Translating the Qur'an into English: Target Readers' Expectations
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Abstract
Although the overwhelming majority of Muslims are non-Arabic speakers and depend on translations of the Qur'an to access the meaning of the text in their respective languages, their preferences and expectations have not been systematically surveyed. This research, the first of its kind in the area of Qur'an translation, is based on a survey which I have designed and conducted in order to establish what readers of Qur'an translations into English prefer in terms of layout, translation strategies, and the translators' backgrounds, amongst other things. The survey also gives the respondents the opportunity to offer their recommendations for future Qur'an translations.
Keywords: Qur'an Translation, Target Readers' expectations, Translation Universals

1. Introduction

The translation of the Qur'an is crucial for Muslims since a minority of all Muslims are Arabs (around 400 million), and therefore the majority of Muslims access the meanings of the Qur'an through translation. It is also important for non-Muslims since there is a growing interest in Islam and consequently in the Qur'an in the wider population. The Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be the literal word of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad gradually between 610 and 632 CE. The revelation was committed to memory by believers and also written down on objects such as stones and camels' shoulder blades. Based on these resources, a full copy was compiled immediately after the Prophet's death in 632 CE and has been preserved unchanged ever since.

Muslim scholars unanimously agree that any translation of the Qur'an can only have an explanatory and descriptive function and cannot be considered a substitute for the Qur'an itself. The primary reason for this stance from an Islamic perspective is that the word of Allah, the Qur'an, cannot be reproduced by the word of man, Qur'an translation. This is why translations often explicitly state that they are not translations of the Qur'an (see Elimam 2014, 2013 and 2009) but of its meanings. To signal this, translations use words like 'message', as in Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* (1980), 'meaning', as in A.Y. Ali's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (1934-7), or both 'meaning' and 'interpretation', as in Hilali Khan's *Interpretation of the Meaning of The Noble Qur'an* (1977). However, scholars also agree that translating the Qur'an into other languages is imperative for delivering the message of Islam to other peoples and nations (For information about the available translations for the Qur'an, see Kidwai 2007).

In recognition of the importance of identifying the expectations of non-Arabic speaking readers of Qur'an translations, some of the prefaces of these translations explain the use of certain translation strategies and layouts by saying that the translators are attempting to make it more convenient for readers to read this particular translation. However, as far as I am aware, no systematic study of readers' expectations or preferences in connection with English translations of the Qur'an exists. Therefore, this article aims to highlight some of the preferences and expectations of non-Arabic-speaking readers of English translations of the Qur'an, based on results obtained from their answers to, and suggestions in, a questionnaire designed for this particular purpose.

2. Literature Review

Translation studies literature has always recognised the importance of taking target readers' expectations into consideration for the success of a translation. Newmark (1988/2003: 55) proposes three typical reader-types, namely: "(a) the expert (in the SL text culture and/or the subject of discourse); (b) the educated layman; (c) the ignoramus – in the culture and/or the topic". He further argues that the translator must consider whether he or she is translating for the same or a different type of TL readership, "perhaps with less knowledge of the topic or the culture, or a lower standard of linguistic education" (Newmark 1988/2003: 15). Furthermore, Newmark considers that "the core of the vocative function of language is the readership, the addressee" (1988/2003: 41). Newmark explains that he uses the term 'vocative' in the sense of "'calling upon ' the readership to act, think or feel, in fact to 'react' in the way intended by the text"[i] (1988/2003: 41). He adds that "[t]exts must be written in a language that is immediately comprehensible to the readership" (1988/2003: 41-2). Newmark's argument is of particular importance in the context of translating the Qur'an since, as is clear from the discussion below, the readers are anything but homogenous in terms of their backgrounds and expectations.

Along the same lines, Jones stresses that "awareness of translation purpose and *users*" is essential (2011: 147, my emphasis), arguing that "[r]eader communities … are also potentially heterogeneous" (2011: 193). One wonders whether translators are postulating an "ideal reader" (Fillmore 1981, cited in Blum-Kulka 2000/2002: 296) and how true this assumption is in relation to the English translations of the Qur'an. Conceding the importance of target readers' expectations, Ruokonen describes "contemporary readers' expectations as one of the factors that seem likely to exert a major influence on the translation process" (2011: 74). She not only stress the influence of target readers' expectations on the translation process but of the *comtemporary* readership in particular. This implies that these expecations can change with time, warranting new translations responding to new expectations.

Similalry, Venuti argues that the "expectations and knowledge" of the target audience of the translation must be taken into consideration (1998: 16). In a similar vein, Evers et al (2010: 154-5) elaborate that translations which have specific audiences

> depend on a number of considerations and decisions concerning both the form and the content of the source text and their implications on translation choices that may satisfy/respect their audience's reading repertoire. Therefore, these choices and considerations should take into account the audience in order to adapt the source text and succeed in *retextualizating* (Costa 1992) it into the linguistic universe of its intended readers.

The issue of form and content is significant. The effect of this relationship on the meaning of the Qur'an in particular has been the subject of many studies, most of which conclude that it is impossible to reproduce both at the same time in a translation. Studies show how the form and content of *ayah*s are so intertwined that splitting them apart in translation inevitably leads to a loss of meaning (e.g. Abdul-Raof 2007, 2001, Elimam 2013, 2009).

