

Literary Traces of the Qur'an in Its English Translation

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ABSTRACT

Based on many researches have been done, the Qur'an uses literary methods in conveying the messages. This research uses different perspective in proving such conclusion by using English translations of the Qur'an written by four authorized Qur'an translators. The researcher uses Hermeneutics and Aesthetics to find the literary substantiations of English translations of the Qur'an. Of course there will be random verses of the Qur'an that would be chosen to be analyzed. Both analysis devices say that English translations of the Qur'an have literary traces that signify the Qur'an as a literary masterpiece, such as not only in owning different dictions and layers of meaning but also in owning aesthetic process and poetic texts.

Keywords: *English translation of the Qur'an, Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, literary substantiations*

INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of comprehensive studies in literary perspective of the Qur'an. It is noted that there are well-research on it, but other researchers use partial part of literature. There are, at least, which are found by this study, results of literary researches on it that were published in journals and thesis actually, such as the finding on the Qur'an as literature (Mir, 2000) and researching the using of God's names in Afsar's and Azmat's *From the Word of Allah to the Words of Men: The Qur'an and the Poetics of Translation* in 2012. There was also research on Qur'an as literature in Iqbal's thesis entitled *The Quran as a Literary Masterpiece within its Historical and Religious Milieus* in 2013. Besides, a research in the same year on translation's ideology of the Qur'an also existed in Mohaghegh's and Pirnajmuddin's *The trace of translator's ideology: A case study of English translations of the Qur'an*. Then in 2014 the writer of this article also had got conclusion that God uses literary method in conveying messages through the Qur'an. Poem is in every part of its surahs. Prose also exists in many part of it (Taufiqurrohman, 2014).

Those researches actually had similarities with others in couple journals. But there has been no research on literary studies that are based on the translations of the Qur'an that next it can be related with the Qur'an itself as the real source. In view of the importance of translating the Qur'an, many eminent scholars of Islam say that it is obligatory. Among these scholars are Imam Al-Bukhary, Ibn Hajar, Ibn Taimiyya, Abdul Azeez Ibn Baz and Muhammad Ibn Salih Al-Uthaymeen (Saudi, 2010). Of course the duty for many translators, in relation to translations of religion documents, is to write a functional and accurate English rendition (Mohammed, 2005). Thus, this study tries to reveal the literary traces of the Qur'an based on its English translations. Although the previous research can be used as the references for this study, still this study can be a new perspective that is offered by the researcher.

METHODOLOGY

This study is categorized as Qualitative Descriptive study because the objects of analysis are in textual forms, namely literary text. The distinguished object here is that it states approach to the Qur'an as a literary text.

So in this case, the approaches of analysis to answer the aims are two methods that are related to literary theories. The writer here chose Hermeneutics and Aesthetics. Both theories function as the devices to answer the literary indications. Hermeneutics would analyze the socio-cultural and symbolic reading of the verses of the Qur'an in this study later (Riffaterre, 1978). Meanwhile, based on Eaton (1999), analyzing aesthetics of something is a matter of being smart in explaining its keywords so that someone else can see where the beauty is. Aesthetics here is used by conveying the logics why the verses of the Qur'an are inferred beautiful.

Since the writer would use the English translations to analyze the Qur'an's literary substantiations, of course there will be sample of words, phrases and sentences of the verses of the Qur'an that would be used in analysis. In this case, the writer used random sampling. Beside for having legal analysis, this random sampling is also aimed at checking the previous references on the conclusion that the Qur'an uses literary ways in conveying messages.

Then for having comprehensive results of analysis, the verses are compared between four authorized translations. The decision on choosing four translations here is based on an authorized research result by Muhammad (2005). The authorized four of more are Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary* –which here is referred to Al-Qur'an Terjemah Indonesia Inggris (2008), Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali's and Muhammad Muhsin Khan's *The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, and Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an*. Then the sample verses in the four translations would be compared as well by using both theories above so that the conclusion would be got after that.

DISCUSSION

Below is some samples of verses of English translations of the Qur'an that are quoted by the

writer randomly. Those are directly followed by the analysis on using Hermeneutics then Aesthetics respectively.

