

التعابير التلطفية في تراجم  
القرآن الكريم  
(دراسة مقارنة)

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## Introduction

The motives for writing this research come from the importance of euphemism in the Quran. Euphemisms are often found in expressions which may be familiar to Arabic speakers of Islamic culture, but are not easily understandable by those outside the culture. Even if such expressions are understood, they may be difficult to be translated at all or even in an appropriate equivalent material. This study aims at identifying the euphemistic expressions in the Glorious Quran and looking for their counterparts in the English language. It also aims at discovering which of the Quranic translations succeeds in translating euphemisms and which one fails in translating them. Another purpose is to show to what extent the errors in translating the euphemistic expressions influence the understanding the meaning

### 1- Definition

Euphemisms are defined as the use of acceptable and inoffensive expressions as alternatives for expressions that are offensive, socially unacceptable, or which sometimes mean unpleasant matters.

Words and expressions are euphemized in order to avoid embarrassment or save one's face among speakers through their conversations.

Semantically, a euphemism is a vague expression. When a word is used as a euphemism, it becomes a metaphor that drops its literal meaning and refers to something else. For example, the euphemism *to help oneself* substitutes the verb *to steal* (Biocrawler.htm.). According to stock well (2002, p30):

euphemism can be seen not so much as a lexical replacement by a dissimilar word (a metonymy rather than a metaphor); the rest room, is a metaphor; rather it conveys slightly different, more pleasant associations than other possibilities

Discussing the semantic opaqueness of the euphemistic expressions. Hudson (2000, p261) states that "the indirectness of from is felt to diminish the unpleasantness of the meaning".

## 2- Usage

Euphemisms are used to hide taboo and unacceptable subjects in English. Taboo are related with unpleasant and disturbing topics like (sex, death, and basic biological functions). For instance, the euphemism *The big C* is used to avoid uttering the word *Cancer*.

Many superstitious euphemisms are formed by English speakers who believe that "to speak a name was to evoke the divinity whose power then had to be confronted" Neaman and Silver (1988, p1-2). For example the word *death* is substituted by many words and phrases, *such as passed away, bit the big one, bought the farm*.

Bureaucrats, politicians and scientists also employ euphemisms ingeniously in order to protect themselves from accountability and moral responsibility for their actions. This special use of euphemism is called *double speak* which means "obfuscation of Language in order to deny or shift responsibility" Kahn (2001, p, 243).

Another use of euphemisms in American English is to elevate the state of menial occupations. For instance, using *help* for *servant*.

## 3- Etymology

The word euphemism is derived from the Greek word *euphemo* which means "auspicious/ fortunate/ (good speech).The Greek– root words" eu (good/ well) "+" pHEME (speech/ speaking) constitute the word *eupheme* (i.e. the origin of the word euphemo). "The *eupheme* was a word or a phrase used in place of a religious word or phrase that should not be spoken loud as taboo" (Wikipedia. org).

Farb (1974: p80) believes that many euphemistic expressions appeared after the Norman conquest of England 1066 when:

The community began to make a distinction between a genteel and an obscene vocabulary, between the Latinate words of the upper class and the Lusty Anglo Saxon of the lower. That is why a duchess *perspired* and *expectorated* and *menstruated*, while a kitchen maid *sweated* and *spat* and *bled*.

It is worth mentioning that one of the first classic examples of euphemism are the expressions *pass away* and *pop* your clogs that substitute the verb *die*.

Maxwell (MED Magazine. htm.) states that the creation of euphemism continue over centuries to suit different contexts. Each century has its own euphemisms according to the language speakers' social interests. For instance, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century euphemistic expressions focus on the drinking of alcohol, whereas the euphemisms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century concentrate on subjects like drugs, ethnicity, politics and war. For example Maxwell (MED magazine. htm) records the euphemism *regime change* which is invented as an alternative for extreme military force.

#### 4- Euphemistic Expressions in English

Euphemistic expressions in English can be classified according to the topics they convey into the following:

1- euphemisms for talking about *slums* and *poor* people. For instance, *the inner cities* and the *negatively privileged* (American English first Papers. htm.).

2 - some euphemisms deal with disabilities. These euphemisms are misleading. For example, instead of *physical handicap* the euphemism *physically challenged* is used (Ibid.).