Of particular relevance to this discussion are Chesterman's three types of 'process' or 'professional' norms (1997: 76-70). His 'accountability norm' describes how translators are expected to meet 'demands of loyalty' to the source text writer, to the commissioner of the translation, *to target readers*, and to themselves in an 'appropriate way'. Chesterman's definition of loyalty is broader than Nord's ("loyalty to the author" and "fidelity to the text, 2011: 38), and Elimam's ("attitude, commitment, or preference to, or prioritising a particular

translation strategy/approach on the part of the translator", 2014: 131). One cannot envisage, however, how a translator would fulfil 'demands of loyalty' to readers without establishing these demands first. Therefore, identifying the target readers' knowledge of the Qur'an is essential in deciding whether or not to include, for example, footnotes or in-text glosses, and whether providing introductions to *Surah*s (roughly translated, 'chapters'), or parts thereof, is necessary. In this respect, Jones (2011: 193) is of the opinion that readers' identities, experiences and knowledge schemata can vary and therefore their need for support information and their reactions to what they read can also vary. In the same vein, Ruokonen (2011: 74) stresses that target readers' expectations "may exert a normative infleunce on translators' solutions". She argues that the findings of her study "suggest that further research is needed on conflicts between expectations and reality, as well as on translations brought out by different publishers" (2011: 73). This is particularly true in the case of the Qur'an, with around 40 complete translations into English alone, each different from the others. Echoing the same proposition, and perhaps flagging up the importance of this questionnaire, Evers et al (2010: 157) state that "there must be 'fidelity towards the final readers' expectations, necessities and abilities' (Aubert, 1993: 75). Simply put, fidelity is defined as an attempt to fulfill the expectations, needs and reading skills the translator assumes the audience to have."

Some translators of the Qur'an claim that their choices were made in light of target readers' expectations. However, none of them reports having carried out a systematic review of these expectations. At best, some report having checked their translations with some readers. Translators may also confuse reviews, usually written by educated or, rather, professional readers, with the expectations of the actual readers who are a mix of the types of readers discussed above. For example, Abdel Haleem (2005) states that he has had an earlier draft of his translation proofread by his students of Arabic and Islamic studies at SOAS. This is interesting because he seems to have assumed that all potential readers of his translation would have the same motivations, expectations and background knowledge that his group of students had. In contrast, Venuti (2000/2002: 491) concedes that "[t]he translation is made to perform different functions, academic or religious, cultural or political, commercial or municipal. Any community that arises around a translation is far from homogenous in language, identity, or social position." This quote implies that readers' communities are heterogeneous in their backgrounds and one can assume their expectations are similarly different from each other and therefore worth identifying.

Evers et al (2010: 159) emphasise that a writer or speaker must have authentic concern over "the 'whom-to' and 'what-for' of their textual actions", arguing that "for a text to be made socially valid, its producer has to take into account the expectations and limitations that rule its reception." In fact it can be argued that the target audience's knowledge, limitations and expectations are "imperative" (Evers et al 2010: 157). This is because the success or failure of a translation largely depends on the readers' reception of it which in turn depends on whether or not it fulfils their expectations. Along these lines, Maher argues that "[i]n different cultures, a particular genre might carry different expectations" (2011: 13). An English translation of the Qur'an is likely to be read by readers from different parts of the English-speaking world and even beyond, i.e. readers from different cultures. In addition, Qur'an translations can be considered a genre in their own right, not least because readers, especially Muslim readers, approach such a translation expecting it to be a direct translation of, literally, the words of Allah, as some of the comments in the questionnaires show. One can therefore argue that different contexts and communicative goals may require different translation methods.

Baker (1996: 176-7) explains that the universal features of translated texts include: simplification (translators subconsciously simplify the language or message or both), explicitation (translated texts tend to spell things out, a practice that includes the addition of background information), normalisation (the tendency to conform to patterns which are typical of the target language), and levelling out (translated texts tend to gravitate around the centre of any continuum rather than move towards the fringes) (see also Chesterman 2011). To my mind all four universals relate to the target readers and their expectations: if a target text is ambiguous, or employs a complex, abnormal/unnatural language, or a markedly different style, readers may not find it appealing. As Baker (1996: 177) points out, a translated text has to "respond to the *needs* of its prospective readers and the context in which it will ultimately function" (my emphasis). This is precisely why this research was carried out: to establish those needs for the guidance of future translators of the Qur'an.

3. Methodology

The data to be analysed in this article are drawn from a questionnaire which I have specially designed to identify what non-Arabic speaking Muslims and non-Muslims expect to see in translations of the Qur'an into English. The questionnaire consists of an introductory section devoted to personal information about the respondents, including their age, gender, level of education and religion. The respondents' background (especially gender and religion) will only be discussed when it seems to polarise their responses. This is followed by three main sections, consisting of several questions each. Section I consists of 17 statements with 3 possible responses each. Section II consists of 9 statements, where the respondent has to tick either 'yes' or 'no'. These questions elaborate on issues covered in the questions in section I. Section III consists of 6 open-ended questions, offering the respondents the chance to give elaborate answers. All the questions relate to issues that are mentioned by translators, either in their respective prefaces or in interviews, as features which distinguish their respective translations of the Qur'an from other translations (for more information on the forty or so available English translations of the Qur'an, see Kidwai 2007 and for ten of the most common translations see Elimam 2013). I built a website for the questionnaire, allowing the respondents to answer the questionnaire either fully or partially. In addition to the survey website, I printed off copies of the questionnaire and visited several mosques in the UK and asked non-Arabic speaking, English native speakers who happened to be at the mosque to fill them out. I explained what the questionnaire would be used for. I also emailed the questionnaire to several non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim native speakers of English in the UK and abroad. I entered all answers provided on the hard copies onto the website of the questionnaire myself. In line with the aim of the article, namely to identify the expectations and preferences of readers of Qur'an translations into English, the quantitative approach of data analysis is used. In addition, considering that percentages of readers' responses to questions would benefit from contextualisation of results, qualitative discussion of responses is also provided. Finally, considering that some of the questionnaires were only partially filed out, percentages are calculated based on the total number of responses to each individual question rather than the total number of respondents (77) to the questionnaire.

