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Translating the Quraan”¹

The Arabic word for translation, تَرْجَمَةٌ “*Tarjamah*”, linguistically means the clarification and explanation of meanings.

In Islaamic terminology, it refers to interpreting one language into the speech of another. So, regarding the Quraan, it means translating its meanings into another language. This translation could be two types: the first being a word-for-word translation in that every single word is replaced with its equivalent in the other language; the second type is a translation in meaning or in *Tafseer* which is to convey the meanings of the speech into another language but without being primarily concerned with the actual words and their exact order.

As an example of this, take the statement of Allaah (ﷻ):

﴿ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴾

Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Quraan, that you may be able to understand.

[Soorah Az-Zukhruf, 43:3]

The word-for-word translation would be something like:

إِنَّ “Indeed, We”

جَعَلْنَاهُ “made it”

قُرْءَانًا “a Quraan”

عَرَبِيًّا “Arabic”

¹ The general conditions for translating the Quraan may also apply generally to translating Islaamic material, and Allaah knows best. [Translator’s Note]

“Indeed, We made it a Quraan Arabic.” and similarly with the other words.

A translation in meaning would be to translate the overall meanings of the verses without paying so much attention to each and every word and its order (ex: “Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Quraan.”). This is close to the general definition of Tafseer.

The Ruling of Translating the Quraan

A word-for-word translation regarding the Noble Quraan is impossible according to many people of knowledge because it would require so many different conditions to be met which would be almost impossible. Some of these conditions would be:

- There must exist, in the language being translated into, exact equivalents in words between it and the language that's being translated.
- There must also exist in the second language the equivalent, or at least very similar, grammatical articles and expressions that are used linguistically to affect, enhance, or alter meanings.
- The order in which words are placed in both languages must be similar such as that pertaining to sentences, adjectives, possessives, etc. Some scholars say that even if it may be possible to translate some verses word-for-word or close to it, it's still not permissible because there is no way to fully convey the complete meaning. There is also no real way to affect people (of another language) as the clear Arabic Quraan does (in Arabic). Besides, there's no necessity requiring a word-for-word translation because a translation of the meanings is sufficient.

Based on this, even if it were possible to translate some words exactly, it's impermissible except in the case of translating a certain word in the listener's language to help him understand without translating every single word in the exact Arabic order.

As for a translation of the Quraan in meaning, then this is generally permissible because there's no harm in it. Rather, it's an obligation if this would be the means of conveying the Quraan and Islaam to non-Arabic speakers since conveying this message is an obligation. And whatever is required to fulfill an obligation, then that itself also becomes an obligation.

In spite of this, this permissibility must also meet certain conditions, such as:

- The translation should not be taken as a substitute to the actual Arabic Quraan in that the translation is considered sufficient and that understanding the Arabic text is no longer necessary. For this, the Arabic text should be written along with the translated text next to it so that it acts simply like a Tafseer, or explanation of the original Arabic.
- The translator must be fully knowledgeable of the meanings and connotations of the words in both languages and what they indicate based upon different contexts in which they may be used.
- The translator must also know the specific meanings of the Quraan's words as they are used in the Islaamic legislation. A translation of the Quraan is not to be accepted from someone unless he is reliable. He must be a Muslim known for his uprightness and correct adherence in the religion.