Translational Resonance, Authenticity and Authority in the Bible and the Quran: translation and religious change

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ABSTRACT
Challenging the traditional conception of what makes a religious text "translatable", this paper attempts to explain why there are such marked differences between religions in their acceptance of translations of their scriptures, and why there is such a varying impact of translation on religious thought and practise. The paper suggests that the scriptural genre is distinct from other areas of translation studies research and introduces the concept of "translational resonance" as a means of approaching the translation of religious texts. Translational resonance is defined as the degree to which a religious text is accepted as authentic and authoritative in translation. Using the Bible and the Quran as examples, it will ask what effect translation has on religious attitudes and behaviours: whether (and, if so, under what circumstances) translation can undermine religious authority, and whether the translational resonance of a text, according to the author's definition, can help to explain the relationship between scriptural authority and religious change.

KEYWORDS: translational resonance, authenticity, authority, religious texts.

Introduction

Few texts are so pregnant with cultural and historical significance as religious scriptures, a fact that understandably renders them problematic from a translation perspective. In the words of David Jasper, translating religious texts is "an impossible necessity" (2005:105). The ambivalence of form and style, and the question of how best to surmount this problem — which to emphasise at the expense of the other — has always been a central problem in translation,[1] and is particularly relevant to the translation of religious texts, most of all to those whose provenance is considered to be divine revelation. Such are the considerations that lead scholars and the faithful alike to debate whether scriptures are indeed 'translatable' at all.

When it comes to translating religious texts, Delisle and Woodsworth explain that, broadly speaking, religions can be grouped into two categories: "those for which there exists one unique, sacred language and those for which the message of sacred texts can be expressed with equal validity in all tongues" (1995:159). In other words, some religions accept translations of their sacred text as authoritative (i.e. consumed as having, or proceeding from, due authority and entitled to obedience, credit and acceptance) and authentic (i.e. having a verifiable origin and authorship, and entitled to acceptance and belief on the basis of agreement with prior knowledge or experience), meaning the text has a high degree of translational resonance; and others recognise neither the authority nor the authenticity of a translation, signifying a low degree of translational resonance. The Christian Bible and the Islamic Quran are respective archetypes of each extreme. The translation of the Bible is characterised by the prevalence of the message (represented most faithfully by Nida's (1969) formal equivalence approach, particularly with reference to the New Testament) and an interdisciplinary approach that sees the convergence of ideas from fields as diverse as

[1] A dichotomy clearly illustrated by the theoretical conversation between proponents of equivalence approaches and those of functionalist approaches.

archaeology, linguistics, cultural studies and critical theory (Orlinsky and Bratcher 1991; Wilt 2003). Meanwhile, linguistic integrity and scriptural introspection, i.e. a tendency to use only critical techniques familiar to the Islamic religion, can be seen to typify Quran translation (Abdul-Raof 2001).

In attempting to understand the differential impact of translation upon religious thought and practise, and the varying success with which translations of religious texts have met, this idea of 'translational resonance' is a useful alternative interpretation of the concept of translatability. Moving away from the traditional notion of translation as pertaining to the possible achievement of a linguistically, culturally and contextually adequate rendering of the source text into the target language (i.e. the theory of scriptural translation as part of the equivalence debate), we can see that, in the case of sacred texts, translatability is rather a matter of how readily the translation is accepted as authoritative and authentic in relation to the source text.[2] For this reason, the term translational resonance seems more appropriate than translatability when referring to religious texts. By examining the relative translational resonance of these two texts, this paper aims to assess the impact of translational resonance on instances of change in religious thought and practise in Christianity and Islam.

Beginning with an appraisal of the differing stances of the two religions towards scriptural translation, the paper then moves on to the practical implications of translational resonance when translating religious texts. A discussion of the historical impact of translation upon religious thought and practise in both cases will follow, and the conclusion will aim to discern the link between the translational resonance of scripture and patterns of religious change.

Translational resonance in theory: why some religious texts are more resonant in translation than others

Christianity and Islam present a dichotomy in their approach to the translation of their central sacred texts. This can be seen today in the very fact that the Bible is anchored into Western translation theory, whereas Quran translation remains on the margins of the translation studies discipline. There are four main ways in which the two religions diverge in their attitudes towards scriptural translation which, taken together, also serve to explain the relative translatabilities of the Bible and the Quran.

The first difference is doctrinal: evidence for the respective theological views on translation can be found within the Bible and the Quran themselves. The idea of translation is central to the Bible, the most obvious example of this centrality being the story of the Tower of Babel,

[2] Much treatment of the translatability concept, not only as applied to religious texts but also to other text types, appears to be rooted in the equivalence paradigm. Williams and Chesterman (2002:19) present the difficulties of translating religious texts as proceeding from a) the chronological gap between source and target texts, and b) the linguistic issue surrounding revelation. While both of these practical concerns (echoed elsewhere in the literature) may indeed pose problems to the translator of religious texts, they ignore the essentially functional question of why religious texts are being translated. Most of the time they are translated for consumption by the relevant faith community in a context of liturgy or spiritual reflection, and as such they must be seen to be authentic and authoritative to be successful. Overcoming practical obstacles such as accurate and sensitive linguistic, cultural and contextual treatment is of course of primary importance, but alone it does not account for the text's reception by consumers, as I argue in this essay.

which has itself become a metaphor for the necessity of translation.[3] However, there is evidence elsewhere in the Bible for the importance of translation. In the Book of Esther, when Esther appeals to the King to issue a decree to the Jews allowing them to defend themselves against an attack, occasioned by an earlier edict that could not be rescinded, it is noted that the King's scribes issue the decree "in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language" (Esther 8:9). In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul, on the issue of speaking in tongues, declares "For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says." (1 Corinthians 14:13). Perhaps most significantly, the Book of Acts narrates the story of Pentecost, when all present are empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues: God's message is suddenly comprehensible to speakers of all languages, signifying that salvation is no longer for the Jews alone (Acts 2:1–12). These examples emphasise the importance of the religious message being able to overcome linguistic barriers to understanding.

