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The Role of Translation in Spreading Islam in English-Speaking Societies through Social Media.

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the pivotal role of translation, with a particular focus on the translation of the Quran into various world languages—especially English—in the dissemination of Islam across English-speaking societies. It examines how social media platforms have become instrumental in presenting Islam, broadening its reach, and addressing misconceptions and fears propagated by Western media. These platforms predominantly use English as a medium of communication, often employing subtitling to translate spoken content into other languages, thereby enhancing accessibility and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Keywords : religious translation, social media, subtitling.

1. Introduction

The concept of Islam is clearly defined as submission to one God. In Arabic, this term refers to safety and security. Although Islamophobia and propaganda have been spreading in Western countries, many people from these regions have embraced Islam for many reasons. Firstly, the translation of the Holy Quran into English, which first appeared in 1934 in Abdullah Yusuf Ali's book. This author revealed himself as a great Indian Muslim (M.A. Sherif, 2017, p. 4). He was born under British occupation and, in his translation, tried to show the true message of the Quran addressed to all humanity.

In fact, it is not easy to accomplish such work without an Islamic background and a good mastery of both Arabic and English morphological, grammatical, and semantic aspects. His contribution to the field of translation inspired many translators, such as Thomas Ballantine

Irving, who was a Canadian-American historian and translator of the first American English translation of the Quran in 1985 (T.B. Irving, 1985, p. 1), paving the way for religious translation. For this purpose, we should highlight the concept of religious translation.

2. Religious translation :

Religious translation is an ancient process. As we know, Jesus's language was Armenian, according to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The Bible was translated into many languages, including Greek, Latin, Arabic, and other European languages. This type of translation is one of the most difficult because it is not easy to render God's words into other languages. It is generally agreed that the translation of the Holy Quran is the best proof of this idea.

On the one hand, the Arabic language is known for its precision and richness. In particular, the Divine words of the Holy Quran are considered miraculous, describing everything with unmatched accuracy. No word in the Quran can be misplaced; every sentence conveys an exact meaning (Herlihy, 2012, p. 129). However, after translation into English, these beautiful characteristics are often lost.

On the other hand, many Arabic words have no direct equivalents in English. For this reason, we often choose to translate only the meaning of the Holy Quran rather than attempt a literal translation.

Muslims believe that the Noble Quran, as the word of Allah, is meant for all people, regardless of their language or ethnicity. To ensure its message reaches everyone, it must be translated accurately, both linguistically and culturally, into other languages and contexts (Abdul-Raof, 2005).

Arthur John Arberry, a British Christian orientalist and a respected scholar of Arabic and Islam, translated the Quran into English in 1955. Acknowledging the orthodox Muslim perspective that translating the Noble Quran is inherently impossible, he titled his work *The Koran Interpreted* to reflect this belief. Arberry stated that his aim in the translation was to replicate the Quran's unique rhythm and rhetoric. However, he maintained that the Quran's untranslatability stems from its distinctive rhythm and rhetorical style, which are unique to the original text, making any translation merely a poor imitation (Arberry, 1996).

Tahereh Saffarzadeh (1936–2008), an Iranian translator, poet, writer, and researcher with a mystical family background, produced a notable English translation of the Noble Quran titled

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The Holy Quran: Translation with Commentary. Published in 2001, it marked the first English translation of the Quran by a woman and was the culmination of her 27 years of study of the Quran and its commentaries. In the introduction to her work, Saffarzadeh (2005, p. 2138) emphasized that a faithful translation of religious texts involves "conveying the meaning in the framework of the Message." Unlike other translators, she deliberately disregarded the Quran's rhetorical patterns, focusing instead on the meanings conveyed by the text. She avoided literal translation, prioritizing clarity and accessibility, as she believed most readers seek to understand the message without unnecessary complexity.