4. Results

77 people aged between 16 and 62 partially or fully completed the survey. Of those 69.9% were female and 30.1% male. 6 respondents (7.79%) had not attended university, as opposed to 66 respondents (85.71%) who had, while 5 respondents (6.49%) did not state their level of education. While 5 (6.49%) respondents did not state their religion, 72 did: 88.3% were Muslim and 5.19% non-Muslim.

4.1 Section I

This section consists of 17 questions. Questions 1 to 5 cover issues relating to the layout of the translation itself, questions 6 to 10 deal with issues relating to translation strategies, questions 11 to 14 deal with issues relating to the translator himself or herself, and questions 15 to 17 focus on the way readers receive the translation.

4.1.1 Layout of the Translation

Responses to the first question relating to their preference for either monolingual or bilingual editions were as follows: a large majority of 89.47% preferred editions offering both Arabic and English, 5.26% preferred versions offering English only and 5.26% thought it did not matter. This is an interesting result since some of the recent versions of Hilali and Khan's translation are monolingual because, according to the publishers, many religious scholars and readers stress the need for an "edition without Arabic verses of the Qur'an" (Hilali and Khan 1998: 7), since some non-Muslim readers "are not aware of the manners of its upkeep and proper respect" (ibid).[ii]

In the case of a bilingual text, 57.1% of the respondents to question 2 preferred to see the Arabic *ayah*s and their English translation in two corresponding columns, potentially for ease of reference, 20.8% preferred to see them on alternate lines and 22.1% thought it did not matter. 72 respondents answered the next question (number 3) on the layout of the translations, with 46.5% preferring editions providing *ayah*s individually, one after the other, 29.6% preferring editions presenting the translation in paragraphs, and 23.9% preferring a continuous format like that of the Qur'an.

According to these results, Abdel Haleem's, Arberry's, Quli's, and Bewley and Bewley's translations are less favoured than Hilali and Khan's, and other similar translations[iii]. Abdel Haleem's translation divides the undivided, continuous Qur'anic text into paragraphs: "[i]n order to clarify the meaning and structure of thoughts and to meet the expectation of modern readers" (2005: xxxiv, see also Abdel Haleem 2008a/b). Abdel Haleem seems to assume an "ideal reader", which in his case are his own students of Arabic and Islamic studies who revised the translation several times before it was published (2005: xxxvi). In other words, his translation seems, more or less, to fulfil the expectations of only one of the groups identified above. Arberry opts for the grouping of *ayahs* into paragraphs as an attempt to reproduce their respective rhythm (1955/1998: x), a choice which does not fulfil Arberry's ultimate aim, not least because the end sound of the *ayah*s (*faasilah* in Arabic) does not follow this pattern of 5 *ayah*s ending in the same sound. Qara'i adopts a phrasal approach (in which the phrase, rather than the *ayah*, is the unit of meaning), which, he argues, makes for easy reading (2004: xvii). Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley use a verse-like format "to pass on to the reader at least a taste of this essential attribute of the original text" (2005: iv).

In relation to their preferred size of edition (question 4), 46% thought it did not matter, 31.6% preferred pocket-size editions, and 22.4% preferred larger size editions. One thing to be noted here is how pleased the second group was with the available pocket-size editions, since all the available ones seemed to be too big. In response to question 5, almost two-thirds of the respondents (65.3%) preferred editions arranged from right to left like the Qur'an, while 14.7% preferred editions arranged from left to right and 20% did not mind. Most available translations are arranged from left to right in accordance with English norms.

4.1.2 Translation Strategies

Whether they preferred the Qur'anic terms transliterated or translated (question 6), more than half the respondents (57.8%) preferred them transliterated, probably because they had experienced the difficulty of finding equivalent terms in English, and probably also because most Muslims know the meaning of these terms and learn them in Arabic regardless of their own languages, 23.9% preferred them translated, and 18.3% of the respondents were neutral. These results contradict the criticism levelled by some reviewers against translations which transliterate such terms, for example those of Bewley and Bewley[iv] and Hilali and Khan.