Meanwhile, the Quran is clear that there is only one permissible vector for Allah's message: the Arabic language. The twelfth surah, Yusuf, tells us, "Surely we have revealed it - an Arabic Quran - that you may understand" (Yusuf 12:2), while Fussilat speaks of "A Book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Quran for a people who know" (Fussilat 41:3).[4] Nowhere in the Bible is there such an explicit statement of the sacred nature of one language above another. As Sanneh explains, the relative translational resonance of the Bible and the Quran "is a fact whose true significance rests on the contrasting theological positions of the two religions on the nature of revelation, and hence of religious orthodoxy" (1992:171). The difference in the "nature of revelation" can be seen by the way God speaks to the reader in each text:

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Genesis 1:1-3)

> This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to t hose who guard (against evil).
> Those who believe in the unseen and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them.
> And who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you and they are sure of the hereafter. (al-Baqarah 2:2-4)

[3] "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.' So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. (Genesis 11:5-8). All Bible quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, available online at www.biblica.com, and were last accessed on 20th September 2009. According to Biblica (formerly International Bible Society-Send the Light, or IBS-STL Global), the New International Version is today "the most widely distributed and utilized [Bible] translation in the world" (http://www.biblica.com/bibles/about/13.php, last accessed 20th September, 2009).

[4] According to Mohammed, until recently Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the quran was the most popular in the English language (2005:69). However, while it remains a widely used translation, its popularity has recently been declining due to its outdated language. M.A.S Abdel Haleem's more recent version is therefore used as the primary reference here. Although Mohammed describes Abdel Haleem's translation as "falling short" in some respects, he also praises many of its features and points it out as a good point of departure for future revisionist translations (2005:70).

We can see that, in the first example, God's words are reported, whereas, in the second, Allah speaks directly to Mohammed through the Angel Gabriel.[5] This crucial difference derives from the fact that, for Christians, Jesus Christ, whose life and works the New Testament of the Bible reports and through which Christians may come better to know him, is the embodiment of the revelation. For Muslims, it is not Mohammed who is Allah's revelation, but the Quran, the text itself occupying the equivalent position of Jesus in Christianity. The respective debates in Christianity and Islam regarding the nature of Christ and the nature of the Quran illustrate this fact (McGrath 2006: ch.11; Winter 2008: ch.9). The way the concept of revelation is portrayed by each text therefore has implications for the translational resonance of the latter: a text regarded as the literal physical embodiment of the divine word, i.e. the Arabic Quran, loses both its authority and its authenticity in translation, since the language is part of the message itself; on the other hand, in a text that reports the divine word there is a distinction between language and message, permitting the translation to be received as authoritative and authentic.

The second major difference between Christianity and Islam regarding their positions on translation has to do with traditional modes of transmission of epistemic authority: in the Judeo-Christian world, the written word is generally seen to have authority over the spoken. The Bible itself is indeed an anthology compiled of distinct writings. The importance of writing is clear from the story of the Ten Commandments:

> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." [28] Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:27-28).

The authority and fidelity of the written word was a significant factor in the central role played by translation in the Judeo-Christian tradition from the very beginning. Orlinsky and Bratcher describe the necessity for the Jews to translate the *tanakh* due to the demographic and political changes caused by their exodus from Judea,[6] and the ensuing need to understand God's teachings in a more comprehensive, and perhaps different, way (1991:5-10). The importance of writing and translation only increased with the appearance of a new sect, Christianity, whose central text was to "determine down into our own times the nature of Bible translation" (Orlinksy and Bratcher 1991:11), not to mention to secure the dominance of Latin alongside Christian thought throughout a large part of the world. The exaltation of the written word can be seen clearly in the fact that various versions of the Bible have been accorded reverential status: the Vulgate was canonized at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, and the King James, or Authorized, Version, commissioned by the eponymous monarch in 1604, embodying the divine authority of the regent, went unrevised for 300 years (Orlinsky and Bratcher 1991:11-38). The culture of the authority of writing can therefore be seen to be at the heart of the reciprocal Judeo-Christian relationship with translation, and is thus also at the source of the Bible's translational resonance.

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[5] Saeed clarifies the nature of quranic revelation thus: "As to any human element in the production of the Qur'an, the text itself stresses that the Prophet was required only to receive the sacred text and that he had no authority to change it. The Qur'an strongly denies that it is the speech or ideas of the Prophet or, indeed, of any other person. It also asserts that the Arabic revelation came directly from God to protect it from human-induced errors or inaccuracies" (2006:16).

[6] Delisle and Woodsworth (1995:160) note that translations of sacred texts often come about at times of political, social, religious or philosophical upheaval.

