The linguistic and cultural barriers and the proportions of liberty and constraint while translating sacred texts

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Abstract
The present paper is an attempt to reveal the typical difficulties to which are confronted translators of every sacred text. So, the authors of this research paper try to precise the meaning-form relations which arise from a corpus of the eighteen final surahs of the holy Quran. For this purpose, two translations of the holy book (those of Jacques Berque and Hamidullah), the most attested and credible, have been chosen and studied in this research to determine the tendencies which deform the source text while translating and which leads to different outputs. By this way, the present work will show the impact of the moderation to find out the right way between the fidelity to the form and the loyalty to the meaning.

Keywords: translation, fidelity, transparency, form, meaning, translation of the holy Quran.

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1. Introduction:

The Quran, as a holy text, has drawn to itself the attention of many readers and translators of every nations and languages, muslim as well as laic. The French translations of the holy text have gone increasingly till this moment. They have been published in every country and the translators belong to different nationalities and religions. The contemporary translations of Quran can be divided into two main groups: those which have been translated by muslims and the translations executed by laics. Among the muslim translators the most well-known works belong to Muhammad Hamidullah,Cheikh Si Hamza Boubakeur and Sadok Mazigh. On the other hand, the laic translations the most famous are those of Albert de Biberstein Kasimirski, Régis Blachère, Denise Masson,deJean Grosjean, Jacques Berque and André Chouraqui. Some of the French translations of the holy text are reputed to be literal; such are that of Dr Salah Ed-Dine Kechrid from Tunis and that of Sheikh Boureima Abdou Daouda from Nigeria. Others like that of Kasimirski don't follow closely the original Arabic structures. Admittedly, all these translators may have different purposes translating the Quran: Some of them may use their translation as a mean of disfiguration of Islam; some others use their talent at the disposal of the Islamic propaganda or the discovery of Islam by non-muslims. Others consider their translation as a contribution to the world heritage enriching intellectually every citizens of the globe, whatever his confession. The translation of a holy text as the central text of each religion, such as the Quran, the Bible or the Torah has always been a delicate attempt, sometimes really perilous. The translation from each

language to another implies a real cultural negotiation. It's about locating the translation in its historical, social and political context and to recognize that, beyond the difficulties of transferring the text and the taking into account of translatability or non-translatability of the divine message, it remains a great deal of other factors to take into account and which can influence the waiting and the reactions of those to whom the translation is addressed. So, we deal with a special kind of linguistic process which leads to a relation or a network of different relations. The translation, as an act of communication, represents a go-between or even a negotiation which is realized from a special point of view or from a kind of ideology. So, the translator is confronted with cultural difficulties during the translation of the holy Quran or the transmission of the prophetic tradition called *Sunnah.* So, what worries the more Muslim people, while translating these holy texts, is precisely the unavoidable betrayal that comprises the operation.

The present paper, focus on every procedures which, during the translation, may lead to a formal or semantic deviation from the source text and hamper by this way the transmission of the message which becomes all the more important as it's about the divine message.

For this purpose, we limited our research to a comparative study of two French translations carried out by two translators of different religions: that of Jacques Berque [1] and the one of

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1 Jacues Berque (1910-1995) is a great French orientalist born in Algeria. He was longtime teaching in College de France. His translation of Quran as one of the most attested is based on sixteen years of research. However, this brilliant translation is not easy to access because of the

Muhammad Hamidullah[1]. This choice is due to the fact that one of them being French and the other Arabic, the comparison of their texts, may show us how much this linguistic divergence can have influenced the fruit of their effort. So, both of the studied translations are classified between the most credible and attested until now.

Considering the enormous quantity of the contents, this research is being limited to the 18 final surahs of the holy Quran. This delimitation of the corpus rests on the quantitative feasibility (considering the length of the surahs) and the linguistic adequacy (due to the variety of themes). The principle aim of this research paper is to determine the borders of liberty that a translator can give himself without any risk of harming the integrality of the message.

2. The preliminary studies

The Quran's translation and the problematic of liberty and constraints while translating sacred texts have made run much ink in different languages and by so many researchers who feel deeply concerned by the subject. This paper is based on the recent researches carried out around these issues. The publications consulted to undertake this research are the followings.

Dejean le Féal (1991) has studied the applicability of the liberty in translation on two different levels: first is that of the analyzing the author's intents to say, and the level of re-expressing these intents. According to her the application of every liberty at the first level is impossible, but it's on the second level that the translator can dispose of certain liberties to reformulate the meaning of the source text.