71 respondents answered question 7 on whether they preferred editions that provide explanations of difficult words in brackets within the translation, or the translation of the text of the Qur'an only. The results were 74.6% and 18.3% (13 respondents, 5 females and 8 males both Muslim and non-Muslim, which is interesting, considering the lower number of male respondents), while the remaining 7.1% (5 respondents, who were all Muslim) thought it did not matter. This contradicts the frequent criticism of Hilali and Khan's translation for being too elaborate and makes Abdel Haleem's, and similar translations, a second choice for readers because the latter rarely offers additional explanations within the text of the translation. This response also emphasises the readers' desire to know as much relevant information as possible, as opposed to having only the text of the Qur'an in front of them. This probably explains why a translation like Arberry's, which does not offer footnotes or in-text glosses, is not popular amongst Muslims, although it keeps close to the original text.[v]

In response to question 8, on editions providing introductions to *surah*s of the Qur'an: a majority of 70.7% preferred translations which provided an introduction to each *surah*, 17.3% wanted an introduction to each section of each *surah* and 12% did not require an introduction at all, as is the case in the Qur'an itself. This result is at odds with Bewley and Bewley's translation which does not offer any introduction to *surah*s or sections thereof. It also implies that a considerable percentage of readers are eager to have more information even if this means inserting introductions within the translation of *surah*s. Just over two-thirds (66.2%) of the responses to question 9 found footnotes and bracketed information helpful in understanding the translation, 23.9% found them distracting and 9.9% were not sure whether they were helpful or distracting. This is also interesting, since one academic criticism of Hilali and Khan's translation has been the amount of bracketed information it features.

Where more than one explanation of an *ayah* is available (question 10), a vast majority, 82.2%, preferred a translation offering all meanings, while 16.4% preferred versions offering only one meaning and 1.4% (only 1 Muslim male out of 73 responses) did not have a preference. This is contrary to what most translators prefer to do, that is, to choose only one meaning, effectively reducing the richness of the *ayah*s.

4.1.3 The Translator

Of 70 responses to question 11 about the linguistic competency of the translator(s), 25.7% preferred a translation carried out by a native speaker of English, 28.6% by a native speaker of Arabic, while 45.7% did not mind, implying that translations, generally speaking, read well, regardless of the language of the translator. In recognition of a translator's possible influence on the output (question 12), a large majority, 84%, (63 respondents who were all Muslim with the exception of 1 non-Muslim female) preferred a translation carried out by a Muslim, while 1.3% (1 respondent only, who is a non-Muslim female) preferred a translation carried out by a non-Muslim and 14.7% (11 respondents, all female, including 3 non-Muslims) did not think the religion of the translator mattered. With this in mind, one can understand why some translations, like those by Arberry, Dawood and Sale, are not popular with Muslims.

In response to question 13, either recognising the complexity of the translator's job or the difficulty of translating the Qur'an, 67.1% gave preference to a translation carried out by a team of translators, while 8.2% preferred an individual translator and 24.7% did not consider it important. It is worth mentioning here that of around sixty complete translations of the Qur'an into English, the vast majority are produced by individual translators. In relation to the gender of the translator (question 14), a large majority of 82.2% did not consider it important, while 13.7% (10 respondents, 9 Muslim males and females and 1 female who did not specify her religion[vi]) preferred a male translator and a minority of 4.1% (3 female respondents, 2 Muslims and 1 non-Muslim[vii]) preferred a female translator. It is worth mentioning here that there are translations of the Qur'an by male translators only (e.g. Abdel Haleem, Quli, A. Y. Ali), female translators only (e.g. Aminah Assami) and single or mixed sex teams (Hilali and Khan and Bewley and Bewley, respectively).

4.1.4 Readers' Reception of the Translation

The following question (number 15) on the meaning communicated through the translation divides the sample: more than half (51.3%) took it to be the translator's understanding of the Qur'an, which may be right or wrong, 42.1% took it to be exactly the meaning expressed in the Qur'an, while 6.6% did not know. This could be because it is not common knowledge beyond the field of translation studies that any given text and its translation are not 'equal'. More than three-quarters (76.7%) of responses to question number (16) considered that the translation involved some interpretation on the part of the translator while 23.3% considered the translation to be a word for word rendering of the Qur'an. Although not all readers would necessarily know about translation-relevant issues, including the difficulty of finding equivalent lexis between languages as different as Arabic and English, this result is puzzling since 42.1% of the respondents to question 15 think that the translation reproduces the exact meaning of the Qur'an.

Three quarters (74.3%) of respondents to question (17) thought they were only engaged with the meaning of the Qur'an while reading its translation, 18.9% thought they were reading the Qur'an itself, and 6.8% did not know. This is surprising for two reasons. First, these figures do not tally with the answers to question 15. Secondly, the unanimous scholarly opinion is that translations are not a substitute for the Qur'an but a medium of understanding for those who cannot access the Arabic text. Since the last two figures are comprised of Muslim and non-Muslim, university and non-university graduate respondents, a few points are in order here. First, one has to remember that several respondents are not Muslim and may not necessarily abide by this scholarly opinion. Second, some respondents do not probably know enough about the relationship between a translation of the Qur'an and the original text. Finally, this makes

me wonder whether some respondents understood the question to ask whether they felt that the meaning of the translation is the same as the meaning of the Qur'an.

4.2 Section II

The second part of the questionnaire required respondents to select either 'yes' or 'no' in response to 9 statements. The first three statements (18 to 20) address the contents of introductions, footnotes and prefaces to translations. Regarding whether the translation should be provided with an introduction discussing issues including the history of the Qur'an and its compilation, the Prophet Muhammad and Islam, a majority of 82.6% agreed and 17.4% disagreed. The vast majority (91.2%) preferred a translation providing footnotes on the occasion of revelation of *ayah*s, the linguistic construction of *ayah*s, etc, while 8.8% did not. This also contradicts translators who stress the importance of avoiding the use of footnotes, which in their view detract from the readers' concentration on the text of the translation itself. For example, in Abdel Haleem's translation, footnotes are kept to a minimum, and are only supplied when "absolutely necessary to clarify meaning and context" (Abdel Haleem 2005: xxxv). While a majority of 84.8% agreed that it is important that the translation come with a preface describing the translator's choices and saying something about the translator, 15.2% disagreed. This is not surprising since 91.3% of the respondents are university graduates and probably understand that there are different translation styles with potential influence on the overall product.

