) (الحاقة/14)

**interpretation:**

This text depicts the image of the earth and mountains on the Day of Judgement as the earth and mountains are raised from their places and then are pounded with one blow to be turned into powder. (Al-Qurtuby, 1967: vol. 18: 264-5)

**TLTs:****1- Ahmed Ali:**

14. And the earth and mountains heaved and crushed to powder with one leveling blow.

**2- Pickthall:**

14. And the earth with the mountains shall be lifted up and crushed with one crash.

**3- Qarib & Darwish:**

14. when the earth with all its mountains is lifted up and crushed with a single blow.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

14. And the earth/Planet Earth and the mountains were carried/lifted so they were leveled/flattened one crunch/destruction.

**Discussion:**

Looking at the renderings, one can see that translator 1 has used the verb 'heaved' without using the auxiliary because this sentence is in the passive voice and coordinated to a previous one.

As for rendering 2, the translator has used the modal auxiliary 'shall' to indicate futurity. He has also used the passive voice which is equivalent to the SLT. It is thought to be an appropriate rendering.

Translators 3 have used the passive voice also but used the present tense which is inappropriate.

As for translators 4, they have used the passive voice but inappropriately used the past tense 'were' and have used more than one equivalent to the verbs of the SLT.

**SLT 5:**

(وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ) (المعارج/9)

**Interpretation:**

This text pictures the mountains on the Day of Judgement as being like dyed wool in different colours because the mountains themselves are of different colours. (Makhloof, 1957: vol. 2: 463)

**TLTs:**

**1- Ahmed Ali:**

9. The mountains like the tufts of (carded) wool.

**2-Pickthall:**

9. And the hills become as flakes of wool.

**3- Qarib & Darwish**

9. and the mountains shall be like puffs of wool.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

9. And the mountains become like the wool/dyed wool.

**Discussion:**

As for the renderings, translators 1, 2, and 3 have not mentioned that the mountains are dyed.

Translators 4 have mentioned the verb 'dyed' but have not mentioned the colour 'red', just like other translators. Also, translators 1, 2, and 3 have used the words 'tuffs, flakes and puffs of wool' which do not exist in the SLT cf: [القارعة: (5) (وتكون الجبال كالعنقوش)]. To add, translator 1 has used the word 'carded' and translators 4 have used 'become like the wool/ dyed wool'. Thus, they are redundant in their translation.

**Proposed rendering:** "And the mountains become like red-dyed wool"

**SLT 6:**

(يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتِ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيرًا مَّهِيلًا) (المزمل / 14)

**Interpretation:**

In this text there is a terrifying image of the earth and mountains which are described as shaking and crumbling, and the mountains are said to turn into mounds of shifting sand. (Al-Qurtuby, 1967: vol.19: 27)

**TLTs:**

**1- Ahmed Ali:**

14. On the day the earth and mountains will rock violently, and the mountains turn to a heap of poured-out sand.

**2-Pickthall:**

14. On the day when the earth and the hills rock, and the hills become a heap of running sand.

**3- Qarib & Darwish:**

14. On the Day when the earth with all its mountains quake and the mountains become heaps of shifting sand.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

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14. A day/time the earth/Planet Earth and the mountains trembles and shakes, and the mountains were a heap of sand, dumped sand or dust.

**Discussion:**

If we look at the renderings of this Aya, we can see that translator 1 has used the adverb 'violently' to indicate the severity of the action. Translators 2 and 3 have used the verbs 'rock and quake without using an adverb to modify these verbs. Thus, they are more faithful to the SLT. As for translators 4, they have been redundant in using 'planet earth' and the verbs 'trembles and shakes' which indicate here a third person singular. They have been also redundant in using a 'heap of sand and dumped sand or dust'. Another grammatical error in addition to using the third person singular is their use of the lexical verb 'were' , whereas the event described will take place in the future (see translator 1 who has used 'will' and translators 2 and 3 who have used the verb 'become' preceded by the adverbial ' on the Day'). The most adequate rendering is No.1

**SLT 7:**

(وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ) (المرسلات/10)

**Interpretation:**

The meaning of this text is that the mountains are blasted or blown away on the Day of Judgement. (Al-Qurtuby, 1967: 157)

**TLTs:****1- Ahmed Ali:**

10. The mountains reduced to dust and blown away.

**2- Pickthall:**

10. And when the mountains are blown away.

**3- Qarib & Darwish:**

10. and the mountains scattered.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

10. And when/if the mountains were uprooted and dispersed/exploded.

**Discussion:**

Translator 1 has used paraphrasing in order to give a full image of the event. This has been unfaithful to the SLT done for the sake of providing a full image to the TL reader.