Darvish (1999), considers the translation as a decision making process under constraints of two natures: Internal ("those non-physical variables that constitute the core cognitive activities of the act of translating") and External ("physical variables"); the external constraints are broken into two other categories of extrinsic constraints (such as the environment, time and space, standards, norms, protocols, tools, technology, systems, machines") and the intrinsic constraints including information medium, readability, legibility and audibility of discourse. Next, he shows how norms and constraints interact and how important is the knowledge of constraints in realizing a translation closer to the ideal.

Adriana Serban(2008) trying to give a theoretical outline of translation with regard to the activity of translating religious texts in Romania after the fall of Communism, recognizes that parallel to technical difficulties of translation of these texts, there are exterior factors which have a decisive influence on the interpretation as well as on the strategies and techniques adopted by the translator. According to her, the language used in a religious text play a crucial role in the political supremacy and the identity of a nation.

Islamic cultural level that it required to understand the content   parallel to the style that tries to reflect the beauty of the Quran Arabic. His work composed of 844pages has been confectioned in Paris in 1991 and titled as "Le Coran : essai de traduction de l'arabe annoté et suivi d'une étude exégétique ». It has been reviewed in 1995 by the editions of Albin Michel, collection: "la bibliothèque spirituelle".

1 Muslim translator, Hamidullah (1908-2002) is an erudite of Indian origin. He lived in France since 1948 until 1996. He is the author of a biography of the Prophet (2 volumes, 1962) recommended by the Muslim bookshops. He is also the first Muslim translator of the holy Quran (1959) in three volumes adorned with calligraphies.

Abdelhamid Elewa (2014) intending to explore the different features of religious translation, "proposes a model of translation", based on a linguistic view on every constituent of the source and the target language in an attempt to circumvent the peculiarities of them and then effecting the translation by "starting from simple structures into more sophisticated ones focusing on phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax, and semantics".

Christiane Nord (2014) maintains that translations are always "interpretations" which give "the meaning" of the sacred text, but they cannot replace the original. She believes that "Canonicity, the status of certain documents as being of supreme authority for a particular constituency, has not been an issue in Islam, because only the Quran in its Classical Arabic text is canonical, although some commentaries have gained almost canonical importance for certain sects of Islam." Basing her arguments, on the *skopos* theory, she includes that in translating sacred text as in every other kind of texts, the *skopos* must include the explicit and implicit norms for the translation of sacred texts in the target culture. From her point of view, the *skopos* must state the audience and the purpose of the translation of the sacred text in question.

3. Theoretical concepts
The intention to aboard such a subject needs first of all to clarify the meaning of some keywords of the domain. Such are the terms and the expressions below:

The liberty in translation: The *liberty* in Translation called also "*Transparency* is the extent to which a translation appears to a native speaker of the target language to have originally been written in that language, and conforms to its grammar, syntax and idiom". Yet, its borders are not precisely determined. Considered as the extreme opposite point of a *word by word translation*, it may covert different degrees starting from the free choice of words and expressions to go to the maximal degree of changes the translator applies to sentences with his own way, at the purpose of adapting the structures to those of the target language and making, by this way, the meaning more transparent for the reader of the translated text. Even, at an excessive level, it has been seen that the presumed liberty leads to the addition of explicative sentences or paragraphs, which the result is no more conceivable as a translation.

The fidelity or faithfulness of a translation Faithfulness is the extent to which a translation accurately renders the meaning of the source text without distortion.

The question of fidelity has been widely discussed by the translators and all those who study this section. However, the subject is still new and the discussion remains open. For the translators, the fidelity is the opposite of the liberty in translation. The fidelity is, according to them, giving the priority to the idea and the style of the author as they are presented in the source language. But, it remains to be seen if such a practice is really and completely possible, considering that, never while a translation, the translator masters completely both source and target languages.

The constraints: Darvish (1999) believes rightly that **"**the word *constraints* assumes that a better translation would have been possible had it not been for the

norms restricting the choices and blocking the alternatives and, on a higher plane, causing confliction between that which is desired and that which is achievable".

4.Analysis, comparison and criticism:
4.1.The translation of Quran's text as a main problem

The liberty in translation means having a choice; nevertheless, the two notions seem paradoxical since the choice seems have been already done by the author and just the choice of the best equivalent remains to do by the translator and here, also, the problem is as much more difficult when the problem arises while translating a sacred text; in this case, the translator doesn't deal with a human author; it's about God's words, so, which can mean the choice and the liberty with regard to it; this is the main problem to which is devoted this paper: how attested translators draw the boundaries of liberty when, as regards divine words the liberty is much limited, much more strict and more commanded.