3 - the military field has its own euphemisms. some examples are (American first papers. htm.):

*air support* is a euphemism for (attacking the enemy from aircraft) *to terminate* is used instead of (to kill)

4 - some euphemisms are concerned with *age*. people tend to use the term *senior citizen* as a substitute for the term *an old person* which becomes useless and without respect.

5 - euphemisms are also used in the language of *commerce* and industry. For instance, the euphemistic expression *income protection* instead of *tax avoidance*

6 - euphemisms have been produced for the *profane* words and expressions. These euphemisms can be sub classified into the following three types:

a- *religious* euphemisms which deal with *God, Jesus ,hell, the devil* for instance, the euphemism *the other place* for the word *hell* (Biocrawler. htm.)

b- people also use widely euphemisms for *excretion* and for excusing oneself from company. For instance *to powder one's nose*, and *to see a man bout a horse* (Ibid.).

c- sexual euphemisms are found in the English Language in order not to speak openly about the operation of sex and the parts of the body that are involved in this operation.

d- euphemisms for *death* are originated by people because they believe that "to speak the word *death* was to invite death" (Biocrawler.htm.). Euphemisms for death are often concerned with *death, burial, and all the people and the places that have relation with death*. For instance, instead of saying *dead* the term *deceased* is used. Also *having passed away* is a euphemism for *dying*.

## 5- Euphemistic Expressions In The Glorious Quran

In studying euphemisms in the Glorious Quran the following steps are applied

- 1- collecting the main data (verses) from the Glorious Quran.
- 2- identifying the clear euphemistic expressions in the collected Verses. The identified euphemistic expressions have been chosen according to Grant McNamara's definition of the euphemism which is "A euphemism is a milder or vague word or phrase used in place of one that might seem too harsh or embarrassing in a particular context " (metamorphosis. com).
- 3- the identified euphemistic expressions are explained according to Tabari's tafsir.

After carrying the mentioned steps, it appears that the euphemistic expressions in the Glorious Quran have been employed in the following areas:

- a- euphemisms which talk indirectly about the poor and those who have nothing to give. For instance the verses 13 of chapter Fatir "لا يملكون من قطمير" which is translated by Ali (1934: p 427) "own not a straw".
- b- euphemisms which are used instead of the term "*the hypocrites* المنافقين". God refers to them by using the euphemistic expression "فترى الذين في قلوبهم مرض" in verses 52 of chapter Al-Maidah. Irving

(arthursclassicnovels.com) this euphemistic expression by reporting "those in whose hearts there lurks malice".

c- euphemistic expressions which deal with people who take bribe. For example, the euphemistic expression "اكلون للسحت" in verses 42 of chapter Al-Maidah which is translated by Ali (1934: p117) "those who live of devouring anything forbidden".

d- a euphemism for slave women whom are owned by Muslim men. This euphemistic expression can be found in the verses 3 of chapter Al-Nisa. The euphemism used is "أو ما ملكت ايمانكم". Irving translates it by writing "someone your right hand controls".

e- the use of the profanic euphemisms can be noticed in the Glorious Quran. These euphemisms are related with subjects like *hell*, *sex* and *death*. for instance, the expression "وبئس المصير" is used as a euphemism for hell in the verse 126 of chapter AL-Baqara. Ali (1934: p20) translates this euphemistic expression in this way "an evil destination (indeed)".

The sexual term *adultery* is substituted by the euphemistic expression "يأتين الفاحشة" in verse 15 of chapter Al-Nisa. Irving (arthursclassicnovels.com) translates this euphemism by writing "commit some sexual offence".

Euphemisms for death can be exemplified by the expression "فأوري سوءة أخي" in verse 31 of chapter Al-Maidah. The euphemism conveys the meaning of burying the dead brother's corpse.

## 6- The Quranic Euphemistic Expressions in Translation: A Comparative Study.

Comparing the euphemistic expressions in the Glorious Quran with their counterparts in English, leads to the result that Quranic euphemistic expressions differ in their topic from their English counterparts except the profanic ones.

Some Quranic euphemisms which deal with *death* and *sex* might have equivalent expressions in English. Many of the euphemistic expressions in the Glorious Quran have no equivalents in English and that constitutes a great difficulty in translation.