The first sample is surah Al-Baqarah verse 152 in which in:

1. Pickthall's translation is:
"Therefore remember Me, I will remember you. Give thanks to Me, and reject not Me";
2. Asad's is:
"so remember Me, and I shall remember you; and be grateful unto Me, and deny Me not";
3. Ali's is:
"Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me, and reject not Faith"; and
4. al-Hilali and Khan's is "Therefore remember Me (by praying, glorifying), I will remember you, and be grateful to Me (for My countless Favours on you) and never be ungrateful to Me".

Pickthall's translation means that human as God's humble must remember their creator, feel thank to Him and not to rebuff. This verse has different situation of words and meanings with other translations. For instance Asad's translation uses "shall" instead of "will". The social meaning has stronger impression in "shall" rather than "will". Word "reject" also is different from "deny" although it can be called synonym. Then Ali's translation has very different one in the last verse, namely "... reject not Faith", by focusing not in God Himself but Faith one. The religious meaning is that what focuses on God is deeper because the destination is God directly, not faith. The fourth translation, Al-Hilali and Khan's, gave limitation by explaining "remember" only with praying and glorifying and "be grateful to me" with countless favor. Actually if there is no such limitations of meaning, the reader and the translators have possibility to get layers of meaning and to interpret more.

Those differences of translation results infer that the Qur'an is a literary text. They remind us on diamond; it has many angles in portraying the side and light. This is the theory

of literary works; once they come to readers, interpretants would be so multi-dimensional that many interpretations and layers of meaning happen (Riffaterre, 1978).

Such diamond illustration on translating the Qur'an in English above indicates aesthetical thing too. One verse in sentence can make various meaning in which all meanings can be true and advantageous may be called artistic. It can be proved again in an example of the verse below. Take surah Hud verse 6:

1. In Ali's translation:

"There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependeth on Allah: He knoweth the time and place of its definite abode (home) and its temporary deposit (safekeeping): All is in a clear Record";

2. In Al-Hilali and Khan's:

"And no moving (living) creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah. And He knows its dwelling place and its deposit (in the uterus, grave). All is in Clear Book (Al-Lauh-al-Mahfuz-the Book of Decrees with Allah)";

3. In Pickthall's:

"And there is not a beast in the earth but the sustenance thereof dependeth on Allah. He knoweth its habitation and its repository. All is in a clear record";

4. In Asad's:

"And there is no living creature on earth but depends for its sustenance on God; and He knows its time-limit [on earth] and its resting-place [after death]: all [this] is laid down in [His] clear decree."

Ali's translation above has different diction that makes different hermeneutical reading. It is like "beast" in Pikhtal's translation. "Moving creature" is larger than "beast" actually so that here Ali's diction has more consequences of interpretation than Pikhtal's. There is difference again in Asad's translation which uses "time limit" and "resting place". Both indicates convergence in interpretation. Being different from those anymore, Al-Hilali and Khan's translation uses special information on "uterus and grave" in understanding the last word. All

different and true interpretations can make artistic fact like diamond. It is literary work.

Such conclusion can be seen too from the translations of sura Ar-Rahman verse 4 as follows:

1. Pickthall's is:

"He hath taught him utterance";

2. Asad's is:

"He has imparted unto him articulate thought and speech";

3. Ali's is:

"He has taught him speech [intelligence]";

4. Al-Hilali & Khan is:

"He taught him eloquent speech".

Each translation has different word in signifying word "al-Bayan". Based on Webster's New World Dictionary, Third College Edition (1986), "utterance" (in Pickthall's translation) means the power of speaking, in Asad's is widened with two words (thought and speech) which means ideas and the act of speaking, in Ali's is only "speech" but being informed by "intelligence" in bracket which means the ability to understand. While al-Hilali and Khan's is "speech" too but added by "eloquent" before it in which it means persuasive and expressive. In conclusion, although the translations seem similar in domain of context, still the distribution and application of meaning is different.

Meanwhile, being seen from the characteristics of words used, some translations uses such literary words. In those verses, they are like "knoweth" and "dependeth" in surah Hud verse 6, and "hath" in surah Ar-Rahman verse 4. There are also "Thou", "Thee" and "Thine" in the following two paragraph, namely in sura Al-Fatihah.