3. Islam and misconception :

In Western countries, Islamophobia is related to the Arabic word *Jihad*, which has a connotative reference to the Crusades, as well as to the term *Sharia*, which is misunderstood by many Americans. They believe that Islamic law threatens their freedom and will be imposed on all of America. This misconception is growing, and many Muslims in these regions are suffering from its consequences, which have a negative impact on the Muslim community, especially following the September 11 attacks. These events resulted in acts of violence and the burning of many copies of the Quran (J. Climent & J. Radzilowski, 2015, p. 304).

For this reason, many internet users who engage with social media try to present a positive image of Islam and eradicate misconceptions and misrepresentations by showing that real Islam is a religion of peace and serenity.

Aldahesh contends that the perspective supporting translatability appears more reasonable than the notion of untranslatability. This view is based on a broader understanding of translation and the variety of strategies available to translators for addressing linguistic and cultural gaps between languages (2014, p. 26).

Hans Peter Krings (1986, p. 175) defines translation strategy as "the translator's potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task." Transliteration is one type of translation strategy. Wright and Budin (1997, p. 257) define transliteration as "an operation whereby the characters of an alphabetic writing system are represented by characters from another alphabetic writing system." Some scholars, such as John Napier, note that both translation and transliteration share common underlying processes, although the former represents free interpretation and the latter represents literal interpretation. Napier (2002) defines translation as "the process by which concepts and

meanings are translated from one language into another, by incorporating cultural norms and values; assumed knowledge about these values, and the search for linguistic and cultural equivalents.”

4. The Role of Social Media :

Media are not merely "tools" for delivering messages; they inherently shape and influence the message itself. The means of communication add their own form and context, making the way we communicate an integral part of the message. Media carry meaning within their structures, possessing their own "languages" and, in many ways, functioning as a language in themselves.

In today's globalized world, media are no longer just one component of culture—they are omnipresent, forming a complex web of interconnected relationships. This pervasive presence has given rise to a new international culture that impacts and reshapes nearly every other cultural system. This emerging culture introduces a novel way of perceiving and interacting with reality, engaging all our senses—aural, oral, tactile, and kinetic.

We are currently experiencing a period of profound cultural transformation driven by significant advancements in media. The twentieth century witnessed groundbreaking innovations, including radio, television, computers, and electronic chips. Today, culture is transitioning from being shaped by print-based ideas, worldviews, authorities, and institutions to being redefined by electronic communication media. The Internet has become a central force in this shift, with the new global language being digital.

Communication is established in the virtual space of interaction through social media, which serves as a key tool of globalization and has greatly contributed to the dissemination of ideas and ideologies. It is an important source of information about many religions, despite the fact that they were often used to fight Islam. However, social media is now being utilized to present the true image of Islam to Western audiences and to contribute to its spread in this region by using the English language.

Social media plays a vital role in spreading Islam, especially since English is considered the primary language of the World Wide Web (Gail & Cynthia, 2005, p. 9). It connects people across the world and fosters the growth of online communities by offering various features

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and services, such as capturing and sharing content, engaging with other users, and expressing opinions. This is particularly evident on platforms like YouTube (Roaimah et al., 2014, p. 46).

4.1. Expanding Islamic Reach via Social Media :

Thanks to social media, the world now knows about the real Islam, and all those misconceptions and misunderstandings about it have been corrected by Muslim scholars and influencers via platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. For example, YouTube channels like The Deen Show provide accessible content on Islamic values.

4.2. Providing Support for Muslim Converts :

As mentioned before, social media has been an open door for non-Muslims to learn the truth about Islam, especially foreign converts in Anglo-Saxon countries. It has made this huge world so small that, all of a sudden, people started learning everything about Islam. They began interacting with each other through Facebook groups and blogs run by new converts who shared their experiences and long journeys to Islam, offering relatable advice that helps in understanding Islam better and showing the beauty and ideals of the religion (Islam, 2019, p. 8).

4.3. Challenging Islamophobia :

Nowadays, we see many people mocking Islam and sharing jokes about it on social media. In contrast, many influencers are trying their best to present the real image of Islam to non-Muslims. Some of these influencers use stand-up comedy or TikTok and other platforms to simplify the ideas of the religion and combat Islamophobia in a humorous way. For example, Ramadan Kareem exemplifies how cultural practices are shared positively with global audiences.