The problem in translating the euphemistic expression in Quran is a matter of culture dependence. To translate the Quranic

euphemisms correctly, the translator should have knowledge of the Quranic Tafsir and the historical circumstances of Muhammad's (pbuh) life and early community in which he grew up. Investigating that context usually requires a detailed knowledge of Hadith and Sirah which are themselves vast and complex texts" (Wikipedia. org).

Some translators try to get across the original meaning of the Quran euphemistic expressions and translate them by using explication paraphrasing and annotation. The present study aims to find out the good translation of euphemisms in the Glorious Quran. To serve the aim of the study, the euphemistic expressions are compared with both the English translations of Ali (1934) and Irving (arthursclassicnovels.com). The explanation of these euphemistic expressions is taken from the Tabari Tafsir. Before doing the comparison, it is important to mention the definition of good translation:

That is in which the merit of the original work is completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which the language belongs, as it is by those who speak the original work, Tytler (Roger Bell (1991, p, 11))

### Example 1 Verses 52 of chapter AL\_Maidah

(فترى الذين في قلوبهم مرض يسارعون فيهم يقولون نخشى ان تصيبنا دائرة السوء  
فعسى الله ان يأتي بالفتح أوامر من عنده فيصبحوا على ما اسروا في أنفسهم نادمين)

Ali's (1934: p 117) translation of the verses

Those in whose hearts there is a disease— thou seest how Eagerly they run about amongst them, saying: " we do fear least a change of fortune bring us disaster "Ah ! perhaps Allah will give (thee) victory, or a decision from Him then will regret of the thought which they secretly harbored in their hearts.

Irving's (arthursclassicnovels.com) translation of the verses.

Those in whose hearts there Lurks malice dashing in among them saying "We dread lest a turn of fortune strike us" perhaps God will bring some victory or command from Himself, so some morning they will awaken regretful about what they have concealed among themselves.

The meaning of the expression *الذين في قلوبهم مرض* Refers to the *hypocrites*. The euphemistic expression is "those in whose hearts there is a disease". In the verses, the socially offensive term *the hypocrites* is substituted by a less offensive expression "those in whose hearts there is a disease".

Both Ali(1934:p 119) and Irving (arthursclassicnovels.com),in translating the verses into English, convey the euphemistic expression "Those in whose hearts there is a disease" and ignore the intended meaning the *hypocrites*. They sacrifice the intended meaning at the expense of the euphemistic expression, so those who are unfamiliar with the Islamic culture they will misunderstand the verse.

### Example 2 Verses 15 Of Chapter AnNisa

(والتي يأتين الفاحشة من نسائكم فاستشهدوا عليهن أربعة منكم فإن شهدوا فأمسكوهن في البيوت حتى يتوفهن الموت أو يجعل الله لهن سبيلا)

Ali's (1934:p 84) translation of the verses

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, or Allah ordain for them some (other) way.

Irving 's (arthursclassicnovels.com) translation of the verses.

Should any of your women commit some sexual offence, collect evidence about them from four (persons) among yourselves. If they so testify, then confine the women to their houses until death claim them or God grants them some other way out.

The euphemistic expression "يأتين الفاحشة" may be used as Tabari (2001:part 4:p 339) explains to refer to the crime of *adultery*. In these verses, there may be a substitution of less embarrassing term the *sexual offence* for a socially unacceptable expression *the adultery*. Ali (1934:p84), in translating the verses into English, conveys the intended meaning "the guilty of lewdness", but he ignores the euphemism "يأتين الفاحشة".

In Irving's (arthursclassicnovels.com) translation, he conveys the euphemistic expression " يأتين الفاحشة ".The euphemism may refer to several meanings of sexual offence beside adultery.



### Example 3 Verses 63 of the Chapter AL-Maidah

(لولا ينهمم الربانيون والأحبار عن قولهم الإثم وأكلهم السحت لبئس ما كانوا يصنعون)

Ali 's (1934: p120) translation of the verses

Why do not the Rabbis and the doctors of law forbid them from their (habit of) uttering sinful words and eating things Forbidden? Evil indeed are their works.

Irving's(arthursclassicnovels.com) translation of the verses.

If their rabbis and scholars had only forbidden them from speaking sinfully and living off graft? How wretched is what they have been producing.

The euphemistic expression "السحت" refers to the *bribe* as it is explained in Tafsir. The meaning of the bribe is "eating things forbidden".