The first task of the translator is to home the strongest and the most frequent interpretations of each verse and each surah, by reading different recognized exegeses. This proves to be necessary more especially as the amount of possibilities to which all the sacred texts are disposed according to different tendencies of the readers. It seems that without this preliminary tough task, every translation of a big amount of verses is impossible whatever the knowledge of languages of the translator. What is fixed here as the first object of this study is to precise the kind of problems to which is confronted the translator while translating the holy Quran.

4.2 Shortcomings due to the personal interpretation of the translator

It's about failings observed in the translation because the translator didn't consider the interpretation of the exegesis. It's actually about taking a position which leads frequently to a kind of distortion in the source text with the profit of a best comprehension of the output. These misrepresentations have different types as follow:

4.3.The omission of linguistic elements

It's about the omission of a word which is visibly present in the source text to reflect only the intentional meaning in the target language. An example of this type of distortion is being observed in the ninth verse of the surah Al-Qariah:

9.فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ .

9. Faommuhu hawiyatun

Muhammad Hamidullah	Jacques-Berque
His mother [destination] is a deep abyss.[1]	Will have in front of him no more than an abyss.[2]

According to the exegesis of Ibn Kathir (1998:552), "The Arabic text expresses this abyss as a 'mother' who will be a refuge just like a child who doesn't find a better protection than her mother's bosom."

Ibn Jarir reports that once Al-Ash'ath ben Abdullah the blind said: "once a believer dies, his soul will be lead towards the souls of other believers who will tell each other: "calm down the heart of your brother because he just left the anguish of the low world. Then, they will ask him: "and such, what had he done?" and he will answer: "Didn't-he go to you?" and they

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1 Sa mère [destination] est un abîme très profond.
2 N'aura devant lui qu'un abîme.

will say: "no, he's surely lead to his mother the pit of the hell".

In his translation, Jacques Berque emphasizes that: "The Arabic language let do several interpretations of '*ummuhu hawiyat*' according to whether the first term is understood as "the direction" where one goes or as "the mother". The translation seems relevant since according to Berque (1990:694), if it had been necessary to understand that 'his mother suffered the pain' then, any other question would be superfluous.

Berque's choice here is the word 'mother' in the translation of this verse, yet it seems that this choice has lead to an ambiguity [1]. As for Hamidullah, his translation seems to be the most faithful as he gives the priority to the meaning.

4.4.The lack of the semantic clearness

It's about all the inadequacies due to the polysemic terms understood in different manners by different exegesis. On this subject, Amélie Neuve-Eglise (2012:19) enhances that "from the point of view of their significance, all of the verses shouldn't be put on the same level: some of them have a content which can be understood in different manners and lead to semantic confusions. So, to avoid this problem, she underlines that: "the meaning of ambiguous verses can be clarified by using the verses free from every ambiguity."

The first verse of the suraht Al-Adiyat presents this kind of inadequacy:

١. وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحاً.

2.   1. Waal'adiyati dabhan

Muhammad Hamidullah		Jacques-Berque
By steeds which pant.[2]		To strangle itself by the wind of the gallop.[3]

According to the exegete Ibn Kathir (1998:549):

"God swears on horses which are gone up by warriors who fight for its own cause; horses which, galloping and neighing, spring up sparks under their choose and surprise enemies at dawn. Because the messenger of God - Allah bless and greets him - began his expeditions at the moment when everybody was called for the prayer. Then, if he heard the call for the prayer, he stopped to do his prayer, if not, he would attack him. Those horses raise dust in the middle of the night moving of a place to another."

According to the mentioned exegesis, has well translated the meaning of the term "al'adiyat" which is the principal term of this verse and which causes different interpretations in Arabic languages. With regard to Jacques Berque's translation, we should say that it gives some confusion compared to the source text, what we can evoke as a lack of semantic clearness. From this point of view, the work of Hamidullah seems preferable because it is closer to the source language and consequently, is more faithful than the other translation, indeed more attached to the form.

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1 According to almizan, le mot *hâviyah* would mean the hell, and this label would be due to the root *havâ* which means "the fall".