On the contrary, "there is no *textus receptus*, a generally accepted form of the Quran" in any language other than Arabic (Schub 2003). This is partly due, as we have seen, to the doctrine found within the text itself. However, the oral tradition into which the quranic revelation entered is of the utmost relevance. The dissemination of knowledge in Islam traditionally revolved around oral modes of transmission. *Al-Qur'an* means "the recitation", and the oral tradition was, and to a large extent still is, at the heart of Islamic epistemic authority (Robinson 1993:231). Despite the fact that Muslims already knew of the printing press from the Chinese, the late advent of printing in the Islamic world is evidence of the suspicion with which Muslims viewed the printed word: "printing attacked the very heart of Islamic systems for the transmission of knowledge; it attacked what was understood to make knowledge trustworthy, what gave it value, what gave it authority" (*ibid*). Indeed, only by being recited does the Quran realise its divinity, a fact borne out by the continued value attached to *tawjid*, techniques for recitation. The basis for the distrust of the written word is to be found in psychological theories of the transformation of human consciousness as it moves from the oral to the written mode of transmission (Steiner 1967). The philosophy of the Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun illustrates the point: an idealist, Khaldun asserted that pure ideas exist only in the mind, the spoken word is an approximation of these ideas, and the written word yet a further approximation (see Steiner 1967). By deduction, to translate would mean to approximate yet further!

This difference in traditional modes of transmission of epistemic authority further contributes to the polarized views of translation between the two religions. However, following the work of Derrida, deconstructionist scholars would be able to argue that the meaning of language, whether written or spoken, originates in the complexity of the inter-related structures of language itself and cannot be seen to be a manifestation of the unity of conscious experience (Derrida 1973). This perspective attenuates the severity of the cleavage between the ideas of Christianity and Islam on the matter of language, providing hope for reconciliation on this point.

The relative importance of proselytism in Christianity and Islam is also, in some measure, responsible for respective religious views of translation. There are many reasons why a text comes to be translated — four of specific importance for the scriptural genre can be identified: translation as mission, translation as cross-cultural communication, translation as emancipation, and translation as deeper knowledge (Moir 2007). As Long explains,

> Migration, displacement and colonisation have combined to upset geographical models of religious distribution and to bring a greater variety of holy texts to the attention of a wider audience… Equally, the missionary colonising dynamic has resulted in translation in the opposite direction: texts imposed on the host language from outside (2005:4).

Mission[7] plays a central role in Christianity, and for it to be effective, translation is essential. Sanneh explains that, for Christians, "mission has come pre-eminently to mean translation" (1989:7). Indeed, Delisle and Woodsworth confirm that translations of the Bible, in particular the New Testament, have been undertaken primarily as an evangelizing tool (1995:179). The

[7] The Lausanne Covenant (available online at http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html) was the product of the 1974 First International Congress on World Evangelization, and the document clearly defines the purpose and scope of Christian mission. The motto of the Lausanne Movement, born out of the Congress, sums up the idea of mission quite succinctly: "The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole world".

very idea of mission necessitates translation, since it requires the local community to understand God's word in their own language. The first missionary, St. Paul contextualized the Gospel for Greek and Roman cultures, enabling it to reach beyond its Hebrew and Jewish context (Stourton 2005). Of course, for some, "mission" and the diffusion of the Bible have often been seen in the light of colonialism, as an instrument of the oppressor, or of Western cultural imperialism generally (Bassnett and Trivedi 1998). As Kidwai affirms, "The Muslim need for translating the Quran into English arose mainly out of the desire to combat the missionary effort" (1987). Indeed, Muslim proselytism is of a different character entirely and as such, "for Muslims mission has stood…for the nontranslatability [understood here as a lack of translational resonance] of its Scriptures in the ritual obligation (Sanneh 1989:7). The integrity of the Quran and the Arabic language prevent such a practise from being envisaged in Islam, and thus the latter uses translation as a tool of proselytism less actively than Christianity. Translations of the Quran "have been undertaken, not to secure conversion to Islam, but to accompany and reinforce integration of believers into the Islamic community" (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995:179). The presence or absence of mission can therefore be seen to denote another divisive element in religious attitudes towards translation.

Following on from this, the distinction made between the activities of translation and diffusion is a final factor in determining the reasons for different perspectives towards translation. According to Sanneh's categorisation of modes of transmission of religious texts, translation is the process whereby the receiving culture absorbs the religious ideas of the carrier culture into its own language, ingesting simultaneously many of the source culture's indigenous concepts and values, as has been the case with Christianity (1989:7). Meanwhile, diffusion implies that the source culture is "the inseparable carrier of the message", implanting itself and its language into the receiving society "as a matter of cultural identity", as can be seen with Islam (*ibid*). The former approach clearly requires that the sacred text be rendered into a target language, whereas in the latter case, the target culture "accepts" the imposition of the source culture's language, at least in matters scriptural and liturgical. Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in the categorisation of religious scripture according to these two principles, this is a useful model for helping to understand the result of different doctrinal stances on translation. It illustrates the necessity of translation to the "survival through time" of the biblical text, and helps to explain the largely symbiotic processes of Islamization and Arabization by way of the religious imposition of the Arabic language (Long 2005:3).[8] This has something in common with Delisle and Woodsworth's ambivalent vision of translation as a way either of "securing conversion" or accompanying the extant process of integration via cultural and linguistic assimilation, the diffusion dimension (1995:179). For the purposes of our discussion, a holy text customarily transmitted by way of *translation* can be considered to have a higher translational resonance than one passed on through *diffusion*, since the former presupposes that the translation will be accepted as authentic and authoritative, while the latter implies resistance or rejection of translation.

Translational resonance in practice: message proximity, the guise of exegesis and the problem of the *textus receptus*

Translating religious texts is a notoriously difficult activity, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there is a huge chronological gap separating the original text, its culture, language and context, from the target text and audience. Secondly, there is the issue of revelation, discussed above, and the divine nature of the text (Williams and Chesterman 2002:42). Thirdly,

[8] Sanneh (1989:7) explains the complexity of the relationship between Islamization and Arabization using language as a variable.