In Ali's (1934:p120) translation of the verses, he gives the intended meaning of the euphemism "السحت" which is "eating things forbidden" and ignores the euphemistic expression "السحت" whose meaning is less embarrassing than the meaning of bribe.

In Irving's (arthursclassicnovels.com) translation, he uses the euphemistic expression "Living off graft" to convey the euphemistic expression "السحت". He ignores the intended meaning of "السحت" which is bribe.

### Example 4 Verses 31 of the Chapter Al – Maidah

(فبعث الله غرابا يبحث في الأرض ليريه كيف يواري سوءة أخيه)

Ali 's (1934: 115) translation of the verses

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the naked body of his brother.

Irving's (arthursclassicnovels.com) translation of the verses.

God sent a raven to scratch the earth in order to show him to dispose of his brother's corpse.

The euphemistic expression "يواري سوءة" comes as an alternative for "burying his brother's dead body".

Both Ali (1934: 115) and Irving (arthursclassicnovels.com) convey the euphemistic expression "to hide the dead body" but they

ignore the intended meaning which is "burying the corpse of his brother".

### Example 5 Verses 3 of the Chapter Al- Nisa

(وإن خفتم ألا تقسطوا في اليتامى فانكحوا ما طاب لكم من النساء مثنى وثلاث وربع فإن خفتم ألا تعدلوا فواحدة أو ما ملكت أيمانكم ذلك أدنى ألا تعولوا)

Ali's (1934: p81) translation of the verses

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four ; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one, or that which your right hand possess; that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice-

Irving's (arthurclassicnovels.com) translation of the verses.

If you are afraid you will not deal fairly with orphans, then marry off such women as may seem good to you, in pair, or three, or four [at a time].

If you still fear you will not act justly, then [marry] one women [only] or someone your right hand controls.

According to Tabari (2001, part4: p217) the euphemistic expression "أو ما ملكت أيمانكم" may be used to refer to "السراري" "slave girls".

The euphemism may be used to be less embarrassing than the substituted expression. Ali (1934: p81) and Irving (arthurclassicnovels.com), in translating the verses into English, convey the euphemism "your right hand possess", but ignore the intended meaning "your slave girls".

The comparison between Ali's (1934) translation and Irving's (arthurclassicnovels.com) translation of the three examples above shows that the two translators face a problem in translating the euphemism. The American native speaker Irving (Ibid)conveys the euphemistic expression and ignores the intended meaning and this will mislead the readers who are not familiar with Islamic culture. To solve this problem the researcher supports Muhammad's opinion that is "translators should firstly translate the euphemism as it means and then to make a paraphrase for intended meaning" (Quranic Studies Errors in English Translation of Euphemi-htm.)

The translator Ali(1934) uses his Islamic culture in translating the Quranic euphemistic expressions. He sacrifices the euphemistic expression at the expense of the intended meaning. The ignorance of the euphemism will make a change in the style and the words of the original text. To solve this problem, the translator should translate the euphemism followed by a paraphrase or annotation that explains the intended meaning.

## Conclusion

The present study deals with the topic of euphemistic expressions in English and Arabic especially those used in Glorious Quran. The euphemism is an inoffensive and socially acceptable word or expression used instead of a word or expression that seems offensive and socially unacceptable or sometimes means unpleasant matter. Simply the euphemism has two meanings the euphemistic meaning and the intended meaning. The euphemistic meaning sometimes has no relation with the intended meaning. It is taken for granted that the speaker of a language from a different culture can not recognize the intended meaning of the euphemism. This constitutes a great problem in translation. The present research starts by studying the euphemism in English, then studying the euphemistic expressions in the Glorious Quran. Many differences emerge between the euphemistic expressions studied in the two languages especially in the topics they refer to. A comparative study has been carried out between two English translations of the Glorious Quran. The study shows that Irving in his translation, he translates the euphemistic expressions honestly, yet the translation of euphemism without mentioning the intended meaning has a negative effect on those who are from a different culture than that of Islam. So they will fail to recognize the verse.

Ali (1934) in his translation, sacrifices the euphemism at the expense of the intended meaning and this will be a defect in the translation. To solve this problem it has been found that the translator should translate the euphemism followed by a paraphrase for its intended meaning which is taken from the Tafsir of the Quran.

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