Clause-Level Foregrounding in the Translation of the Qur'an into English: patterns and motivations

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ABSTRACT
This study examines word order variation in the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, and ten of its translations into English, produced between 1920 and 2004. Word order in Arabic is flexible and is used as a linguistic resource for realising several discursive functions. Arabic literature on *balaaghah* (Arabic art of eloquence) details a number of such functions, which can be realised by foregrounding an element (e.g. predicate, object, adjunct, adverbial) to or towards clause-initial position.

The Arabic data consists of *aayah*s identified in *tafsiir*s (commentaries on the Qur'an), specifically those identified by al-Baydhaawii, a renowned commentator, as examples of foregrounding in the Qur'an. Al-Baydhaawii and other commentators also identify the functions realised by each instance of foregrounding. A corpus of (68) *aayah*s, some of which feature 2 instances of foregrounding, thus constitutes the Arabic corpus. According to the commentators consulted in this study, the Qur'an uses foregrounding to fulfil the functions of *specification*, *restriction*, *emphasis*, *glorification/amplification* and *denial*. The literature also identifies a number of *aayah*s which fulfil more than one of these functions simultaneously.

Ten English translations of the Qur'an constitute the English corpus used in this study. These are carried out by individual or team translators with different ideological orientations (*sunnii shii'ii*, sufi, *Qa±iyaanii*, orientalist) and demonstrate different levels of competence in the source and target languages (some are native speakers of Arabic, some are native speakers of English, some are not native speakers of either language, while the team translators consist of a native speaker of each language). Strategies used across the ten translations to render the relevant instances of foregrounding are identified and repeated patterns of choice described. The translators featured in the corpus generally remain close to the word order of the *aayah*s, often opting for non-canonical word order in English. Some have a preference for cleft structures, which allow them to foreground different elements of the clause. Translators also use lexical strategies (especially the addition of restrictive items such as *alone* and *only*) as well as punctuation devices (such as rendering a clause as an independent sentence/question or placing a punctuation mark such as a dash before an element or elements in a clause) in order to reproduce, make up for or strengthen the force of the foregrounding in the source text.

The study then selects a sub-corpus of three translations for closer examination of the cumulative effect of the translators' preferred choices on their respective style. The selected translations are examined to identify how frequently individual translators (or a team of translators) use each strategy to render the foregrounding featured in the *aayah*s which constitute the Arabic corpus. Translators' choices are then explained against a backdrop of their stated aims (where these are made clear in a translator's introduction or preface), available reviews of the translations and interviews with the translators, as well as

documented information about their background and the context in which they produced their respective translations.

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