The next three questions (21 to 23) deal with issues relating to the translator's religious orientation. A majority of 87.5% agreed that translators of the Qur'an expressed their own opinions in the translation, while 12.5% disagreed. This is surprising because it contradicts respondents' responses to question 17, where 18.9% thought they were reading the Qur'an and 6.8% did not know whether or not they were reading the Qur'an, which implies that they were unaware of the translators' influence on the outcome.

An overwhelming majority of 94.8% thought that translators' religious orientations influenced the translation, while 5.2% (3 respondents) disagreed (2 of them, a male and a female, both Muslim, contradict themselves by having agreed that translators of the Qur'an express their own opinions in the translation in question 21). Unsurprisingly, almost two-thirds of the respondents (63.9%) would not read a translation carried out by someone from a different religious orientation (e.g. *shi'i, sufi*) while the rest (36.1%) would. This last percentage (i.e. 36.1%) is also surprising, considering that it indicates that respondents did have some awareness of the possible influence of the translator on the meaning communicated through their work and also that some of them (16 readers[viii]) were willing to read their translations.

The next three questions of this section (24 to 26) deal with the influence of translation reviews on readers. These questions aim to identify whether a translation, like that of Abdel Haleem, for example, is likely to become more popular now that he has been awarded an OBE, or whether Hilali and Khan's is likely to lose its hold on the market because it has been criticised by some as being too elaborate. More than half of the respondents (53.6%) had not read reviews of the translation(s) they already have, while 46.4% had. About two thirds (67.2%) read reviews about the translation(s) they were planning to buy, while 32.8% did not. A considerable majority of 84.1% agreed that reading reviews of translations affected the way they felt about them, while 15.9% disagreed.

One has to consider here how accessible academic reviews of translations of the Qur'an are. Of all the reviews I have read for this and other research on the translation of the Qur'an,

only a handful were published in newspapers that non-academics normally have access to, e.g. Abdel Haleem (2008a, 2004a, 2004b), and the vast majority are only accessible via academic journals. With this in mind, it is difficult to believe that these respondents are referring to academic reviews. They may instead be referring to reviews available on publishers' websites, which are usually posted by readers of these translations, or published in newspapers, however scarce such reviews are.

4.3 Section III

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions (27 to 32). 60 respondents answered the first of these questions that asked them to state the name of the translation(s) they owned: 27 of them had only one translation while 33 had more than one (including 7 respondents who did not know the names of the translations they had). The most popular translation was Hilali and Khan's/*Saheeh International*,[ix] which was owned by 33, either individually or in combination with another. This was followed by A. Y. Ali's, which was owned by 25 respondents, Pickthall's, owned by 18 respondents, Abdul Haleem's, owned by 3 and Mohar Ali, owned by 2, while Ahmed Ali's, M. Asad's, L. Bakhtiar's, M. Bucaille's (a French translation), Dawood's, Dyrabadi's, M. Fakhry's, M. Khan's, Faruk Malik's, Mawdudi's, Sale's, Anis Shakir's and M. Shaker's were owned by one respondent each.

Question 28 on which translation they enjoy the most, was answered by 51 respondents (and some of them had chosen more than 1 translation): 12 respondents either did not have a favourite translation or misunderstood the question and wrote names of translations of Islamic books instead (which explains why 51 answered this question although, according to the previous question, only 33 had more than one translation);17 respondents preferred Hilali and Khan's/*Saheeh International*; 8 considered A. Y. Ali's their favourite (one of them in combination with another); 5 preferred Pickthall's (2 of them in combination with other favourites); Abdel Haleem's was a favourite of 4 respondents (2 as their only favourite and the other 2 in addition to another translation), while Arberry's, Dyrabadi's and Sale's were named by 1 respondent each.

Question 29 on which translation the respondent would like to own, was answered by 39 respondents, of whom 20 did not know which one to choose and 4 wrote names of *Tafsir* (commentary or interpretation of the Qur'an) books instead. Whether this was by mistake or because they consider a translation a form of *Tafsir* is worth investigating. Of the remaining 25 who answer the question correctly, Hilali and Khan's/ *Saheeh International* came first, with 7 choices, followed by A. Y. Ali's with 3 choices and Abdel Haleem's with 2, while Ahmed Ali's, Arberry's and Pickthall's were favoured by one respondent each.

It is not surprising to see Hilali and Khan's translation as first favourite in the three previous questions. This is in line with what most respondents put down as their preferences in the first two parts of the questionnaire for a translation which offers them more than word for word rendering of the Holy text (see questions 7, 8 and 9 above). However, what is surprising to note in this respect is that, looking at the translations owned or considered their favourite by all 4 non-Muslim respondents, who are all university educated, one can see they are more exposed to translation carried out by non-Muslims rather than by Muslims: one has Sale's (a very negative translation[x]) and Pickthall's (a Muslim) but prefers Sale's, another has Dawood's (a Jew) and Ahmed Ali's (a Muslim) but prefers Arberry's (an orientalist), the third has Zafrullah Khan's (a member of the religious cult Ahmadiyya; see further Elimam 2013: 108-11), and one was not sure which one she owned and did not have a favourite. It is worth

investigating why these translations rather than others are more available to non-Muslim readers.