The words can be categorized as Elizabethan English. It used to be used in literary works, especially by Shakespeare (https://patricianowacky.weebly.com/uploads/5/7/4/8/57483233/mine_thine_and_-eth.pdf). They are like "knoweth" was instead of "know" in contemporary language, and "thou" for "you" subject as "thee" for "you" object and "thy" for "you" possessive in contemporary

language (www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1031/terms.pdf). Such words signify that the Qur'an is considered by the translators and by the readers as having so beautiful language that they used such archaic literary language. In conclusion, this one characteristic emphasizes the Qur'an as a literary masterpiece too.

Furthermore, the Qur'an's status, in religious position, as God's literary work also can be seen from many verses around stories had been conveyed. It is like in surah Al Kahfi verse 60 to 82 that are translated into English by four Qur'anic translators above. It tells around the unique life learning process between Khidr as the source of learning to Musa as the target of learning. There are many lessons of life that can be taken. There are also many characters got involved in the story. The settings were clear too. The plot is forward and flashback. Those are the proofs that the verse has what a text can be called a literary work, namely prose or Narrative text. There are more on that in the Qur'an's text. That conclusion of the Qur'an as a literary work in this paragraph also indicates aesthetic too. It is because in one whole text, there enclosed many stories inside among other types of literary characteristics.

The next hermeneutic and aesthetic perspective also can be inferred from poems in all verses starts from the first surah to the last. Take for example a surah that is recited repetitiously daily for Moslems. It is Al-Fatihah. Below is the translation of surah Al-Fatihah by Pickthall.

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
The Beneficent, the Merciful.
Owner of the Day of Judgement,*

Thee (alone) we worship; Thee alone we ask for help.

Show us the straight path,

The path of those whom Thou hast favoured;

Not (the path) of those who earn Thine

anger nor of those who astray.

The verse has concise and poetic way in conveying comprehensive meaning as a verse. The first makes the readers get involved in believing they are before Allah in everything they do, feel and think. This is also followed by illustrating Allah as the Beneficent to everyone and everything in all Worlds and the Merciful to all believers. That's why praise be to Him as Lord of all Worlds. The characters then are emphasized again. It is important to emphasize things just like Sujud in Salats. Then the Day of Judgement is also enclosed which refers to Allah as the Owner. In relation to the men, they are taught to focus to Allah either in worshipping or in asking for help. Then they are taught to pray to Allah to be showed and guided for being on the true life. There are also layers in meanings in interpreting this surah as what has been showed by many exegesis experts in interpreting other verses too.

In case such findings above reflect the multi-interpretations and layers of meaning, the impossibility of Qur'anic translations into perfect ones seems happen (Afsar and Azmat, 2012). Instead, this phenomenon can have big lesson. It is that God has revealed the Qur'an in the literary type. Beside being based on the multi-interpretation and layers of meaning, it is also based on poetic types of all verses and the existence of proses.

Then the results of analysis above show that there are many traces of literary characteristics of the Qur'an. This conclusion is also based on the literary indications that has been got from the analysis. The table below can show such conclusion above.

Table 1. *Literary Traces of the Qur'an Based on Literary Indications*

No	Literary Indications	Fact of Literary Traces (Yes/No)
1	The using of different dictions in	Yes

	different translation	
2	The facts of layers of meaning	Yes
3	The facts of multi-interpretations	Yes
4	The using of literary words	Yes
5	The existence of aesthetic prose	Yes
6	The using of concise words	Yes
7	The existence of poetic texts	Yes

Table 1 above has parsed the findings of this research. There are seven literary indications that have been found by using Hermeneutics and Aesthetics. Those seven indications are stated positive. In other words, those seven can signify literary traces of the Qur'an through its English translations. So this finding can substantiate the previous findings that stated the Qur'an as a literary masterpiece.

CONCLUSION

The researcher finds that English translations of Qur'an are indeed able to prove that the Qur'an is a literary masterpiece. The substantiations of

this can be seen from the inside-out analysis by using Hermeneutics and Aesthetics. Furthermore, both analysis say that English translations of Qur'an meet the requirements (literary indications) as a kind of literary work such as in owning different dictions in different translations, layers of meaning, multi-interpretations for the readers or translators, literary words, aesthetic proeses, concise words and poetic texts. Since the translations are literary works, the Qur'an itself must be a literary work too. It can be concluded finally that the Qur'an has left traces of its using literary types on its English translations.

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