"centuries of veneration have given them [religious texts] a thick overlay of meanings" (Long 2005:3). Finally, although not exhaustively, the semantic space required in the target language can already be occupied, and the vocabulary and grammatical structures available to convey the message may already be "culturally loaded with indigenous referents" (Long 2005:1).

Yet, somehow, religious ideas must find a way to permeate new societies, in order for the religion to recruit new adherents and therefore expand, and also for the message to be transmitted through time and space. This is what David Jasper calls the "impossible necessity" (as quoted in Long 2005:105). Two instruments available for this to take place are translation and diffusion. Each has their problems. Let us take diffusion as an example. The Quran, a religious text whose Arabic language and culture is "the inseparable carrier of the message", must be consumed in Arabic according to religious orthodoxy in order for it to be received as authentic and authoritative (Sanneh 1989:7). Translations are considered to possess neither authenticity nor authority, corresponding to the low translational resonance of the text. However, considering the fact that today less than a fifth of the world's Muslim population speaks Arabic, adherents are faced with a difficult choice: either learn Arabic or use a translation (Mansfield 2003:42). Amir Ali admits that "there are difficulties in both alternatives" (1961:x). The same problem is visible in the fact that, while most of the world's Christians and Jews read the Bible in translation, theologians and biblical scholars are often encouraged to learn biblical Hebrew and Greek, in order to acquaint themselves with the original source text. Another dimension of the same argument is the competition between different approaches to Bible translation: Nida's functional equivalence approach emphasises style over substance, conveying the message in a comprehensible way, but moving further away from the "literal" word, whereas a more literal approach in itself may present the words as revealed, but this at the probable expense of comprehension and clarity (1969).

Fundamentally, what is at stake here is the believer's linguistic proximity to the message, the message being that contained in God's original utterance (which, in the case of the Christian New Testament would be Jesus Christ, and in the case of Islam, the Quran). Either one *translates* the message into a target language, enabling the consumer more easily to comprehend the content, but placing another linguistic layer in between them and the message, or the message must be *diffused* in the original language, with the result that the consumer is possibly separated from the message through problems of linguistic comprehension, despite being "closer" to the original words. Both options are therefore imperfect, unless of course the consumer is a proficient scholar in the language(s) of the revealed text(s).[9] The relative translational resonance of a text may therefore appear to be of little importance in the consumer's proximity to the message, since both methods are flawed in this respect: a translatable text separates the reader from the message as does a less translatable one. However, assuming that it is possible for the consumer to be fluent in the language of the original revealed text, diffusion seems the most effective method by which the message can be transmitted. In other words, less translatable texts have the potential to increase the consumer's linguistic proximity to the religious message.

There are, of course, other factors besides linguistic considerations that separate the consumer from the "original" message. Linguistic comprehension of a text is not equivalent to a thorough cultural and contextual understanding of the references and symbolism present within the text and its message – scholarship and contemplation can bring the believer closer to achieving this understanding, but any reading of a text where the reader is separated from

[9] It is acknowledged that this is presumably the religious ideal, but in practice it is uncommon.

the context by a huge chronological gap will inevitably result in an imperfect appreciation of the effect on the contemporaneous audience. It thus remains the case that a situation in which the entire religious community today reads and understands the original language and context of scripture to a satisfactory standard is unlikely, for many reasons. With this in mind, some sort of translation is inevitable. This is the great paradox of the "untranslatable" religious text, such as the Quran – the untranslatable is actually frequently, copiously translated. The only significant survey of translations of the Quran available,[10] the *World Bibliography of the Meanings of the Holy Quran* (1986) lists 2668 printed translations of the book into 70 different languages, 300 different ones into Urdu alone.

It is clear from this fact that a low level of translational resonance does not equal a low level of translational activity. As Kidwai explains, "the act of translation may logically be viewed as a natural part of the Muslim exegetical effort", and it is under the guise of exegesis that the Quran is actually translated (1987:66). The titles of renderings of the Quran out of Arabic evoke the doctrinal difficulties associated with translating the scripture. Often called "commentaries" on, or "interpretations" of the Quran, this is merely an issue of nomenclature – to borrow from Shakespeare, "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". These texts, which are formally annotated translations, call upon the traditional Islamic practices of *tafsir* and *ta'wil*,[11] exegesis of the meaning of the text in its spiritual context, a feature also of biblical scholarship. They are nevertheless translations of the Quran into a language other than Arabic, but, significantly, these translations are not recognised to be *the Quran*, in other words they are not received as authentic and authoritative by Muslims. On the grounds presented in the first section, a translation can never claim perfectly to represent the Quran, and we must acknowledge the "complementary nature of the translation rather than its substitution for the sacred text" (Amir Ali 1961:xiii; Delisle and Woodsworth 2005:178). Ultimately, despite the nominal existence of translations of the Quran, the text remains, from a religious point of view, untranslatable.

What is more, it is the text's lack of translational resonance that results in the absence of a *textus receptus*, or a recognised, common translation, and therefore interpretation, of the scripture.[12] The fact that a text is untranslatable means that no translation of it can be considered authoritative. Consequently, all interpretations of the text can be considered equally valid. As we see with the Quran, this results in a multiplicity of competing translations, all of which may offer different interpretations of the text and its message, to be treated with equal authority by readers. The potential problems this may engender are obvious. The thick overlay of meanings acquired by a sacred text through years of veneration means that it "means all that it can be made to mean", and anecdotal evidence for this is the popular belief in Islam that each verse of the Quran can be interpreted in sixty thousand different ways (Smith 1924:364). This may be hyperbole, but it is a widely accepted precept of cultural studies that the consumer of a text is also an active producer of meaning, and the encoding-decoding dynamic which necessarily comes into play supports at least the principle

[10] To this author's knowledge. There is certainly no other census available in English.