Question 30, on which translation the respondent would recommend for a Muslim, was answered by 47 respondents. 7 respondents seem to have misunderstood the question and named Islamic books, while 8 respondents did not know which to recommend, including 1 respondent who would recommend a translation which offered 'sufficient clarification for frequently misunderstood *ayah*s and…translates all the terminology'. The translations most frequently recommended were Hilali and Khan's/*Saheeh International* with 15 choices, followed by A. Y. Ali's, chosen by 11 respondents, Pickthall's, 4, and Abdel Haleem's, 2, while Mohar Ali's, Arberry's, Dawood's, Dyrabadi's and Faruk Malik's were recommended by one respondent each, either independently or in addition to another translation.

Question 31, on which translation the respondents would recommend for a non-Muslim, was answered by 50 respondents. While 12 could not name a translation, several named more than 1, and 3 named commentaries on the Qur'an. 13 recommended A. Y. Ali's, 12, Hilali and Khan's/*Saheeh International*, 7, Pickthall's, 5, Abdel Haleem's, and 2, Asad's (one of them noted 'despite issues with his background'[xi]), while Arberry's, Dawood's and Dyrabadi's were recommended by one person each.

The results of the previous two questions are interesting. Whilst the majority of respondents would recommend Hilali and Khan's/*Saheeh International* to a Muslim, they would recommend A. Y. Ali, which is not as explanatory as the previous two, to a non-Muslim. The respondents seem to be aware that Muslim and non-Muslim readers have different preferences with regards to the amount of meanings and/or relevant information they want to see communicated in the translation. This seems to tie in with some of the results above where respondents are clearly divided according to their religion.

Since some responses to the final open-ended question (number 32) on whether there was anything they wanted to pass on to translators of the Qur'an were repetitions of earlier choices, I reproduce the most important suggestions put forward by the respondents below.

(1)   Some emphasised that the translator should have a thorough knowledge of Islam. Some went as far as recommending "a translation committee, whose members are known, to provide all the possible interpretations of the verses." Another advised the translators to render the exact meaning of the *ayah*s and provide all possible explanations. One respondent argued that "when an Arabic word has several complex meanings, a footnote on these meanings would allow the reader to see the depth of the *ayah*." One respondent wrote: "make clear certain limitations between Arabic and English… because one word in Arabic can have many different meanings in other languages."

(2)   Respondents recommended that the translator should "avoid paraphrase" and, according to three respondents, render the text exactly, leaving extra information out of the main body. However, at least five respondents advised the translator to reproduce the classical meaning of the original *ayah*s "as it was understood by the prophetic generation and those after them". In contrast, two respondents advised the translator to give detail when needed and "not keep the reader guessing; assume they do not know anything about the verse."

(3)   Several recommendations stressed the importance of using simple modern English and some warned that "following the word order of the Arabic too closely makes for awkward reading."

(4)   Respondents described the layout of the page as "very important; it makes it easier to read if there are bullet points or numbers." Two respondents found the Arabic font "important,"

since some of the current editions use too small a font which makes it difficult to read. Three respondents focused on the font of the translation itself, preferring larger fonts.

(5)   Several respondents found the excessive use of brackets distracting, but commented that "without them a lot of the meaning will be lost," and suggested a compromise, generally preferring the use of footnotes, in which case it would be up to the reader to decide whether to read them or not. It is worth noting that one respondent did not recommend the use of footnotes at all.

(6)   One respondent stated that a translator should "try to get some of the poetry insofar as it's bound up with the meaning, but not try and reproduce style/sound/rhythm at the expense of content."

(7)   One respondent wanted the translator "to provide sufficient explanation of the translation technique."

(8)   Several respondents commended the questionnaire itself, stating that it was an eye-opener for them: "the questionnaire has highlighted a lot of significant points which at times leave a question mark in a person's mind.

5. Limitations of this Research

The number of respondents (77) is limited. Therefore one cannot be sure whether more responses could have changed the overall results of the questionnaire considerably. Although the research targeted Muslims and non-Muslims, the vast majority of the respondents are Muslims, and it remains to be established whether the results might have been different had more non-Muslims taken part. Based on the responses to question 31, it seems that respondents believe that non-Muslim readers have different requirements, e.g. less explanation and more focus on the text of the Qur'an only. Thirdly, I had only Muslim and non-Muslim native speakers of English in mind when I designed the questionnaire, but two respondents, whose choices are part of these results, are native speakers of Chinese, and I do not know whether they are also native speakers of English. Finally, considering that most of the respondents were British, one wonders whether the results would have changed had more Americans or Australians, for example, participated in it.

6. Conclusion

The investigation reported here suggests that readers of English translations of the Qur'an are non-homogenous in the sense that only in a few cases was there a clear majority in favour of one option over the other(s), while in most cases all possible options were selected and in open-ended questions several and sometimes contradictory preferences were expressed. This ties in with what the relevant literature states about readers of translations in general.

Although the imbalance of the sample along the axis of gender, religion and education, prevented a nuanced analysis of preferences along these lines, a closer look reveals that responses to most questions could not be categorised around any of these themes and that the sample was very non-homogenous notwithstanding these variables. Probably a much larger sample of respondents could have produced more discernible attitudes that could have been captured by this article.