2 Par les coursiers qui halètent.
3 S'étrangler au vent du galop.

4.5.The interpretative differences

The text interpreted by an exegete, may be, in its turn, understood variously by different translators who translate it in several manners. The problem may, also, come from the divergence between the exegetes whom each translator has referred to.

The most representative example of this type of problem may be the fourth verse of the suraht Al-Qariah.

4 يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ.

4.Yawma yakoonu alnnasu kaalfarashi almabthoothi

Muhammad Hamidullah	Jacques-Berque
It's the Day that people will be like butterflies scattered.[1]	The day when the humans will be dispersed such as grasshoppers.[2]

According to Ibn Kathir (1998:552):"On that day, people moving and spreading all around will resemble to geometer moths dispersed in all directions as God says "like grasshoppers which takes their flight" (Quran, LIV, 7).

The keyword of this verse is *alfarashi*. According to the exegesis, this term is used to designate the chaos which will take place before the last judgment to which the image of grasshoppers or the geometer moths can better match than that of butterflies.

5.The stylistic specificities

Both translators studied in this research have resorted to other processes either to help a better comprehension or to make the verse clearer and easier to access. These additional informations, sometimes necessary and sometimes optional are related to semantics as well as stylistics.

5.1. The compulsory additions

The language of the holy text of Quran is extremely rich and the density of its content recovers every spiritual and social side of the believers' life. On the other hand, there are so many hidden meanings which the decoding is not possible without the intervention of an exegete. Even the partial comprehension of this sacred text is not easy to undertake for it needs a very deep knowledge of the Arabic language of the prophet's epoch. So as it is underlined by Neuve-Eglise (2006-2) "one can easily imagine all the difficulties to which may be confronted a western reader who, in addition to linguistic barriers, stay often foreign with the culture and the thinking manner present within the Muslim world."

Considering the evoked points parallel to the fact that the classical Arabic is full of metaphors and stylistic richness, further, additional information is required to let the reader get the complete message. A good example for these kinds of cognitive additional information lies in the second verse of the suraht Quraish.

2إِيلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاء وَالصَّيْفِ.

2. Eelafihim rihlata ashshita-i waassayfi.

Muhammad Hamidullah	Jacques-Berque
From their pact [concerning] their winter and summer travels[3]	Their gathering for the caravan of winter and that of summer[4].

This verse is lacking the verb, in other words the verb in this verse is hidden.

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1 C'est le jour où les gens seront comme des papillons éparpillés.

2 Au jour où les humains seront comme sauterelles répandus.

3 De leur pacte [concernant] les voyages d'hiver et d'été.

4 Leur rassemblement en vue de la caravane d'hiver et de celle d'été.

Searching to stay faithful to the structure of the source language, Berque has avoided any form of verbal predicate while Hamidullah has inserted, on his own responsibility, the verbal form "concerning" which he put in square brackets, saving this way the pureness of the source text and reassuring the seizure of the meaning by the French reader.

5.2. The arbitrary additions
Sometimes, the translators resort to non-compulsory additions to clarify the meaning of some verses. An example of this kind of additions may be seen in the third verse of the suraht Al-Bayyinah:

3. فِيهَا كُتُبٌ قَيِّمَةٌ.

3. Feeha kutubun qayyimatun

Muhammad Hamidullah	Jacques-Berque
In which we find ***descriptions of a perfect straightness***[1].	Where are found ***writings of uprightness***[2].

As we can see, the phrase "***kutubun qayyimatun***" has been translated by two different ways according to each of the translators in question so that even the length of the sentences differs. We are, here, vis-à-vis one of the thirteen deforming trends of Berman, that of "lengthening", using some more words to make the content explicit.

5.3. Keeping some words from the source language
It can appear in various forms such as:
a.The absolute faithfulness to words and expressions used in the source text which remains such as they are without any translation. This will not stop always and

completely the comprehension of the meaning, but may deform the target language so that it becomes unusual and the result is, to some extent, strange! Examples of this kind are not rare; such is the fourth verse of the suraht Al-Humazah.

4. كَلَّا لَيُنبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ.

4. Kalla layunbathanna fee- lhutamati

Muhammad Hamidullah	Jacques-Berque
Of course not! He will, certainly, be put into the Hutamah[3]	Surely not! May he be put again into the Hutamah![4]

The word Hutamah, as one of the names of the hell, has been considered as a proper name and stayed non-translated. Nevertheless, this fidelity may cost the risk of incomprehension of the notion if, the translation does not include any notation. For facing this kind of lack, some translators have proceeded to translate this proper name by a word which does not correspond precisely to the original word, but seems to be more explicit for the French reader. It's for example the case of the translation made by André Chouraqui (1990:995) who opted for the word "la Vorace" (the voracious one) as an equivalent for the term "hutama". This target based approach is, undoubtedly, not accepted by every translator concerned by the sacrality of a holy text.