[11] The *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (2006), Leiden: Brill, explains that *tafsir* means "interpretation" or "commentary", while *ta'wil* has a similar meaning, but comes from a root which means to "return to the beginning". In classical Islam, this has meant that *ta'wil* is the fact of settling upon one interpretation when a number of them are presented by the *tafsir*. However, the *Encyclopedia* posits that today *ta'wil* is now associated with exposing the allegorical meaning.

[12] The author intends here to use the term "textus receptus" in an innovative way, to denote a "received", and therefore common, translation of a religious text. A distinction is made between this use of the term and any reference made to the *Textus Receptus* as a source text, namely the Greek New Testament as compiled by Erasmus in the early 16th century (see Combs in *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1, 1996).

of the claim. For Amir Ali, the "only solution" to reconcile the need for Muslims thoroughly to understand the Quran with the linguistic problems faced by many, is to "welcome the appearance of more and more translations, each profiting from the achievement of its predecessors and thus coming nearer and nearer to the spirit and flavour of the original, but *never claiming to represent it perfectly*" (Amir Ali 1961:xi-xiii [emphasis original]). Kidwai, at least, is hopeful in this regard. He says, "Muslim Scripture is yet to find a dignified and faithful expression in the English language that matches the majesty and grandeur of the original", but suggests that "the currents of history …seem to be in favour of such a development. Even English is acquiring a native Muslim character and it is only a matter of time before we have a worthy translation of the Qur'an in that tongue" (1987:66). A worthy translation is not forcibly an authoritative and authentic one, but such a development may make Quran translation a more respectable activity in the eyes of Muslims, without compromising Islamic theological principles.

Translational resonance and religious change

Our analysis thus far tells us that whether a text is considered translatable or not has little effect on whether it is actually translated – while the Islamic Quran favours the diffusion method over the translation espoused by the Judeo-Christian Bible, both texts have been copiously translated, as a means of religious statecraft to deal with the geographical and cultural extent of each faith community. Now we will turn our attention to the *effects* a religious text's level of translational resonance can have on religious thought and practise, focusing on the relationship between translational resonance and religious change.

There is already quite a wide consensus that the *translation* of sacred texts can bring about or facilitate cultural, social and other types of change. Delisle and Woodsworth propose that "the great cultural shifts that have punctuated the history of Western and Eastern traditions have been made possible by translations", (1995:159) and one only has to think of the role of Luther's or even Tyndale's Bible in the Reformation to perceive a link between scriptural translation and changes of a fundamental nature to both religion and society at large (Randell 2000; Mullett 2004; Daniell 2001). Looking for signs of a link between a religious text's *translational resonance* and specific instances or processes of religious change is an altogether more subtle exercise. Nonetheless, an examination of the historical contexts of important translations of both texts may give us some clues as to whether translational resonance plays a meaningful role in processes of religious change. The hypothesis is this: translating a religious text, whether for purposes of mission, cross-cultural communication, emancipation or for theological or philological motives, inevitably results in analysis of, and debate about, the content of the text. The very act of translating, and the ambivalence between form and style mentioned previously, is symbolic of these two processes;[13] reading sacred texts in the vernacular furthermore allows the reader uninitiated in the language of liturgy to interpret the text as an individual.

With this in mind, it seems reasonable to infer that the translations of a highly translatable religious text, usually accepted as authoritative and authentic, would be more easily associated with processes of internal religious change and the potential external repercussions thereof, since linguistic adaptation of the text to a new external environment is more permissible, and the text's 'message' is received as valid in the target language. According to

[13] Religious texts are no different from other texts in this respect. The tensions between functionalism and equivalence theories in translation studies can illustrate the process of debate about form and meaning which arises as a natural result of translating a text.

this assumption, a less translatable text, while it may frequently be found in translation, would less easily engender changes in religious thought and practise, since it cannot be received as authoritative or authentic by adherents, but rather have 'complementary' status, and the text's true 'message' can only be approached in the original scriptural idiom. As a highly translatable sacred text, the Bible lends itself to translation for various reasons already outlined. For Christians, the New Testament in translation is still received as 'the Bible', since it is Jesus Christ, and not the text itself, who is the "Word of God", as John illustrates when he describes how Jesus, the Word, came to live among humankind: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1-14).

Nevertheless, there have been moments in the Bible's history when translation was discouraged or prohibited, for reasons of control by the religious authorities: in 1401 the statue *de heretico comburendo* made the act of making, owning or reading an unauthorized vernacular version of the Bible illegal in England (Daniell 2005:104). Despite the ups and downs of institutional recognition, however, the Bible can at all times be considered a translatable text, since the criteria by which we assessed this attribute have never changed in function of establishment views on translation, but rather are inherent in the nature of the text and its place in Christianity. There are three moments in the history of Bible translation which have caused a significant change in religious thought and behaviour, which we shall analyse with reference to the book's translational resonance in an attempt to discern a link.

What Orlinsky and Bratcher call the "Second Great Age of Bible Translation"[14] begins with the new status of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, following the Edict of the Emperor Theodosius in 380 AD (1991:12). The Bible was already a translatable text before the advent of Jesus Christ – the Babel story, which lays the foundations for the inevitability of translation, appears in the first book of the Old Testament, and the translations of the Jewish Old Testament out of Hebrew into vernacular Aramaic and Greek are evidence of the translation method associated with translatable texts (Orlinsky and Bratcher 1991:10-12). Nevertheless, with the Gospel, the "new world of Christianity…helped determine down into our own times the nature of Bible translation", making it clear, as seen above, that the "message" of the New Testament is embodied in Jesus Christ; the books are a way of knowing the message more closely in that they tell us about his person, his life and death, and the need to "spread the Word" gives fresh impetus to the arguments in favour of translation (Orlinsky and Bratcher 1991:11). In this way, the translation of the Bible into Latin, the language of the Roman Empire where Christianity was now the official state religion, can provide us with evidence of a link between translational resonance and religious change.

