



A Diachronic Study of the Lexical Variations in Pickthall and Hilali-Khan's Translations of Surah Rahman

Zaheer Hussain¹
Muhammad Umer Azim²
Muhammad Shaghil Baqa³
Gulraiz Qadir Gulfam⁴

ABSTRACT

Translating the Quran is an arduous task because of its pithiness and eloquence as Arabic language is one of the most difficult languages as far as grammar and morphology is concerned. Different translations of this holybook in English language, starting from orientalist to the natives, have lexical variations on account of the language evolution throughout the time or the mother tongue of the translators. The present study focused on the diachronic translations of Surah Rahman by Pickthall (1930) and Hilali-Khan (1996). Firstly, it was questioned that which were the lexical variations and secondly what were the reasons of the lexical variations in both the translations. For this purpose, only content words were compared, and it was found out that majority of content words were different in both the translations; Hilali-Khan translation is based on simple vocabulary which was related to modern trends. Further, the lexical choice is based on the current use of the terms which were understood by the readers of this time.

Key Words: Translation, Lexical Variation, Diachronic, Language Evolution, Orientalists

¹ National University of Modern Languages Lahore Campus (zhussain@numl.edu.pk)

² Higher Education Department, Punjab (becketlove@hotmail.com)

³ The University of Lahore (muhammad.shaghil@lbs.uol.edu)

⁴ National University of Modern Languages Lahore Campus (gulraiz.1979@gmail.com)





1. Introduction

The holy Quran is the book of Allah Almighty which was revealed onto the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This holy book was revealed in Arabic language, which is considered to be one of the richest languages of the world in terms of vocabulary and eloquence. It is a miracle of Almighty Allah that this holy book is still the original because Allah promised to protect it from any sort of changes like omission, addition, alteration, reordering etc. It contains 114 surahs and out of which, 86 were revealed in the holy city of Macca and 28 were revealed in the holycity of Madina in Saudi Arabia. It is a book of guidance - social, financial, family, marriage, divorce, raising children, inheritance, government...etc, - basic beliefs of Islam - existence of God and the resurrection - ethical and legal subjects, general advice regarding right and wrong, narratives of the early prophets and historical events of the prophet's time, verses pertaining to natural phenomena. The holy Quran has been translated in more than 100 languages of Europe, Asia and Africa (Al-Jarf, 2014). The earliest translation of the holy Quran was conducted in the 7th century in the Persian language from the Arabic language. The Quran was translated by Orientalists, non-Arab Muslims, and Arab Muslims. Different translations of the Quran are based on word-to-word, meaning of the verses, archaic English, simple modern language, and commentary techniques. English translations of the Quran vary in style and accuracy of meaning. Translation of the Quran has always been problematic and difficult, as the Quran possesses an exoteric and an esoteric meaning (Al-Jarf, 2014). One of the biggest challenges in translating the Quran is its pithiness and eloquence within the context. The translations of the Quran are done by the individuals and the organizations. Out of 62 translations (Al-Jarf, 2014) of the Quran in English, Pickthall (1930) and Hilali-Khan (1982) are individual and organization based translations. Pickthall's translation is in archaic English, but Hilali-Khan's translation is in modern English.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To find out the lexical variations of Pickthall and Hilali-Khan translations of Surah Rahman in the Quran
- ii. To find out the reasons of lexical variations of Pickthall and Hilali-Khan translations of Surah Rahman in the Quran



1.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the lexical variations of Pickthall and Hilali-Khan translations of Surah Rahman in the Holy Quran?
- ii. Why are there lexical variations of Pickthall and Hilali-Khan translations of Surah Rehmen in the Holy Quran?

1.4 Delimitation

The study focused only 55th surah of the holy Quran, Surah Rahman, because it is one of the most widely recited and listened Surahs of the holy Quran. Further, it has the rhythm and alliteration of sounds, words and sentences. Secondly, the functional morphemes like prepositions and grammatical aspects are not studied and only the lexical morphemes are focused because with the passage of time a language evolves in lexical morphemes etc, nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Thirdly, the archaic expressions for the pronouns are also not included in the study.