It seems from this preliminary study that there is a wide range of expectations by readers of Qur'an translations, so that none of the English translations available tick all boxes for all readers. Certainly some translations appeal to a group of readers, but expectations are so varied that they are sometimes contradictory. For example, while most respondents find footnotes and bracketed information helpful, some do not. Some of the recommendations reveal that readers are not fully aware of what the available translations of the Qur'an have to offer. They request, for example, an edition offering transliteration of the whole text, which is already available (e.g. M. Asad and Mohar Ali). More importantly, it also seems that many of the assumptions that translators of the Qur'an have made and continue to make about what readers prefer are not valid. For example, several translators believe that bracketed information interrupts the flow of the text, while most respondents find them helpful in elucidating the meaning of the *ayah*s. The number of comments respondents make in the third part of the questionnaire on the nature of the translation process itself suggests little awareness on the part of readers of the complexity of the issues, e.g. difficulty of finding equivalent terms, and having to choose between preserving meaning or form.

I had only hoped to shed light on the importance of taking into account preferences of the target readers of the English translations of the Qur'an, by identifying these needs and making them available to future translators of the Qur'an. However, the respondents' comments also make it clear that another achievement of the survey was that it managed to trigger in the respondents' minds a process of enquiry into the nature of the translation process itself.

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[i] This language function has been given many other names, including 'conative' (denoting effort), 'instrumental' and 'operative' and 'pragmatic'.

[ii] Ahamed, for example, states in his foreword the correct procedures involved in treating a copy of the Qur'an with respect as follows: "do not read these books (i.e. the Qur'an) in bathrooms or even place them on the floor, or handle them unless …in a state of personal cleanliness" (Ahamed 2003: iii).

[iii] Although Quli's adopts this column format it is not popular probably because they it is a Shi'i translation and, according to the results of question 23, most respondents would not read a translation carried out by a translator from another religious orientation. It is worth mentioning here that around 5 % of Muslims are Shi'as whilst the rest are mainstream Sunni Muslims.

[iv] Bewley and Bewley argue that non-Arabic speaking Muslims have assimilated Qur'anic terms into their languages because their equivalents in other languages "have become so imbued with a meaning other than that intended by the original Arabic" (2005: iv). However, in *Al-Ahram Weekly's* Book Supplement, Denys Johnson-Davies (2002) finds "disturbing" the use of the Arabic words rather than their respective translation since consulting the glossary to establish the meaning of these terms can be cumbersome; he gives the following example: "We gave him his reward in the *dunya* and in the *akhira* he will be among the *salihun*," [roughly "Present life," "Hereafter" and "the righteous," respectively].

[v] Bausani (1957: 79) quotes critics of Arberry's translation (which draws on the text of the Qur'an only) who describe it as a "slavish faithfulness to the letter…[which] has in general excluded any corresponding reflection of the spirit." In addition, the hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) are used to explain and complement the Qur'an, and separating them from each other, as Arberry did,

may not lead to the correct interpretation/translation. For example, (وَهُوَ يُجِيرُ وَلا يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ) (Qur'an, 23: 88), is rendered by Arberry as "protecting and Himself unprotected" (Arberry, 1998: 349) which, Burton argues, is not only incorrect but meaningless (1969: 388). Adel Haleem translates this phrase as "Who protects, while there is no protection against Him" (2005: 218).

[vi] Their preferences for a male translator prompted me to look at the answers they provided to the open-ended questions on which translation(s) they have and which they would recommend to others. Based on their answers, these 10 respondents are divided as follows:

- 3 respondents (female, 2 Muslim and 1 who does not state her religion) do not answer the questions about which translations they have or which they would recommend for other readers,
- 1 (female) respondent does not name the translation she has and would recommend "any" to other readers,
- 1 (male) respondent has "several translations" and would recommend two by a male translator (Y. Ali and Pickthall). Without more information about the translations he owns, and whether they are by male of female translators, it is difficult to figure out why he prefers a male translator,
- 2 (1 male and 1 female) respondents have several translations by males and females, but would only recommend a translation carried out by a male (Y.Ali, Hilali and Khan and Abdel Haleem), and 1(male) respondent has a translation by a female but would recommend 2 by male translators, which probably implies all 3 respondents may not be happy about some aspects of translations carried out by female translators,
- 2 (males) have several by male translators, and would recommend 2 translations carried out by males, which makes one wonder why they would prefer a male translator although they have not read translations by females, and whether the reason for their selection may be due to factors other than the quality of the translation itself.

In conclusion, the vast majority do not mind the gender of the translator(s), but a minority does. Within the latter group some seem to be so inclined because of the quality of the translation produced by either sex, judging by the titles of the translations they have, but others for no apparent reason. More research into this is required in order to identify the exact reason why one gender is preferred over the other.

[vii] Of those 3, 1 Muslim respondent mentions that she has 3 different translations by Abdel Haleem, Bakhtiar and a third unnamed "one with Al-Azhar approval, from Egypt" (most probably Majid Fakhri), but contradicts herself by saying that she enjoys Abdel Haleem's (a male translator) the most and that she would recommend it to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The second Muslim respondent does not answer the questions on which translation she has or which one she would recommend to Muslim or non-Muslim readers. The third respondent, a non-Muslim, is not sure which one she has and is not sure which one she would recommend for a Muslim or a non-Muslim reader. With this in mind, it seems that preference for female translators on the part of these 2 respondents is not likely to be based on issues they came across with translations produced by males but rather due to reasons which fall outside the translation itself.

[viii] 16 is the difference between 55 respondents who agreed that the translator's religious affiliation influences the translation (question 22) and the 39 respondents who would read a translation carried out by someone from a different religious orientation (question 23).

