Euphemism in Arabic & English Translation: 
Quranic Texts as a Case Study

Abstract:
Euphemism is an important term that should be carefully dealt with by translators. It is a way of using a pleasant and less direct word instead of a rude or too direct one. This paper is an attempt to show some aspects of euphemism in English and Arabic. So the application is made to euphemistic expressions in Quranic texts and how they are translated between into English. It is hypothesized that English translations of Quranic euphemistic expressions seem inaccurately produced.

1-Introduction :
It is clear that language can be regarded as an invaluable treasure that tells very much about the world of which human beings are real. Indeed, it is man that has played the key role in creating and developing such languages. Through decades, people have ceaselessly enriched and diversified linguistics with many new concepts. Among them, the concept of using euphemisms becomes more and more common in present day language. Euphemism may be used to avoid mentioning freely taboo words. The primary example of taboo words requiring the use of a euphemism are the "unspeakable names for deity, such as Persephone, Hecate, Nemesis or Yahweh. By speaking only words favorable to the gods or spirit, the speaker attempted to procure good fortune by remaining in a good favor with them. Hudson (2000:261) defines euphemism as:
"..the extension of ordinary words and phrases to express unpleasant or embarrassing ideas. The indirectness of form is felt to diminish the unpleasantness of the meaning. The words so extended are called euphemism, and some examples are … pre-owned, and pass away"

Kahn (2001:243) states that "except perhaps for bureaucrats and politicians, scientists are unparalleled in their ingenious use of euphemisms to shield themselves from accountability and moral responsibility for their actions. Modern linguists have even created a word for it, “double speak”, the obfuscation of language in order to deny or shift responsibility"

According to Stockwell (2002:30)"euphemism can be seen not so much a lexical replacement by a dissimilar word as a replacement by a closely associated words (a metonym rather than a metaphor); the rest room is not a metaphor; rather it conveys slightly different, more pleasant associations than other possibilities".

2-Etymology of the word euphemism:
The origin of the word euphemism comes from the Greek word euphemo, with the prefix "eu" meaning "auspicious / good / fortunate speech" and the root 'phemism' meaning 'speech'. The eupheme was originally a word or phrase used in place of a religious word or phrase that should not be spoken aloud. Etymologically, the eupheme is the opposite of the blaspheme (evil-speaking). The eupheme was originally used to replace a word or phrase that should not be spoken aloud, such as the names of evil deities speaking their names would
invite evil, so a euphemism provided a sense of safety. Euphemisms were used to replace sacred words that were not to be spoken aloud.

3-Euphemism vs. dysphemism:

Euphemism is a substitution of an agreeable or less offensive expression in place of one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the listener. Euphemism is not generally legislated into existence but is derived out of energies produced by the ebb and flow of the people who find a way to express themselves in a time and place, and with more style and grace. Words originally intended as euphemisms may lose their euphemistic value, acquiring the negative connotation of their referents. In some cases, they may be used mockingly and hence become dysphemisms. For example, the term "concentration camp", to describe camps.

4-Euphemism as a form of doublespeak:

Doublespeak is a term which is deliberately constructed to disguise or distort its actual meaning which often results in a communication by-pass. What distinguishes doublespeak from other euphemism is its deliberate usage. Doublespeak may take the form of bald euphemisms such as ' downsizing ' or ' rightsizing ' for "firing of many employees"; or deliberately ambiguous phrases such as "wet work" for "assassination" and "take out for" destroy".

Sometimes euphemism is used to hide unpleasant or disturbing ideas, even when the literal term for them is not necessarily offensive. This type of euphemism is sometimes called doublespeak and it is used in public relations and politics.

5-Taboo words:

We can notice that people may sometimes use some words but not others which are regarded as taboos. The word 'taboo' here was borrowed from Tongan, a Polynesian language, and in society, it refers to the acts which are to be avoided. When an act is taboo, reference to this act may also become taboo. That means, first one is forbidden from doing something, then one is forbidden talking about it. Taboos are valuable as an index of the comfort or importance of a topic to a person or a culture. In other words, taboos are the ones that are not to be used, or at least, not to be used, in the 'polite society' because of being considered rude, vulgar or in some cases
too direct or indecent. So, how can it be dealt with the issue of not using the words in the taboo list? It is the existence of taboo words and / or taboo ideas that stimulates the creation of euphemisms. We have euphemisms like the word donkey that replaces the Indo-European derived word for ass. Some euphemisms evolve over a period of time into taboo words themselves. Discussion of verbal insults invariably raises the question of obscenity, profanity, "cuss word" and other forms of taboo language. Taboo words are those that are to be avoided entirely, or at least avoided common swear words such Damn! or shit! The latter is heard more and more in polite company and both men and women use, both words openly. Many, however, feel that the latter word is absolutely inappropriate in polite or formal contexts (Akmajian, 1997:289).