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Translator 2 has been brief and to the point in using 'blown away'. It is considered to be an appropriate rendering. As for translators 3, they have used the verb scattered which does not reflect the full impact of the horrifying scene of the event. Translators 4, however, have used redundant words: 'when/if' and the verbs 'uproot and dispersed/exploded' which are different in meaning and thus cannot be alternatives.

**SLT 8:**

(20) (ا) (النبا)

(وَسَيَّرَتِ الْجِبَالَ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا)

**Interpretation:**

In this glorious Aya, the mountains are depicted as moving and turning into mirage. The tense is in the past but indicates the future and it is in the passive voice. Another interpretation of 'سيرت' is 'uprooted' or 'removed'. (Makhloof, 1957: vol. 2: 503)

**TLTs:**

**1- Ahmed Ali:**

20. The mountains put in motion turning into a mirage.

**2- Pickthall:**

20. And the hills are set in motion and become as a mirage.

**3- Qarib & Darwish:**

20. and the mountains move, and vaporize.

**4- Mohamed and Samira Ahmed:**

20. And the mountains were made to move, so it was/became a mirage.

**Discussion:**

If we look at the renderings of the text, we can see that translator 1 has used the verb 'put in motion' for 'سيرت' without using an auxiliary verb as the English text is also in the passive. This is because the sentence is coordinated to a previous one. The second part 'فكانت سرايا' has been rendered into 'turning into mirage'. Translator 2 has used the word 'hills' as an equivalent to 'الجبال'. He has also used the passive voice for 'سيرت' and coordinated another clause using 'and become as a mirage' as an equivalent to 'فكانت سرايا'.

Translators 3 have used the active voice which is inappropriate as the mountains do not move by themselves. They have used the word 'vaporize' which is a scientific term as an equivalent to 'فكانت سرايا'.

Translators 4 have used 'were made to move' as an equivalent to the verb 'سيرت', but they have used the singular pronoun 'it' and the past tense of the verb 'be' and the past of the verb 'become'. It is to be noted that all translators have not given the future sense to the event, which is going to take place on the Day of Judgement.

**Proposed rendering:** And the mountains will be set in motion and they will become a mirage.

### **Conclusions:**

1- The Glorious Qur'anic texts include an inimitable rhetorical language in comparison with ordinary prose. Therefore, most of the translators, consulted in this paper, failed to convey the same effect or force as that of the SLT.

2- Some of the translators fell into grammatical errors. For instance, in rendering text 1, translators 4 have used the singular pronoun 'it' which is literal as the reference in the source text to the 'mountains' which is plural.

In rendering text 2, translators 4 have used the third person singular 's' with the verb 'move' whereas the subject 'mountains' is plural.

Some translators have missed the use of the auxiliary verb in the passive voice constructions, as translators 3 have done in his rendering of text 4.

3- Some other translators have been redundant. They have used expressions which do not exist in the SLT's. For instance, translator 2 has used the word 'awful' which does not exist in the SLT. Translators 4 have been redundant in almost all of their renderings. They, as the other translators, have repeated some words perhaps to emphasize the meanings of some Ayaas, but unfortunately failed to do so. An example on that is the rendering of text 4 where translators 4 have used the verbs 'carried/lifted, each as equivalent to the verb 'حملت', though the two verbs have different shades of meaning.

**Recommendations:**

The glorious Qur'an is Word of Almighty Allah. Besides, it is considered to be the first and the most important reference of the most legal systems in the Islamic countries. Also, the behaviour of the Muslim individual must be coincident with its instructions; therefore, the Glorious Qur'an must be translated by a special group of experts. Their translation must be the acceptable one only. In this case, the faulty and the inadequate renderings will be ignored, and the non-Arab receivers will get accurate and appropriate senses of the glorious texts.

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## مشكلات ترجمة الآيات التي تصور حالة الجبال يوم القيامة

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### الخلاصة

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة المشكلات التي تواجه المترجمين الذين يترجمون نصوص القرآن الكريم إلى اللغة الإنكليزية. وهو يركز على دراسة ترجمات بعض الآيات التي تصف حالة الجبال والمشاهد المرعبة التي تحصل لها يوم القيامة. ويهدف البحث إلى دراسة التراكيب اللغوية التي تصف تلك المشاهد من الناحيتين الدلالية والنحوية. وقد تم اختيار اثنين من المفسرين أحدهما قديم هو القرطبي والآخر حديث هو حسنين مخلوف، كما تم اختيار أربعة من المترجمين هم: أحمد علي، وبكتل، ورقيب الله ودرويش، ومحمد أحمد وسميرة أحمد. وتم تحليل تلك الترجمات مع بيان نقاط الفشل والنجاح في تلك الترجمات. وقد اتضح من خلال هذا البحث أن الترجمة التواصلية هي الأفضل عند ترجمة النصوص القرآنية.

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