4.4. Fostering Interfaith Dialogue :

The term Interfaith Dialogue emerged with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after the Revelation through the Archangel Gabriel. His wife took him to her Christian cousin, Waraqah Ibn Nawfel, who was known for his wisdom and knowledge.

4.5. Subtitling :

Subtitling is a translation practice aimed at conveying original dialogues and other verbal information, whether written or spoken, into the target language in the form of written text, typically displayed at the bottom of the screen. Unlike dubbing, which entirely replaces the original dialogue, subtitling preserves the source text both aurally and visually while adding supplementary information. Given the multimedia nature of the content, subtitlers are required to balance the interaction between auditory and visual elements, ensuring that viewers can simultaneously read the subtitles and follow the visuals. Subtitling has historically been classified as a form of "constrained translation" due to the limitations inherent in its environment (Díaz-Cintas, 2012).

Beyond its role in audiovisual translation, subtitling has also proven to be a powerful tool in facilitating cross-cultural communication, particularly in religious contexts. In this regard, it has played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam by making religious teachings accessible to non-Arabic speakers worldwide. Islamic television channels, such as Iqraa TV, have subtitled Arabic-language sermons, lectures, and discussions into multiple languages, allowing audiences from diverse linguistic backgrounds to engage with Islamic content. According to Moll (2017), subtitling serves as a form of cultural mediation, helping to correct misconceptions and present an authentic understanding of Islam by ensuring that religious messages are accurately conveyed across linguistic barriers.

5. The Role of Translation in Accessing Islamic Teachings :

Translation allows non-Arabic speakers to access Islamic texts, including the Quran and Hadith, in their native languages. Social media platforms often feature translated versions of Islamic texts and educational videos that offer viewers an understanding of core beliefs and practices in Islam. For example, platforms like YouTube host videos where scholars provide translated explanations of the Quran, making the religious text more accessible to a global audience (AlMamun & Bhuiyan, 2023, p. 471).

To demonstrate the role of translation in spreading Islam, many videos from prominent Islamic educators, such as Ahmed Sabeel, actively engage audiences through translated content. One of his popular videos, "How to Understand Islam", available on YouTube, is translated into several languages, helping make the message of Islam accessible to non-Arabic-speaking audiences.

Example : Ahmed Sabeel's Video on "Understanding Islam"

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In this video, Ahmed Sabeel discusses key Islamic principles and clarifies misconceptions, focusing on translating Islamic teachings into simple, understandable terms. The video is subtitled in multiple languages, allowing viewers from various linguistic backgrounds to connect with the message.

Comment :

This video exemplifies how social media and translation can be powerful tools for spreading Islam, ensuring that Islamic teachings are comprehensible to diverse global audiences. By translating Islamic content into multiple languages, individuals from various cultures and regions can engage with the faith more deeply, promoting cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, videos like this serve as key examples of how Islamic scholars and content creators use platforms such as YouTube to bridge language barriers and enhance the reach of Islamic dawah (invitation to Islam).

4. Conclusion :

Social media and translation have become crucial tools for exchanging ideas, overcoming cultural barriers, and promoting understanding in a world where communication transcends national boundaries. Regarding Islam, these resources have been crucial in ensuring that its teachings are understandable to a worldwide audience. The Quran and Hadith are now accessible to non-Arabic speakers because of translation, which guarantees that the message reaches individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Despite its difficulties, religious translation is nevertheless an essential tool for disseminating and conserving Islamic knowledge.

At the same time, social media has transformed how people interact with Islam. It has offered a forum for clarifying misconceptions, encouraging discourse, and bringing people together in meaningful talks. Whether through translated literature, subtitled movies, or online discussions, Islamic teachings are being conveyed more dynamically and widely than ever before.

Translation and internet communication continue to break down barriers, making Islamic teachings more accessible and facilitating connections between individuals of many cultures and beliefs. As technology advances, so does the ability to share knowledge, improve understanding, and deepen the bonds that bind communities together.

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