6-Examples of English euphemisms

As mentioned earlier, euphemism is an expression intended by the speaker to be less offensive, disturbing, or troubling to the listener than the word or phrase it replaces. Also, in some versions of English, "toilet room" itself a euphemism, was replaced with" restroom and "W. C". There are also examples of euphemisms which are geographically concentrated. The term " restroom is rarely used outside of the United states and "W.C", which before it was quite popular in Britain , is passing out of favour and becoming more popular in France and the polite term of choice in Germany . Connotations easily change over time ,for example " idiot ", " imbecile " and " moron " were once neutral terms for an adult of toddler , preschool and primary school mental ages, respectively " ( Gould, 1996 : 188 – 189 ).

Common examples:

Some other common euphemisms:

- Abortion instead of premature birth.
- Pollution, outgasing or runoff instead of industrial unpleasantness.
- Fatally wounded instead of killed.
- Curvy instead of fat.
- Lost their lives for were killed.
- Wellness for benefits and treatment that tend to only be used in times of sickness.
• A love of musical theatre or confirmed bachelor for male homosexuality.
• Women in sensible shoes for lesbianism.
• Ill-advised for very poor or bad.
• Pre-owned vehicles for used cars.
• Correctional facility for prison.
• The big C for cancer (in addition, some people whisper the world when they say it in public, and doctors euphemistically use technical terminology when discussing cancer in front of patients, e.g., c.a. or neoplasia neoplastic process, carcinoma for tumor. Euphemisms for cancer are used even more so in Netherlands, because the Dutch world for cancer can be used as a curse word.
• Bathroom tissue, t. p. or bath tissue for toilet paper (usually used by toilet paper manufactures).
• Sanitation worker (or, sarcastically, sanitation officer or sanitary engineer) or garbologist, for bin man or garbage man.
• Economically depressed neighborhood for ghetto.
• Force, police action or conflict for war.
• Mature for old or elderly.
• Enhanced interrogation technique for torture.
• Precaution for torture.
• Fee for fine.
• Specific about what one eats for being a picky eater.
• Intellectually challenged for being mentally retarded.
• To have been paid for being fired from or by ones employer.
• Adult entertainment for pornography.
• To cut excesses (in a budget) for to fire employees.
• Legal capital for stated capital.
• Gender reassignmient for sex change.

The aforementioned examples of English euphemisms suggest that most of them are well-known expressions, often they can be somewhat situational, in another wards, what might be used as a euphemism in a conversation between two friends might make no sense to a third person. In this case the euphemism is being used as a type of innuendo, where as sometimes euphemism is being considered as a type of jargon,
where it is used in some circles but not others such as the medical field. One such example is the line, "put him in bed with the captain's daughter" from the popular sea shanty *Drunken Sailor*. Although this line may sound more like a reward for getting drunk to non-seaman, the phrase "captain's daughter" was actually a euphemism used among sailors for the cat o'nine tails (itself a euphemism for a find of whip).

7-Euphemism in Arabic:

Condescension in the language of article (kindness) and also the idea revolves around the meaning of Al-tarafuq (lutf).

Glossary of terms in the Holy Quran to the Arabic Language Academy and the condescension in the verse:

فيأتكم برزق منه و ليتلطف " أي و ليترفق في الحصول على ما يريد
Surah : Al-Kahf, verse 19 ( Ali, 2001: 713)

Satisfy your hunger therewith; And let him behave with care and courtesy.

It is already clear to us that courtesy in the language means Al-tarafuq, but it would not be attached to the resourcefulness, acumen and intelligence. The ancient Arab scholars realized this phenomenon and studied it under courses of metonymy (AL-kinaya) and used some of the related terms such as: improving the pronunciation, meaning and mitigation.