Before the Edict of 380 AD, Rome was a city-state of a more or less pluralist religious dispensation; understandable since many different peoples and cultures were encompassed by the *Pax romana* (Bispham and Smith 2001). The internal problems this fact may eventually have caused have been the subject of countless volumes and are beyond the scope of this study, but suffice it to say that the decision of Theodosius to 'promote' Christianity, until then a cult which had gained significantly in power and influence among citizens of every status,

[14] Naudé summarises the Four Great Ages of Bible translation thus: the First Great Age (ca. 200 BCE–4th century CE) was in a Jewish setting and the target languages involved were Greek and Aramaic; the Second Great Age (4th century CE–ca. 1500) was Catholic in origin, and involved the Christianisation of the Hebrew text and had Latin as the target language; the Third Great Age (ca. 1500–1960) was predominantly Protestant in character and the target languages were various, mainly European; the Fourth Great Age began ca. 1960 with the appearance of the *Revised Standard Version* (2005:3).

to the official imperial religion, a concept hitherto unheard of in Rome, is regarded by many as the shrewdest political move in favour of the unity of the Empire since the Emperor Constantine has introduced more religious tolerance with this edict of 325 AD (Gibbon 2000; Baker 2001). The profound effects upon the Roman geographical space of translating the Bible into Latin can hardly be underestimated. The pivotal translation in this case would be that of St. Jerome, commissioned by Pope Damascus in 382 AD to replace the Vetus Latina.[15] Jerome's translations directly from the Hebrew, and from the Greek in the case of the Gospels, were the basis of what would become the Latin Vulgate, which remained in liturgical use by the Roman Catholic Church into the twentieth century (Orlinsky and Bratcher 1991:13).[16] Had the Bible been a less translatable religious text, then inaugurating it as official scripture with authority across an Empire where the vernacular already varied widely and where new languages were emerging out of contact with vulgar Latin, would have been inordinately difficult if not impossible, and the resultant expansion in power of the Latin language, both in religious spheres and beyond, would likely not have taken place (Walter 1994:15). Thus we can see that the Bible's translational resonance was in this case partially responsible for its ability to effect religious change in the short-term, with more far-reaching, long-term ramifications.

Although there were translations of all or part of the Bible into vernacular European languages as early as 1528 with Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples' French version, it is Luther's Bible, a translation of both testaments into German, appearing in 1534, that is usually associated with the beginning of the Reformation movement[17] (Bogaert 1997). Whether Luther's translation of the Bible into German was the impetus for, or instrument of, the Protestant current of Reformation is debatable, but it does not seem unwise to suppose that it may have been a little of both. Whatever the precise role of vernacular translations in the Reformation, as Orlinsky and Bratcher have observed, "the inaccessible Roman Catholic Vulgate was the victim of a struggle between old and new"; a struggle which Luther's Bible represented (1991:29). Luther's German Bible can be seen as an example of translation of religious texts for motives of emancipation, in this case emancipation of worshippers from the tyranny and corruption of the contemporary Church. Again, the text's inherent translational resonance is a decisive factor in the success of Luther's Bible. No matter how oppressed Christians may have been, or were aware to have been, by the Church's exploitative control of the Bible (translations of which were at this time institutionally forbidden), had the text not been 'naturally' translatable, Luther's Bible would not have been received as authoritative and authentic by believers. As has already been stated, the translational resonance of a text is not a matter of whether a particular religious or political institution permits or forbids its translation, but is a characteristic of the text within the doctrinal and historical dimensions it inhabits. The consequences of the Reformation, with Luther's Bible at the centre of it, can

[15] Vetus latina, or Old Latin Version, is the name normally collectively given to the Latin versions in use before the Vulgate.

[16] It was controversial because Jerome bypassed the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures) to translate directly from the Hebrew into Latin. Some said it would split the Church, which, interestingly, was a process probably already underway as the Byzantine Empire began to distinguish itself from the Western Roman Empire in custom and religion. Incidentally the Septuagint remains to this day the liturgical text of the Eastern Orthodox Church in what was the Byzantine Empire, and all translations are based on this, further evidence perhaps of the influence of the Bible's translatability on religious change – a less translatable text would not be able to be accepted as authoritative in two different translated versions in one Empire, a fact which led to the distinction between the Roman and Orthodox Churches (Orlinsky and Bratcher, 1991:4).

[17] Tyndale's New Testament, an English language translation from (dubious) Hebrew manuscripts, was published in full in Cologne in 1526, and would be instrumental in the English Reformation (Daniell, 2001). It was also to be the basis for the King James Authorized Version of 1611.

hardly be overstated. It was the beginning of a current of secularization which would shape the Western world into our own times. Diarmaid MacCulloch states that "it is impossible to understand modern Europe without understanding these 16th century upheavals in Latin Christianity"; and it is impossible fully to understand the mechanism by which this translation affected such a profound religious change without understanding the Bible's integral translational resonance (2004:10).