[ix] The reason I am counting Hilali and Khan's and *Saheeh International* together is that the latter is an updated and a revised version based on the first, according to Dr Waleed Al-Amri, ex-director of the translation department at the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, through personal correspondence. He confirms that Darussalam and the Complex's editions are by Hilali and Khan and that *Saheeh International* is the most thorough and systematic revision of Hilali and Khan's. In its own right, he adds, it has witnessed many revisions and updates. It has the advantage of being more readable than its predecessor. The translator/revisor is an American Muslim woman whose name is Umm Muhammad, Aminah Assami (see also http://www.saheehinternational.com/).

[x] It is surprising to see (considering the respondents' answers to questions relating to the possible influence of the translator himself or herself on their respective output - questions 21, 22 and 23) that one reader, a non-Muslim female, cites Sale's translation as her favourite out of two (the other being Pickthalls'), since it is criticised for its negative view of Islam and Muslims. For example, Sale refers to Muslims as 'Mohammedans' (1836: 1). This lexical choice betrays an orientalist's point of view towards Islam and the Qur'an. Muslims, on the other hand, reject the title 'Mohammedans' as they believe in all of Allah's Prophets and not only in the Prophet Muhammad. They also refuse to refer to Islam as 'Mohammedanism' as they consider Islam to be the religion of all Prophets who were sent to deliver a particular version of Islam to their respective people (see Elimam 2014: 135).

[xi] Asad is criticised for misinterpreting certain *ayah*s and for bringing his Jewish background to bear on his translation. For example, Asad denies the occurrence of some events mentioned in the Qur'an, such as the throwing of the Prophet Abraham into the fire and the Prophet Jesus speaking in the cradle (see Kidwai 1992 and 2007; Mohammed 2005).

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Questionnaire

Age: ….

Gender:	☐ F	☐ M
Level of Education:	☐ Below University level	☐ University level
Religion:	☐ Muslim	☐ non-Muslim

Please tick the appropriate response.		
1	I prefer editions offering	☐ only the English translation of the Qur'an
		☐ both the Arabic text of the Qur'an and the English translation
		☐ does not matter
2	If the Arabic text is provided, I prefer to see the Arabic ayahs and their English translation	☐ in two opposite columns
		☐ on alternate lines
		☐ does not matter
3	In terms of layout, I prefer editions	☐ paragraphing the Arabic text in the translation
		☐ using continuous format like that of the Qur'an
		☐ providing ayahs individually, one after the other
4	I prefer	☐ pocket size editions
		☐ larger size editions
		☐ does not matter
5	I prefer an edition arranged from	☐ right to left like Arabic
		☐ left to right like English
		☐ does not matter
6	I prefer to see Qur'anic terms	☐ transliterated (e.g. Salah, Zakah)
		☐ translated into English (e.g. Prayer, Islamic Alms Giving)
		☐ does not matter
7	I prefer an edition providing	☐ explanation of difficult words in brackets within the text of the translation
		☐ translation of the text of the Qur'an only
		☐ does not matter
8	I prefer a translation which provides	☐ an introduction to each surah.
		☐ an introduction to every section of each surah
		☐ no introduction like the Qur'an
9	Footnotes and bracketed information	☐ distract me while reading the translation
		☐ help me understand the translation
		☐ do not know
10	Where more than one explanation of an ayah is available, I prefer a translation	☐ offering only one meaning
		☐ offering all the meanings
		☐ do not know
11	I prefer a translation carried out by	☐ a native speaker of Arabic
		☐ a native speaker of English
		☐ does not matter

12	I prefer a translation carried out by	☐ a Muslim
		☐ a non-Muslim
		☐ does not matter
13	I prefer a translation carried out by	☐ team translators
		☐ an individual translator
		☐ does not matter
14	I prefer a translation carried out by	☐ a man translator
		☐ a woman translator
		☐ does not matter
15	I take the meaning offered in the translation to be	☐ exactly the meaning expressed in the Qur'an
		☐ the translator's understanding of the Qur'an, which may be right or wrong
		☐ do not know
16	I consider the translation	☐ to be a word for word rendering of the Qur'an
		☐ to involve some interpretation on the part of the translator
		☐ do not know
17	When I read the translation,	☐ I think I read the Qur'an
		☐ I think I only read the meaning of the Qur'an
		☐ do not know

Please tick Yes or No		**Yes**	**No**
18	I prefer a translation with an introduction discussing the history of the Qur'an and its compilation, the Prophet, Islam, etc.		
19	I prefer a translation providing footnotes on the occasion of revelation, linguistic construction of ayahs, etc.		
20	I prefer a translation with a preface describing its own characteristics and saying something about the translator.		
21	Translators of the Qur'an do express their own opinion in the translation.		
22	Translators' religious orientations influence the translation.		
23	I would read a translation carried out by someone from a different religious orientation, e.g. sunni, shi'i, etc.		
24	I read reviews about the translation(s) I already have.		
25	I read reviews about the translation(s) I am planning to buy.		
26	Reading reviews of translations affects the way I feel about them.		

Please answer the following questions:	
27	Which translation(s) of the Qur'an do you have?
28	Which translation do you read/enjoy most?
29	Which translation would you want to have?
30	Which translation would you recommend for a Muslim?
31	Which translation would you recommend for a non-Muslim?
32	Do you have any comments to pass on to the translators of the Qur'an?

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