2. Literature Review

At the beginning of the twentieth century, as it was the time of colonialism and Christian missionary attacks against Islam and the Quran in British India, some Muslim authors of the Indian subcontinent took up the translation of the Quran as a defensive move. So, this field, dominated by Orientalists, until 1920 was changed dramatically. The increasing number of translations from the Muslims, i.e., is more than fifty, have answered with the decline of the Orientalists attempts. After A.J. Arberry's translation in 1955, after a gap of some fifty years, Alan Jones's appeared in 2007. In contrast, since 1980 new translations by Muslim writers have been appearing regularly, particularly in the last two decades. The two Muslim translators, Abul Fadl (1911) and Hairat Dihlawi (1916) resisted the missionaries and the Orientalists' accusations against the Quran in the commentary. However, these Muslim translators contributed very little because of poor knowledge of the English language and its odd presentation (Kidwai, 2017).

With Pickthall's magnificent translation, this initiative flourished into a wonderful scholarly tradition. His work supported the ever-growing English-speaking Muslims to gain some understanding of the meaning and message of the Quran in English. Pickthall (1930) in the foreword of *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, considers the Holy Quran untranslatable and regrets his prowess to capture and articulate, "that inimitable symphony (of the Quran), the very



sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy” (p. vii). According to Kidwai (2017), Pickthall’s translation of the holy Quran has two points of pride as it is the first worthy translation, and it serves all along as the touchstone against which all later translations have usually been measured for their faithfulness to the original Arabic/Quranic text and for gauging their mastery or otherwise over the English idiom and usage. Initially, Pickthall translated a few verses of the holy Quran in his article *The Islamic review* (1919) and then the complete translation was published under the patronage of Nizam of Hyderabad. In the very article *The Islamic review* (1919), he criticized the previous English translations as, “translations of the Sacred Book are prosy, and seem discursive and garrulous, whereas the Quran in Arabic is terse, majestic, and poetical. So bad are some of the translations, and so foolish many of the notes which choke the text” (Kidwai, 2017, pg. 232). Pickthall’s translation became popular soon after its publication. More than one hundred and sixty editions of Pickthall’s translation are on record.

In 1974, the holy Quran was co-translated in Istanbul, Turkey by Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan. It was revised in 1994 in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in 1996 another edition was published by King Fahd Complex for the printing of the holy Quran under the title *The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*. This work contains around 856 pages of text translation in addition to three appendices i.e., a 32-page long glossary of terms, topics, and index of topics (Jassem, 2014). As this translation was done in the last quarter of the 20th century, the language was different from the old translations like Pickthall’s. The archaic expressions like *ye*, *thou* and adding *th* with the verbs were changed into modern English language and its use.

Although Hilali-Khan translation earned a worldwide distribution because of the support of the Saudi government as well as its criticism due to Wahabbi inclination, but the current study will focus on the modern English of this translation. It has parenthetical explanation of the terms which are also excluded. On the other hand, Pickthall’s translation is focusing Biblical and archaic expressions along with terseness of the English language. Both the translations have more than fifty years gap and English language has changed and evolved rapidly in this time frame. According to Basanet “if a translation is going to sound authentic and be readable, the translator must write in his or her own language, in a language rooted in reality, not fantasy” (2011, p. 25).





3. Methodology

It is exploratory qualitative research, and the contents of translations will be analyzed descriptively.

3.1 Sample

Two translations of Surah Rahman by Pickthall (1930) and Hilali-Khan (1996) are taken as sample of this study.