While it would be pertinent to say a word about the King James Version in this debate about translational resonance and religious change,[18] the final example of translational resonance and religious change is more contemporary, and comes not from one translation of the Bible, but from the multiplicity of translations invoked by the Christian right in defence of their moral and theological arguments. As Margaret M. Mitchell (2006) states in her essay, *How Biblical is the Christian Right?*, America's right-wing Christians of the Moral Majority frequently cite passages from different translations of the Bible, with no justification for their selection, in order to support ethical and theological claims. The political, social and cultural importance of the Christian Right movement in the USA is highly significant in terms of today's geo-political landscape, especially in view of the legacy of President George W. Bush, perhaps the movement's most (in)famous representative. Furthermore, it is significant in that the resurgence of religion in the public sphere, symbolised by the increasing importance of religion in the politics of the USA and elsewhere in the emerging post-secular climate, defies both the sociological prediction of the decline of religion with the development of scientific progress propounded by scholars such as Marx and Durkheim, and the notion that translation is the enemy of religion. Indeed, the USA is fertile ground for Bible translation. Nonetheless, religion remains a force to be reckoned with in this nominally secular society.

How to explain such a phenomenon? Elizabeth Eisenstein, writing about the history of print and its impact upon religion, identifies two diverging trends in the influence of print, one pointing towards "Erasmian trends and ultimately high criticism and modernism" and another "toward more rigid orthodoxy culminating in literal fundamentalism and Bible Belts" (cited in Robinson 1993:232). Could this dynamic also be indicative of the effects of translation on religion? This is something of a digression, since we are not primarily concerned here with the relationship between *translation* and religious change, rather between the latter and the *translational resonance* of religious texts. Is it the case that the Bible's translational resonance, that is the acceptance of translations of the Bible as authoritative and authentic, enables the various translations to be used indiscriminately to support ethical and theological arguments for political ends? Is it not also true to say that the Quran, a text that we have defined as possessing a low degree of translational resonance, is also used in this way, on the basis of the fact that there are no authorized versions of the text? On this interrogatory note, let us focus our analysis once again on the relationship between translational resonance and religious change.

One line of argument linking the translation of the Bible with the schism between religion and public life known as secularization is linguistic in character, and therefore significant for the

[18] Notably that the "Authorized Version", for all the connotations of control that this nomenclature represents, is almost certainly the best example of translational tenacity in modern history: unrevised for 300 years, the KJV had a profound effect on the place of Bible translation within the wider translation studies panorama, evidenced by its ongoing literary and cultural influence in Western societies; furthermore, this was the cornerstone of the Church of England, a Protestant Church with the monarch as the head – if the Bible were not such a translatable text, then it is difficult to imagine that this relationship between the regent and the breakaway Church could have been stabilized, since s/he could no more claim authority over it than any other believer.

impact of translational resonance on the use of scripture. For instance, Al-Azami (quoting Mascall 1965) opines that,

> "the guiding principle of the secularization of Christianity [is] the philosophical school which is commonly known as linguistic analysis. If such is the aim of linguistic analysis in Biblical studies, what other motive can there be in applying it to the Qur'an?" (2003:10)

Indeed, it seems justifiable partially to attribute some of the major changes affected in Christianity to the translation of scripture, as we have seen above. A translatable text, a text received as authoritative and authentic in translation, and transmitted by way of translation as opposed to diffusion, has the potential to be the impetus for or instrument of religious change by virtue of its very translational resonance, regardless of institutional control. Simply, because the Bible translated is still the Bible, translating it can have a real impact. Turning our attention to the Quran, the situation is somewhat different. It is an untranslatable text, received neither as authentic nor authoritative in translation; yet translations of it do exist under the guise of exegesis. The concept of translation is more or less ignored, made invisible by the indivisibility of the text's spiritual message from its language.[19] It is difficult to assert whether these pseudo-translations of the Quran, called interpretations, meanings or commentaries, have the capacity to effect religious change, but it is clear that there is no example of translation being implicated in any of Islam's major moments of change in the same way as the Bible.

The most significant instance of rupture in Islam is undoubtedly the separation of the Shiites and Sunnites in the 7th century of the Gregorian calendar, a fact which certainly constitutes an example of massive religious change, but which originates in issues of religious politics and the question of succession, rather than discussions of scripture: significantly, both Shiites and Sunnites read the same Quran and profess its inimitability (Esposito 2000). In 651, just nineteen years after Mohammed's death, when the Caliph Uthman was warned about discrepancies between versions of the Quran as it was being used in Iraq and Syria, and was advised to revise the sacred book, lest it become an object of dispute, like the Jewish and Christian scriptures, he ordered a revision of the Quran in the Quraysh dialect spoken by the Prophet: "This has ever since remained the final and standard version of the Quran" (Nicholson 1995:142; Al-Azami 2003:vi). This is a clear instance of the Quran's inherent lack of translational resonance: here was a moment when translation of the Quran was implicated in religious change, but only to confirm the text's lack of translational resonance. In what way is such an event different from the statute *de heretic comburendo*? In the case of the latter, the decree did not prevent translations of the Bible from appearing, even illicitly, whereas Uthman's order fixed definitively the form and style of the Quran in Arabic, and although interpretations and commentaries continue to appear to this day in languages other than Arabic, these are not used as the Quran in the way the different versions seem to have been used in 651. This observation can also be linked to the fact that in Islam revolution often means restoration rather than reformation (Arkoun 2006).

[19] The author wishes to emphasise the "spiritual" element; as Derrida (1998) has argued, by claiming that there is no *hors-texte*, the meaning of all texts is inextricably linked with the language, implying that the message of each translation of the Bible could be interpreted differently if it were expressed in different language. However, the author works on the principle that adherents believe that God did indeed have a single spiritual message and that the meaning of this message can only have one expression: for Christians, as has already been stated, this is Jesus Christ and for Muslims it is the Prophet.

Perhaps the one example of translation being implicated in religious change in Islam can be found in Mustafa Kemal's Turkey. As part of a wide-ranging programme of reform aimed at modernising Turkey along similar lines to other European states, Mustafa Kemal, known as Atatürk, declared the country secular, and in 1932 he publicly read a translation of the Quran into Turkish commissioned by himself, thereby paving the way for the use of Turkish as the liturgical language in place of Arabic (Cleveland 2004:181). Atatürk's reforms were not limited to religion, but included healthcare, democratization, agricultural reform and the liberation of women. Kemal's reforms are seen by islamologists as the precursor reforms to those of Habib Bourgiba in Tunisia and others, themselves already embedded in a process of reform in Islam which began in Turkey with the Tanzimats almost 100 years before Kemal. As one of the only secular states where Islam is the predominant religion, today Turkey is often hailed as an example of the compatibility of Islam with modern liberal democratic principles, although this claim can also be criticised (Jenkins 2008). The lack of translational resonance of the Quran did not prevent these changes from taking place, yet it is important not to draw too universal a conclusion from this, for several reasons. Firstly, while it is possible to suggest that translation played a pivotal role in the secularization of Christianity by taking the Reformation and Luther's translation as an example, Kemal's translation of the Quran has not led to such a dynamic in Islam. Indeed, these changes have so far only been applicable to Turkey, and history will be the judge of the impact of Kemal's Quran translation for Islam as a whole. Secondly, Atatürk's motivation for his reforms, including his translation of the Quran and the legalization of Turkish for liturgical use, was not purely religious, rather it was part of a nationalistic movement in the Islamic world within the framework of which Kemal engaged with reform in an effort to modernize his state, and his inspiration and model was notably secular Europe (Mango 2004). Nonetheless, translation and the question of spiritual ownership of the Quran were very much implicated in these reforms in a similar way to Luther's Bible and the Reformation movement. At best, with regard to the Kemalist legacy in Turkey, translation can be described as an evolutionary force, the ultimate impact of which for Islam as a whole remains to be seen.

Before we conclude, we have attempted here to discern a possible link between the translational resonance of a religious text and the propensity towards religious change occasioned by translation. Clearly it is a complex issue; its complexity is illustrated by the fact, mentioned above, that in today's modern age, religion is once again firmly on the agenda in public life on a global scale, despite predictions that it would decline in importance in modern societies. The way in which the Christian Right in the USA manipulates different (authorised) translations of the Bible is similar to the way that Islamist fundamentalists quote passages of the Quran out of context, in Arabic or in another tongue, both doing so to justify contestable theological or (invariably also) political viewpoints. However, there is a clear distinction in the success of translation as a vehicle for religious change between the two religions, with it being obviously implicated in many of the most fundamental and far-reaching developments in Christianity, but less present as a revolutionary force in Islam. The factor facilitating translation as a vehicle for religious change can be seen in each case to be the translational resonance of the respective religious text: the more the text is received as authentic and authoritative in translation, the greater the ease with which translations will bring about or aid religious change.

Conclusion

It is acknowledged that translation can be a motor or catalyst of religious change, but this is a fact well-established and of which there is so little doubt that it is almost a statement of the obvious. Yet, in recent times there has been a general observance in the social sciences of the

continuing importance of religion in society, despite factors of progress, modernization and religious pluralism and debate, at the heart of which lies translational activity. Furthermore, cultural studies scholars also recognise the significance of the emotional aspects of religious thought and practise alongside considerations of its social importance. This is the origin of the reappraisal of the concept of translatability in relation to religious texts. If the translatability of a religious text is defined as pertaining to the ease with which it can be rendered into the target language in a manner which is stylistically, formally, functionally and contextually equivalent, then all religious texts are equal with one another and with all other types of text, since this definition is essentially the equivalence debate recast. To ask whether a religious text is translatable according to this definition is to ask whether translation itself is possible, and we must assume, if we are to translate at all, that translation of all texts is possible according to this definition, although some aspects must always be prioritised over others and whatever level of equivalence may be achieved, the target text will necessarily be an imperfect or approximate rendering of the source text: in short, a translation of it.

Yet, what makes this definition even more inadequate in application to sacred texts is that it ignores the emotional, devotional aspect that is not found in any other genre. It is more appropriate, therefore, to speak of the 'translational resonance' of a religious text: a phenomenon that is defined not by whether it is possible to render the *text* including its meaning into the target language, but whether even the most 'perfect' translation of the text will be accepted by the faith community as authoritative and authentic. From this perspective, it is possible to shed light on why translations of some religious texts, like the Bible, have been more effective at bringing about or aiding religious change than others. Importantly, translational resonance must not be seen as a facet of institutional control over translation at a particular moment in history or in a particular geographical or cultural space. It is to be understood as an inherent feature of a text, defined by the text itself but also by external, sometimes pre-existing conditions. This can be seen in the fact that a text's translational resonance does not determine how, when or where, or for that matter whether and how much, a text is translated. It can, though, affect how the translated text is received and it can have an influence on the effect of translation on the religious community and beyond. So, we can say that in the case of a translatable religious text like the Bible, translations of which are received as authoritative and authentic, translation can play a significant role in religious change, because debate and discussion provoked by the translation process are viewed as legitimate. Meanwhile, with a relatively untranslatable sacred text such as the Quran, translation is not able to be such a force for change, firstly because the very notion is ideologically resisted, and secondly because new ideas arising from the translation process necessarily hold less currency than is the case for a translatable religious text.

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