Al-Mibrad states that the best of metonymy is the desire to replace the despicable word for a more condescend meaning. The Almighty God said:

أحل لكم ليلة الصيام الرفث إلى نساكم " سورة البقرة الآية 187
"Permitted to you on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives" Sura: Al-Baqarah, verse 187 (Ali,2001:74-75)

أو لامستم النساء " سورة النساء الآية 34 و سورة المائدة الآية ۶
"Or ye have been in contact with women"

Euphemism in the Holy Quran gains special importance as it is used in a context which is closely related to muslims. Since the Quran is the main source of Islamic teachings, it has been translated into several languages, particularly English. There are many versions of English translation of the Quran. However, these
translations have many errors arising from the lack of competence and understanding of Arabic syntax as well as failure to capture stylistic, pragmatic and figurative aspects of the Quran, or even sometimes errors in translation mostly resulting from the non-equivalence between the source and target languages (Baker, 1992:20-21).

However, good translators with encyclopedic and linguistic knowledge of both source and target languages know how to deal with them; therefore, errors can indicate the quality of a translation, moreover, they can reveal what is going on in the translator's thinking process (Seguinot, 1990:68). The failure to capture these aspects makes several verses in the Quran untranslatable. Euphemism is one of the rhetorical devices that constitutes a stumbling block in the face of the translators of the Quran. Thus, we notice that there are many English translations which fail to give the functional equivalence of certain euphemistic expressions in the Holy Quran. As mentioned earlier (in the above) euphemism is defined by many linguists as substituting a pleasant term for an offensive one, i.e. it means stating an unpleasant matter in pleasant expressions. This is done to avoid embarrassment or threat of face among interlocutors through their interaction. Simply, euphemism is regarded as a polite and more pleasant word or phrase used to avoid something that may be shocking or embarrassing.

Bell (1991:11) states: "that in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language, to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is be those who speak the language of the original work". This definition is really related to our topic under discussion in the sense that the effect of the translated euphemistic expressions on those who are not aware of the culture of the Muslims is different from the effect of the original on Muslims.

It is agreed that the translation of the Quran involves lots of difficulties and one of these difficulties is the translation of euphemism. Euphemism is a milder or vague word or phrase used to replace one that might seem too harsh or embarrassing in a certain context. Euphemism constitutes a great problem in translation. It is a great luck where the translator finds an
equivalent for the euphemistic expression. If there is no equivalent, the translator may resort to explication, paraphrasing and annotation to get across the meaning of the original. The difficulty of translating euphemisms in the Quran arises from the fact that the original meaning of the Quran depends on "the historical circumstances of Muhammad's (pbuh) life and early community in which it originated. Investigating that context usually requires a detailed knowledge of Hadith and Sirah, which are themselves vast and complex texts.

To serve the aims of the present study, the main data (verses) have been quoted from the Holy Quran. The attempt has been made to gather verses which contain clear euphemistic expressions. Al_Tabari’s explanation of these euphemistic expressions is compared with both the English translations of Zidan and Pickthall. The study clarifies which translation ignores euphemism and which does not. The study will also show who translates euphemistic expressions honestly and who sacrifices euphemisms at the expense of meaning.

Example 1:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

يولج الليل في النهار و يولج النهار في الليل. و سخر الشمس و القمر كل يجري لاجل مسمى ذلكم الله ربكم

له الملك و الذين تدعون من دونه ما يملكون من قطمير.

سورة فاطر، الآية 94

القطمير: القشرة الرقيقة على النواة

Zidan’s translation of the ayah:

God merges the night into the day and merges the day into the night, and He has subjected the sun and the moon, each one runs its course to an appointed term. This is God. Your Lord, to Him is the Dominion, and those you invoked other than Him, possess nothing in the least. Sura Fatir, verse 13.

Picktall’s translation of the ayah: He marketh the night to path into the day and He marketh the day to path into the night. He hath

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1 The Hadith is the of the sayings of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) in which these sayings and the conduct of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) constitute the Sunnah. The Hadith has come to supplement the Holy Quran as a source of the Islamic religious law.