3.2 Data Collection:

An inventory is developed of lexical variations of Pickthall and Hilali-Khan translations in a sequence of the verses of Surah Rahman, which is as followed:

Verse No.	Arabic	Pickthall (1930)	Hilali-Khan (1996)
2	عَلَّمَ	Made known	Taught
4	الْبَيَانَ	Utterance	Eloquent Speech
5	بِحُسْبَانٍ	Made Punctual	Run on their fixed courses calculated with measured out stages for each
6	النَّجْمِ	Stars	Herbs (or stars)
7	السَّمَاءِ	Sky	Heaven
7	رَفَعَهَا	Uplifted	Raised high
7	الْمِيزَانَ	Measure	Balance
8	تَطَعُوا	Exceed	Transgress
9	بِالْقِسْطِ	Strictly	Equity
9	تُخْسِرُوا	Fall short	Deficient
10	وَضَعَهَا	Appointed for	Put for



11	النَّخْلُ ذَاتُ الْأَكْمَامِ	Sheathed palm-trees	Date-palms producing sheathed fruit-stalks
12	وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ	Husked Grain	Corn, with (its) leaves
12	الرَّيْحَانُ	Scented Herbs	Sweet-scented Plants
13	فَيَأَيُّ	Favours	Blessings
14	صَلْصَلٍ	Clay	Sounding Clay
14	كَالْفَخَّارِ	Like the potter's	Like the clay of pottery
15	نَارٍ	Smokeless fire	Smokeless flame of fire
20	يَبْعِيَانِ	Encroach	Transgress
22	يَخْرُجُ	Cometh forth	Come out
24	الْمُنْشَأَتِ	Displayed	Coming and Going
24	كَأَلْأَعْلَامِ	Like banners	Like mountains
26	كُلُّ	Everyone	Whatsoever
26	فَانٍ	Pass away	Perish
27	يَبْقَى	Remaineth	Abide forever
27	وَجْهٌ	Countenance	Face
27	الْجَلَالِ	Might	Majesty
27	الْإِكْرَامِ	Glory	Honour
29	يَسْأَلُهُ	Entreat	Begs
29	شَأْنٍ	Exerciseth power	Matter to bring forth
31	سَتَفْرُغُ	Dispose	Attend
31	النَّقْلَانِ	Dependents	Classes





33	مَعَشَرَ	Company	Assembly
33	تَنْفُذُوا	Penetrate	Pass
33	إِلَّا	Save with	Except with
33	بِسُلْطَانٍ	Sanction	Authority
35	نَّارٍ	Heat	Smokeless flames
35	نُحَاسٍ	Flash of brass	Molten brass
35	تَنْتَصِرَ	Escape	Defend
37	انْشَقَّتْ	Splitteth	Rent
41	الْمُجْرِمُونَ	Guilty	<i>Mujrimun (Polytheists, criminals, sinners, etc.)</i>
41	فِيْرُحْدُ	Taken	Seized
44	بَيْنَهَا	Circling round	Between
44	حَمِيمٍ	Fierce	Hot
50	عَيْنَانِ	Fountains	Springs
56	قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ	Modest gaze	Restraining with glances
56	يَطْمِئُنُّنَّ	Touched	<i>Yatmithhunna</i>
58	الْيَاقُوتِ	Jacynth	Rubies
60	إِلَّا	Aught save	Other than
64	مُذْهَمَاتَانِ	Foliage	-----
66	نَضَاحَتَانِ	Abundant	Gushing forth water
72	مَقْصُورَاتٌ	Close guarded	Restrained



76	حِسَانٍ	Fair	Beautiful
76	عَبَقَرِيَّ	Carpets	Mattresses

4 Data Analysis

The analysis is done in the light of two translations of the holy Quran in 1930 and 1996 respectively. The analysis is done in the order of the verses which are given in the inventory as well. Firstly, those lexical variations will be discussed which are different in terms of simplification of the meaning and secondly the overall analysis of both the translations is related to lexical variations.

4.1 Findings

In verse no. 2, the phrase ‘made known’ is used in 1930, whereas in 1996 the word ‘taught’ is used, which is definitely a simple expression to understand as compared to ‘made known’. In verse no. 4, in 1930 the word ‘utterance’ is used and in 1996, the phrase ‘eloquent speech’ is used. The phrase ‘eloquent speech’ is closer to the meaning of the Quranic word ‘*Bayaan*’ used in this verse because the term denotes the excellence of speech in praise of God is indicated instead of mere speaking quality of humans. In verse no. 5, the phrase ‘made punctual’ is used in 1930 and in 1996 there is a very long sentence is used i.e., ‘Run on their fixed courses calculated with measured out stages for each’. There is a complete meaning rather explanation of the stars’ movements that all of them are moving in their orbits and their stages are also measured. In verse no. 7, in 1930 the word ‘sky’ is used which is a better word as compared to the word ‘heaven’ in 1996 because the word heaven is used for the place above the sky where the pious people will reside after the day of judgement. In the same verse the word ‘uplifted’ is used in 1930 and in 1996 the phrase ‘raised high’ is used so the latter seems a closer meaning of the Quran. Another variation in this verse is ‘measure’ in 1930 and ‘balance’ in 1996 for the word ‘*Mezaan*’.

The word ‘balance’ denotes a simpler and closer meaning of the Quranic word. In verse no. 9, the phrase ‘fall short’ in 1930 and the word ‘deficient’ in 1996 are used for the word ‘*Tukhsiro*’. The single word of 1996 is more relevant and easier to understand the term ‘*Tukhsiro*’ which means inadequacy in quantity or supply. In verse no. 9, the word ‘strictly’ is used in 1930 and the word ‘equity’ is used in 1996 where the latter is low frequency word, so,





the former is easy to understand. In verse no. 10, the phrase ‘appointed for’ is used in 1930 and the phrase ‘put for’ is used in 1996 for the word ‘*Waza’aha*’, so, the latter translation is easier. In verse no. 11, the phrase ‘sheathed palm-trees’ in 1930 and the phrase ‘date-palms producing sheathed fruit-stalks’ in 1996 are used. The former is the example of reduction and the latter is the example of addition and simplification of translation. In verse no. 12, the phrase ‘husked grain’ in 1930 and the longer phrase ‘corn, with (it) leaves and stalk for fodder’ in 1996 are the examples of pithiness and addition respectively. The variation of ‘husked’ and ‘leaves’ is pertinent because the former is more plausible and understandable and further the word ‘grain’ is a better translation than ‘corn’. In the same verse the difference of ‘scented’ in 1930 and ‘sweet-scented’ in 1996 is the example of addition in the latter as the scent is always pleasing. Again in the same verse, the word ‘herbs’ in 1930 and ‘plants’ in 1996 is the instance of simplification in the latter. In verse no. 13, the term ‘favours’ in 1930 and the term ‘blessings’ in 1996 are used. The former is used for positive as well as negative meaning like approval and prejudice or partiality but the word ‘blessing’ is used specifically as divine aid or protection, so this term is simplifying the meaning. In verse no. 14, the difference of ‘clay’ and ‘sounding clay’ in the old and the new translations respectively is the example of reduction and simplification. The 1930’s term ‘clay’ is following reduction theory of translation whereas the ‘sounding clay’ is the closer and simpler alternative of the Quranic word ‘*Salsaal*’. In the same verse the phrase ‘like the potter’s’ in 1930 is the example of reduction but the phrase ‘like the clay of pottery’ in 1996 is the example of addition and simplification. In verse no. 15, the phrase ‘smokeless fire’ in 1930 is not giving the complete meaning as compared to the phrase ‘smokeless flame of fire’ in 1996.

In verse no. 20, the word ‘encroach’ in 1930 and the word ‘transgress’ in 1996 both are low frequency words in the translations but ‘transgress’ is more aptly used as the waters of two seas are within their limits and not intruding gradually or stealthily upon the rights or property of each other as the word ‘encroach’ suggests. In verse no. 22, the phrase ‘cometh fort’ is used in 1930, whereas in 1996 the phrase ‘come out’ is used which is definitely a simple expression to understand as compared to the former. In the verse no. 24, the word ‘displayed’ is used in 1930, whereas in 1996 the phrase ‘coming and going’ is used which is a simple expression to understand as compared to ‘displayed’ because the ships in the seas are not displayed rather move from one place to the other. In verse no. 26, the word ‘everyone’ is used in 1930 for every



type of things or creatures of this world whereas in 1996 the word ‘whatsoever’ is used which is more comprehensible and meaningful because ‘everyone’ is used for humans primarily. In the same verse the phrase ‘pass away’ and the word ‘perish’ are used for the Quranic word ‘*Faan*’. The phrase ‘pass away’ is used for the death of humans only but the word ‘perish’ is used for the destruction of anything and according to the Quran everything will be destroyed, so, the word ‘perish’ used in 1996 is more understandable. In verse no. 27, the term ‘remaineth’ in 1930 and the phrase ‘abide forever’ in 1996 are used for the Quranic word ‘*Yabqa*’. Here the latter translation is additional and the former is apt and suitable. In the same verse, the word ‘countenance’ in 1930 is very difficult as compare to the word used in 1996 translation i.e., ‘face’. In the same verse, the adjectives used for Allah Almighty are ‘Might’ and ‘Majesty’ in 1930 and 1996 translations respectively are almost the same words but the word ‘Glory’ in 1930 is changed with ‘Honour’ in 1996 in which latter is simplified. In verse no. 29, the word ‘entreat’ of 1930 is changed with ‘begs’ in 1996, which is simplification. In verse no. 29, there is a phrase ‘exerciseth power’ in 1930 whereas there is a longer phrase ‘matter to bring forth’ in 1996 for the word ‘*Shaan*’. The word ‘*Shaan*’ has the literal meaning of matter and both the translators explained the term by addition of phrases. The 1930’s expression is shorter and simpler than the other. In verse no. 31, the word ‘dispose’ is used in the sense of ‘to deal with’ in old translation which is not a common meaning of the word in present times but in the 1996’s translation the word ‘attend’ is relevant and easy to understand. In the same verse the words ‘dependent’ and ‘classes’ are used in the translations which means humans and jinns, so, the latter term is more useful in the current time. In verse no. 33, the word ‘assembly’ is used in the old translation whereas the word ‘company’ is used, and the latter is frequently used word in the present times, so, it is easier. In the same verse, the word ‘penetrate’ in 1930 is low frequency word but in 1996 the word ‘pass’ is used which is very high frequency word and very simple to understand. Further, the phrases ‘save with’ and ‘except with’ are used respectively and the latter is easy to understand. By the end of verse no. 33, the words ‘sanction’ and ‘authority’ are used and the latter is a high frequency word so easy to understand. In verse no. 35, the single adjective ‘heat’ is used for fire but in 1996 translation there is a phrase ‘smokeless flames’ is used which make it simplified as smokeless flames generate more heat. In the same verse, in 1930 the phrase ‘flash of’ is used for brass but in 1996 the adjective ‘molten’ is used for brass, which is simple and





easy to understand. Further, in this verse the term 'escape' is used in 1930 and the term 'defend' is used in 1996 which is a high frequency word and carries simplification. In verse no. 37 the word 'splitteth' is used in 1930 whereas the word 'rent' (the past participle of rend) is used in 1996. The latter is very low frequency word so not easily understandable as compared to the word 'splitteth'.

In verse no. 4, the word 'guilty' is used in 1930, whereas the word is not translated rather the Quranic word '*Mujrimun*' is given but in parenthesis 'polytheists, criminals, sinners, etc.' are written which simplifies the meaning. Although the word 'guilty' is very common and understandable as well. In the same verse the words 'taken' and 'seized' are used in the old and the new translation and 'seized' is a low frequency word as compare to 'taken' so the latter is easy to understand. In verse no. 44, the phrase 'circling round' is used in 1930 and the preposition 'between' is used in 1996, so, due to reduction in the latter there is confusion but the former expression is self-explanatory. In the same verse, the word 'fierce' is used in 1930 and 'hot' is used in 1996, so, the latter is simplified. In verse no. 50, the words 'fountains' and 'springs' are used in 1930 and 1996 translations and out of these the latter seems relevant and apt because it is commonly used for water coming out of mountains. In verse no. 56, the phrase 'modest gaze' is used in 1930 and the phrase 'restraining their glances' is used in 1996. The latter is elaborative expression that those maidens even had not a glance on others. In the same verse, the word 'touched' is used in 1930 for those maidens that they were never touched but in 1996 the Quranic word '*yatmithhuna*' is used and in parenthesis it is elaborated that no one has opened their hymens with sexual intercourse. In verse no. 58, 'jacinth' is used in 1930 whereas in 1996 translation the stone name 'rubies' is used and latter is commonly known so it is simplified. In the verse no. 60, the phrase 'ought save' is used in 1930 and the phrase 'other than' is used in 1996 and the latter is easily comprehensible. In verse no. 66, the word 'abundant' is used in 1930 and the phrase 'gushing forth water' is used in 1996. The latter has addition but it has simplification of the expression. In verse no. 72, there is a phrase 'close-guarded' in 1930 and in 1996 translation there is a single word 'restrained' is used which is easy to understand. In verse no. 76, the words 'fair' and 'beautiful' are used in old and new translations respectively and the latter is simplified. In the same verse the word 'carpets' is used in 1930 and 'mattresses' is used in 1996 and both the words are equally understandable at the present time.



There are a few variations in both the translations which do not have any clear indication perhaps because of the eloquence of Arabic language which gave freedom to the translators to translate in any way. Following are the instances of such cases:

In verse no. 6, the word 'stars' is used in 1930 whereas the word 'herbs' is used and in parenthesis the word 'stars' is also mentioned for the Quranic word '*Najam*' because this word has both the meanings. In verse no. 24, the ship in the sea are mentioned as 'like banners' in 1930 and 'like mountains' in 1996. In majority of the translations in English the word 'mountains' is used. In verse no. 41, the word 'guilty' is a good translation of the Quranic word '*Mujrimun*' but in 1996 translation the word is mentioned as it is and in parenthesis the types are given. In verse no. 64, the word 'foliage' is used in 1930 translation whereas there is no such word in 1996 translation, so, it is addition in translation.

5 Conclusion

Both the translations, Pickthall (1930) and Hilali-Khan (1996), have the gap of almost 66 years and during this time lexical variations occurred in English language. So, the translation of Surah Rahman is translated with the variations which are mentioned in the analysis. It is noteworthy that the later translation is simplified and at very few points the older translation has simple expression. As Basanet (2011) suggests that translation must have the touch of current era instead of using biblical or archaic expressions. Further, the purpose of translation is to facilitate the reader so there is no charm in using archaic or obsolete vocabulary. During this analysis it was also found that the translation of the holy Quran is not bound with the zeitgeist rather the context of the Quran is more important. It is also a fact that even after hundreds of years, the translator will not be at liberty to bring a lot of lexical variations which can alter the meaning.

References:

- Al-Hilali, T. and Khan, M. (1996). The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary. Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran
- Al-Jarf, R. (2014). Itineraries in the Translation History of the Quran. *Available at SSRN 3884088*.
- Arberry, A.J. (1955). The Koran Interpreted. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Bassnett-McGuire, S. (2011). Reflections on translation. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.





- Jassem, Z. A. (2014). The Noble Quran: A Critical Evaluation of Al-Hilali and Khan's Translation. International Journal of English and Education ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:3, Issue:2, April 2014, Pp. 237-73.
- Jones, Alan. (2007). The Quran Translated into English. London: Gibb Memorial Trust.
- Kidwai, A. (2017). Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's English Translation of the Quran (1930): An Assessment. In Nash G. (Ed.), *Marmaduke Pickthall: Islam and the Modern World* (pp. 231-248). LEIDEN; BOSTON: Brill. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76wrn.16
- Pickthall, Marmaduke. (1919) 'The Quran', The Islamic Review. 9–16.
- Pikthall, Marmaduke. (1930) The Meaning of the Glorious Quran. Hydrabad-Deccan, India: Government Central Press