5.4. The difference of equivalent's choice
This may occur at both lexical and idiomatic levels. It's about the points where each of the two translators has opted for a different word or expression to reproduce the meaning of a lexical entity in the source text. Such is the case of the

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1 Dans lesquelles se trouvent des prescriptions d'une rectitude parfaite.
2 Là Où figurent des écrits de droiture.

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3 Mais non ! Il sera certes, jeté dans la Hutamah.
4 Non pas! Qu'il soit rejeté dans la Hutama!...

expression "*jannatu 'adnin* » in the eighth verse of the suraht Al-Bayyinah.

8جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَداً رَّضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ.

8. Jazaohum 'inda rabbihim jannatu 'adnin tajree min tahtiha al-anharu khalideena feeha abadan radiya Allahu 'anhum waradoo 'anhu thalika liman khashiya rabbahu.

Hamidullah	Jacques-Berque
Their reward with Allah will be *gardens of perpetual residence* beneath which rivers flow, where in they will abide forever. Allah being pleased with them and they with Him. That is for whoever feared his Lord[2].	Their reward is with their Lord. *Gardens of Eden*, beneath which rivers flow; they will dwell therein forever; Allah well pleased with them, and they with Him: all this for no one but the fearers of the Lord.[1].

Even if several meanings have been attributed to the word "Edn", in different texts whatever the confession (*delights* for Hebrew 'Eden', 'plain' for akkadian 'Edinu', 'steppe' for Sumerian 'e-din'etc.), the fact that Hamidullah has preferred to translate the word to "gardens of perpetual residence" is a choice of the translator to keep the concept or to translate it at the purpose of making it accessible to the foreign reader.

6. Conclusion
The samples approached in this research are far from representing the totality of

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1 Leur salaire réside en leur seigneur: jardin d'Éden, de sous lesquels ruisseaux coulent: ils y seront éternel à jamais. Dieu les aura en son contentement, comme ils L'auront en le leur. Voilà qui ne concerne que les craignants du Seigneur.
2 Leur récompense auprès d'Allah sera les Jardins de séjour, sous lesquels coulent les ruisseaux, pour y demeurer éternellement. Allah les agrée et ils L'agréent. Telle sera [la récompense de celui qui craint son Seigneur].

stylistic specificities used in the translation of the holy Quran by these two translators. All we tried to show through this study is to home in some of the strategies used by them to get over some kinds of difficulties which arise when translating a sacred text.

All the measures taken, here, are examples of liberty in translation of a sacred text while respecting the optimal faithfulness vis-à-vis the holiness of the divine message.

Considering the examined examples, the criterions of the fidelity differ from one translator to another according to whether they opt for the source or the target language.

An important point to take into account is that the language used in both studied translations is close to the modern French, so easily intelligible for an ordinary French individual with an average linguistic level.

The main problem followed in this paper has been somewhat different from the simple question of tracing a net demarcating line between the liberty (as a sign of betrayal) and the fidelity (as a strict respect of constraints carrying out to the literality). So, we have tried to define the problem from a different point of view, that of choices which can make the translator among every existent strategy to give the maximal clearness to the output text, and this in the intention of accessing the optimal intelligibility for every reader as a potential subject to be converted to Islam. The preference here is clear: A faithful translation is a text which succeeds to transmit the message of the source text in the target's one in such a way that it will be seized the best by the reader of the translated text. This will, undoubtedly, be possible if he takes account of the stylistic subtleties in the target language to reproduce the same effect as in the source

text. This is why a literal translation may partially make obscure the message and stop, by this way, the reader to decode it. In other words, the translator should understand the original text to express the same meaning by means of the other language, lexically and syntactically, as correctly as possible. Thus, the fidelity in a translation may be defined as "the adequacy of the meaning seized by the translator with what meant the author in the source text and then the adequacy of the meaning seized by the reader of the target text with that of the original one". This is what has been, apparently, respected by Jacques Berque whose translation of the holy Quran "combined the fidelity to the text and the beauty of the style parallel to taking in account the contributions of the Muslim tradition" as highlights Amélie Neuve-Eglise (2006:9).

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