2 AL-Sirah AL-Nabawiya narrates the life of the Prophet Mohammed(pbuh).
subdued the sun and moon to service. Each runneth unto an appointed term. Such is Allah, your Lord; His is the sovereignty; and those unto whom ye pray instead of Him own not so much as the white spot on a date-stone.

Commentary:

The meaning of expression ما يملكون من قطمير assures that those who will worship other than Allah will live in a complete poverty. Here the euphemism in the expression refers to "the white spot on a date-stone" which in itself is a symbol of poverty. What is meant by the ayah is poverty and the euphemism expressed is the white spot on a date-stone. In the ayah, there may be a substitution of a pleasant and an agreeable term (قطمير: the white spot on a date-stone) for an offensive one (فقر: poverty).

Example 2:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم:

واذ قال ابراهيم رب اجعل هذا البلد امنآ و ارزق اهله من الثمرات من امن منهم بالله و اليوم الاخر قال و من كفر فامتعه قليلآ ثم اضطره الى عذاب النار و بئس المصير. سورة البقرة الاية ١٢٦

Zidan's translation of the verse:

And when Abraham prayed: my Lord! make this a region of security and bestow upon its people fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day. He answered: As for him who disbelieveth, I shall leave him in contentment or a while then I shall compel him to the doom of fire-a hapless journey's end!

Pickthall's translation of the ayah:

And when Abraham prayed: my Lord! make this a region of security and bestow upon its people fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day. He answered: As for him who disbelieveth, I shall leave him in contentment or a while then I shall compel him to the doom of fire-a hapless journey's end!

Commentary:

The euphemistic expression المصير refers to the hell to which the disbelievers will be driven. Our glorious God may choose the euphemistic expression المصير instead of hell because hell is an offensive and troubling word. So, we have a euphemistic expression referring to it.

In translating the verse into English Zidan conveys the euphemism المصير (المصير) but ignores the real intended meaning which is hell. Evil destination is more pleasant than hell. It is taken for granted that the
one who is not from the culture of Islam will not understand the
degree of torment which the disbelievers will have. Whereas in
pickthall's translation, he conveys the euphemistic expression
(a hapless journey's end) but ignores the intended meaning (hell). He
sacrifices the meaning at the expense of the euphemistic expression.
"A hapless journey's end" may refer to the end of a journey. For
instance, around the moon or in resort.

Example 3:

Zidan's translation of the verse:
Why do the scholars and the Rabbis not forbid them from uttering
sin and from devouring the unlawful? Evil is their contriving.
Sura: Al-Maidah surah, verse 63
Pickthall's translation of verse:
Why do not the rabbis and the priests forbid their evil speaking and
their devouring of illicit gain? Verily evil is their handiwork.

Commentary:
The euphemistic expression may be used as Tabari explains to
refer to the bribery (which means eating things forbidden) the Rabbis
and the doctors of Law take for ruling without regarding the laws of
the Qur'an. Here, the meaning of the euphemistic expression is
bribery.
Both Zidan and Pickthall ignore the euphemistic expression which is
used to reduce the severe meaning of bribery and mentioned only the
meaning (the bribe which means eating things forbidden). To solve
this problem they can / may use the euphemism plus a paraphrase or
an annotation.

Example 4:

Zidan's translation of the ayah:
They say. "Our lord why have you prescribed fighting for us, if only
you had given us a brief respite? Say. "The pleasures of this worldly
life are trifling, and the life of the Hereafter is much better for those who fear God, and you shall not be wronged in the least.

Pickthall's translation of the verse:
And say: Our Lord? Why hast thou ordained fighting for us? if only thou wouldst give us respite yet a while? Say (unto them, O Muhammad): the comfort of this world is scant; the Hereafter will be better for him who wardeth off (evil); and ye will not be wronged the down upon a date-stone.

Commentary:
Tabari explains that فتيل is the specks of a date-stone. This is a euphemistic expression which means the least (a very small). Zidan, in translating the ayah, mentions only the meaning ignoring the euphemism. On the other hand, Pickthall mentions the euphemistic expression ignoring the intended meaning.

Conclusion:
Translators of Quranic texts involving euphemistic expressions have proved failure to convey the same senses found in the original. This failure can be attributed to the absence of cultural equivalents in this linguistic area between the ST and the TT. Accordingly, this has verified the hypothesis.

References: