

The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an and the Orientalist terminology of Islam: The imposition of translated equivalents to avoid translation. A case of teleology in research and translation

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Abstract

The only scientific paradigm that Western scholars have created for Islam and its culture is Orientalism. But it is a paradigm that has certain shortcomings, particularly in regard to the understanding of terms in Arabic and its translation in European languages. This deficiency is most evident when we talk about the studies on the Koran. The research presented here examines some of the issues relating to the translation of the Quranic texts into Western languages. Likewise, we research how this understanding and translation constitute a fundamental element in creating and developing theories—whether orientalist or not— about any Arabic, Islamic or Oriental topic. With this objective in mind, we have used an example taken from the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an by Brill publishers in Holland and compiled by Georgetown University in Washington. It shows Islamic terminology we could consider Orientalist. In addition, the article attempts to demonstrate the existence of a bibliographical gap in such an important topic as the treatment and translation of Islamic terminology and, in particular, of the Koranic terminology, above all within the framework of Orientalist studies.

Key words: Qur'an, Islam, Translation.

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Introduction

For years, Islam is becoming the object of ever-growing interest due to politically and socially-related events and the influence these events have on western societies. Due to this, the media has tended towards a hesitant and imprecise use of the concepts related to the terminology of Islam and/or its radical tendencies, known in the press and in western studies as *Islamism*. Newspapers have been flooded with journalistic research and opinion chronicles and articles that have led to a more and more complex vocabulary. The publishing world has opened its doors to Islamic topics. However, given that the professionals directly linked to current Islamic topics (journalists, politicians, sociologists, historians, etc.) usually have limited knowledge Arabic as a language, nor the source of the Islamic lexicon, and faced with the absence of sufficient works on Islamic terminology in Spanish¹ and other western languages, the use of journalistic sources and foreign essayists has triumphed, especially in the transliteration of terms. This, coupled with a lack of knowledge of the Islamic doctrine, has given rise to continuous misunderstandings and distortions that could spark greater misunderstanding and the rejection of the Islamic cultural universe.

The translator, as the *dragoman*, has, in general, played an important figure as a cultural liaison and more specifically between the European and Islamic cultures. In the case of Arabic, in its relationship with Western languages, the translator becomes an essential instrument in the dialogue among the nations making up humanity and to establish a non-discriminatory world political and social balance.

It is therefore necessary to engage in an epistemological translation among civilizations that respond, in origin and configuration, to divergent epistemologies. Despite its complexity, this type of research is particularly important within academic realms, as it is vital for the mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences among civilizations, which is the only means of understanding between groups of people. If Islam is to be approached in any one of its areas or doctrines, this requires, prior to issuing scientific judgment, the understanding and assimilation of Islamic concepts to carry out this

¹ Recently, two lexicographic works covering this concept have been published. One is more specialized while the other more informative and in contact with the needs of the media and general reader. The specialised dictionary written by Felipe Mafllo is titled *Diccionario de derecho islámico* (meaning *Dictionary of Islamic Law*), Gijón, Trea, 2005. The most commonly known work was written by Luz Gómez *Diccionario de Islam e Islamismo* (meaning *Dictionary of Islam and Islamism*), Madrid, Espasa, 2009.

study; otherwise, we run the risk of altering or distorting the analysis and, therefore, reaching erroneous conclusions that are useless in every possible way and to anyone.

The language used in the Qur'ān translates individual systems and notions that cannot be interpreted, neither totally or exactly, with our own concepts based on Western categories of thought and analysis. When applied to a society formed under other influences and with a different religious background, this can give way, and in fact this is the case, to deceiving and non-scientific analogies.

Thus, Islamic doctrine and Koranic terminology, which requires major efforts in understanding such texts, should be understood by means of their own concepts with the help of a specific vocabulary. Because if the true sense of the words is lost, then the problem of assimilation and reception arises with its subsequent incomprehension or misunderstanding of a term. In the words of Muhammad Yūsuf 'Adas:

“The current enmity of the West against Islam [...] originates in the individual experience of (the West) with religion and its inability to understand Islam for two main reasons: the single-minded nature of the European mentality and the inadequacy of European languages to assimilate the Islamic terminology. [...] For the West to understand Islam, it must review its terminology referring to Islam” (Yūsuf 'Adas, *apud* 'izzat Bigovitch 1994: 19).

Having explained the above, our objective will be to clarify the role played by Arabic terminology and its understanding, as well as its translation into European languages. Likewise, we research how this understanding and translation constitute a fundamental element in creating and developing theories —whether orientalist or not— about any Arabic, Islamic or Oriental topic. With this objective in mind, we have used an example taken from the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* by Brill publishers in Holland and compiled by Georgetown University in Washington. It shows Islamic terminology we could consider *orientalist*.

The Orientalist translation of Arabic terminology is only one of the elements, or one of the tools used in the creation of the "orientalist ideology" and of its vision of what is Arabian and Islamic. No doubt, the resulting translation is the least conflicting of the elements making up that orientalist ideology, in the sense that, if there are errors in the translation of the Arabic terminology, these can only be attributed to the ignorance of

the Arabic language on behalf of the orientalist/translator who is using the terms incorrectly —without taking into consideration evil intentions or personal interest in a term or the would-be meaning. At the same time that the translation of Arabic terminology demonstrates the orientalist's degree of knowledge of the Arabic language, it also indicates their idea of Islam. In other words, how that particular orientalist understands Islam, and from there, by comparing the equivalent used for the terms in Arabic with the true meaning of the original, the degree of success or error in their understanding of Islam can be deduced, or rather, of the referred to Islamic texts of the translation.

The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān as an example of orientalist translation

We consulted the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (hereinafter *EOQ*) and confirmed that very few Arabic terms appeared (in fact the few terms that do not appear in Arabic have been transcribed in Latin characters). Likewise, the terms that did appear were the translation that the *EOQ* editors had chosen for the words in Arabic, which, in our view, violates one of the basic principles of translation and research, which is that the original must always be the reference for the translation and not the translation the reference for the original. In addition to this, we are of the opinion that there are a series of mistakes in the *EOQ* with regards to the selection of the terms, aside from the actual translation, since many of the essential terms linked to Islam or the Qur'ān do not appear in the *EOQ*, or offer an extremely brief explanation.

To legitimize the quality of the work that appears in the *EOQ*, we made a list of words in Arabic, paying attention to the importance of these words in the Qur'ān; next, we verified how they had been translated and explained in the *EOQ*. To carry out our terminological analysis and to use key scientific arguments in our support, we consulted works by Muslim specialists who comment (*tafāsīr*) on the Qur'ān and other dictionaries and encyclopaedias about Islam in Spanish and in English. With these and other works we considered important to approach this research, we compared the definitions, the translation and the explanation of our list of terms with those of the *EOQ*.

The terms selected for our study include:

- *Amr* (امر): issue, order.
- *Tašābuh* (تشابه): similarity or figurative sense.

- *Mulk* (ملك): dominion or political power.
- *Hukm* (حكم): disposition, decision, sentence.
- *Ta'wīl* (تأويل): interpretation.

Nevertheless, we have discarded other terms from this list—which from our point of view we considered essential for analysis to their importance in the Qur'ān—because of the limitations imposed by time and space. In the end, we have decided not to include these words, thus leaving the door open to future research. These referred to words include قائم [*qā'im*] (responsible for/before), the verb غلب [*galaba*] (to conquer, to defeat/vanquish) سلطان [*sulān*] (to prevail in the same sense of other verbs) and سحر [*sir*] (in the Qur'ān, prestidigitation and illusionism (magic) while outside of the Qur'ān it can be understood as witchcraft). All the same, it is interesting to note that terms such as *galaba* and *qā'im*, although, as just indicated, they are of particular relevance and appear with a great number of entries in the Qur'ān, these words are hardly worthy of mention in the *EOQ*, or in the other encyclopaedias consulted. However, it must be stated that *galaba* is explained briefly under the entry “Byzantines” (2001: 266) in the *EOQ*. Surprisingly, this term does not appear in the Qur'ān. Thus, we highlight that western arabists do not render the same importance to the treatment of certain Koranic terms that the Muslim specialists do.

We have noticed that certain terms of major relevance in the Qur'ān and in Islam do not appear in the *EOQ*, or in any of the legal and Islamic dictionaries in Spanish consulted. In our opinion, this demonstrates that there is a comprehension and perception problem on behalf of European culture in general, and Western languages in particular when it comes to Arabic and Islamic terminology, at least in the case of the supposed specialists. We started with the hypothesis that this problem might be due to two main causes:

- a) Error (in the comprehension and knowledge) of one of the essential tools needed in the scientific study of the Qur'ān, which is the Arabic language.
- b) Distorted and biased view of Arabic-Islamic cultural realities of the lexicographical entries analyzed on the part of Arabic or orientalist authors.

Likewise, another objective of our article is to demonstrate the existence of a bibliographical gap in such an important topic as the treatment and translation of

Islamic terminology and, in particular, of the Koranic terminology, above all within the framework of Orientalist studies. In addition to this, we must mention our intention of demonstrating the lack of a series of valid, objective and scientific guidelines when elaborating a dictionary/encyclopaedia of Islam or of the Qur'ān, so that, as a result, it offers a quality product based on objective knowledge.

We considered that to obtain a collection of terms in two different languages, not only with Arabic but with any other language, it is necessary to go to specialized sources in the language of origin so that the work does not lack objectivity and scientific rigor. In the Arabic language, when elaborating a dictionary/glossary/encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān and in selecting the terms that will be used in its make-up, the works of scholarly Muslims is vital. Thus, knowing and understanding their point of view, as well as how they treat and the interest they show about the different Koranic terms becomes equally necessary. For this, it is necessary to bear in mind the *tafasir* (comments or explanation and interpretation) they have carried out in historical, political and religious texts about Islamic and Koranic doctrine. By examining the texts written by specialists in the original language, we will avoid falling into scientific analogies and misrepresentations and be able to endow a work of this type with a correct selection of the terms.

The situation of Islamic terminology in translation: the orientalist paradigm

Until now, orientalism —as mentioned previously, in its traditional form and successive rebirths and expansions— has been and is the normal semblance of (in its two meanings of habit and norm) Islam in the West. If it is possible for there to be another type of reception of Islam and its understanding, without having to fully accept it, this constitutes a matter that, for the time being, lacks an answer. In other words, the paradigm represented by orientalist studies, and among these the translations of Islamic texts, provides the only scenario for understanding Islam for all those that, using these orientalist studies, arise from outside of this belief, or even included in it but when they have no other means of access as is the case of many western Muslims, whether converts or the children of immigrants. With all the prejudices that this could spark, it is essential to recognize that this is the situation and that any reflection on the matter must bear this in mind. Undoubtedly the Orientalist paradigm works in a different way in

each researcher's individual case and need not necessarily become a hindrance, nor does not hinder, at least in terms of result, although it should effect the ideological principles used as a starting point, to achieve highly satisfactory results for the scientific attitude. Regarding this matter, Roser Nebot suggests the possibility of seeking out a new paradigm that allows for the study and definition of the Islamic reality from another point of view when stating that:

“[the current Orientalist paradigm] continues to be fully valid in terms of fidelity to its origins, but cannot avoid creating doubt and suspicion that it does not have to be the sole means of studying Islam without being a Muslim” (Roser Nebot, 2010: 101).

It must not be forgotten that orientalism has been, and continues to be, the institutional response of western powers to Islam. By no means is it the natural reaction of non-Muslims in contact with Islam, whether as individuals or within their social dimension. At the same time, we must not forget that these days, the orientalist paradigm does not abide by the limits between Muslim and non Muslim. Currently, many of the best representatives of this paradigm have Islamic names and are, in fact, Muslims; some situations that escape or move away from this cognitive paradigm are not bound to Islam with any more than the constraints of scientific interest. In this sense, when mention is made of the orientalist paradigm, it is not referring to a personal attitude of the researcher or translator, although this could be the case, but rather to a *modus operandi* acquired during training, which, in most of its manifestations, works in an unconsciously.

The reflection of Muslims has generated, through historical experience, a large block of Islamic terminology. This terminology indicates the varied possibilities that the Qur'ān and Islam have been received to date. It represents the first foundation upon which the specialists on the subject, whether Muslim or not, must base their opinions and thoughts in this respect since it is the working material for new research in this field. To do this, it is necessary to understand each term and each idea in its exact reach and context and, in turn, be able to find the best way to translate it. Moreover, Muslims are not limited to their ideological presuppositions when carrying out their work. They have always borne in mind and appreciated those institutions, uses or ideas that, in other civilizations, have demonstrated effectiveness in keeping with the principles of the Islam. This evaluation

of foreign cultural discoveries must take place within the wealth of experience and thought that the West has undergone.

Based on the above, and within the heart of Islamic studies, the renovation of its approaches to the doctrine of Islam would have to be duplicated, as they affect both the most appropriate understanding of the Islamic lexicon, as well as the review of the equivalent meaning glossaries that have arisen in the various European languages.

This question is revealed to be much more momentous than one would think, since endowing strange meanings to the terms used in any discourse almost completely modifies the message sought by its originator. In many western translations of classic Islamic texts, it is obvious that neither the historical context nor the ideological meaning of the language used was taken into account. Words have been understood, not based upon the meaning they had when the writer wrote them, but rather based on (the translator's) knowledge and academic experience; an example of the acceptance of Western academic speech in linguistic strategies. This interference in semantic values has resulted in the misrepresentation or an understanding guided by academic or ideological prejudices of these said Islamic sources and the substitution of their real content for another, mistaken interpretation.

In most passages of the Qur'ān, it is of interest that in the classic comments on the revealed text, various meanings may coincide in a single clause. In practice, those various meanings become opinions argued from different angles of scientific research and expressed within historical-cultural circumstances.

The Koran: a challenge for the translator

Firstly, it is important to differentiate between the Qur'ān and a translation of the Qur'ān. This is a common focus from the Muslim point of view, which contrasts with the Christian point of view by which the Bible is the Bible, not matter what language it is written in. For Muslims, the divine word adopts a specific Arabic form, and that form is as elemental as the meaning that transmitted by the words themselves. Therefore, only the Qur'ān in Arabic is the Qur'ān, and translations are simply interpretations or explanation of the meanings of the Qur'ān in another language. For Muslims, only the Qur'ān in Arabic represents the Word of God, the Revelation. All translations into other

languages are no more than mere adaptations or interpretations and therefore lack any sacred value.

As has been mentioned, a translation of the Qur'ān is not the Qur'ān, but rather an interpretation of its meaning. The Qur'ān has been translated dozens of times into English and other European languages, among these to Spanish. Each translation represents the way in which a person understands the text. Each translation is different from all the others and none of them is, in itself, the Qur'ān. There is only one Word, but there are as many interpretations of the Word as there are readers.

Above anything else, the Qur'ān is a text to be read aloud or to be recited by heart, following its rules of enunciation (*ta'ywīd*); to be listened to, to be learned and meditated through hearing and not sight. Those who wish to interpret the Qur'ān must undergo harsh training to penetrate into Koranic speech; this training is accompanied by an interiorization of the Qur'ān by reciting and meditating its meanings. It is not, therefore, a book, but a text, a fact of speech, in the Saussurian sense of the term, an exponent of linguistic excellence in the language it uses, and it must be treated as such.

The Qur'ān responds perfectly to the treatment of language as a symbolic system of vocal-auditory support where writing is a secondary element. As an auditory text, the Qur'ān is revealed as a discourse made and designed to demonstrate the capacity of the human language to teach and warn by means of oral reality, which, at the same time, allows the final intentions to be perfectly understood.

Arabic, contrary to what is believed, does not represent the language of a people, although there is a great mass of Arabic speaking people. Above all else, Arabic is the language of a transcendent ideology; Islam. It is the language of the professing flock: the Muslims. This is as much as saying that Arabic is the means to express a way of thinking and of seeing the world that even superimposes on the way of thought and vision of the world for those who learn it. This does not mean that you have to accept Islam to communicate in Arabic. However, it must be understood that this language constitutes, especially in its structures and resources an expression of Islam. A good command of Arabic will never be attained if this Islamic component is rejected. This aspect is so important that even Arab Christians and Jews are forced to be highly

cultured in Islamic aspects if they want to achieve a high linguistic level in this language. No one should be surprised by this circumstance, since, to a lesser extent, it is the same in Spanish and other languages whose speakers are, for the most part, Christian and whose literature is peppered with biblical quotes and thoughts. These quotes and thoughts have become embedded in general language by way of communicative strategies, having, on occasion, lost their original religious meaning.

This is the case with Arabic, but to a greater degree, with more strength and relevance, since Koranic Arabic makes up:

- a) The style pattern of the learned language.
- b) The literary pattern of aesthetic taste.
- c) The source of grammatical structures and linguistic analysis.
- d) The lexicalization pattern for a variety of word types: Idiomatic expressions, semantic copying, Arabized word loaning, neologisms, phraseology.
- e) The emotional experience melting pot of Arabic speakers.

In our opinion, it is therefore crucial to teach and translate Arabic from this reality and to use the Qur'ān, texts or Koranic speech, not as a book that expresses a particularly transcendent idea, but as a matrix of linguistic knowledge of Arabic, so as to, from there, go on to the study of the communicative phenomena of the Arabic language: idiolects, socialists, registers, dialects, etc.

Arabic belongs to the category of languages with an extensive tradition and a well-defined style. This means that learning such a language must be carried out in terms of knowledge and acquisition of this linguistic-literary tradition and the special communicative strategies of the language and that, when referring to Arabic, only take form in the Koranic style. In fact, this style works with institutional status, which sanctions the fortune or misfortune of the communicative actions implemented in Arabic, according to its greater or lesser agreement with the accepted combinations in the defined style of the language (here, Koranic). In other words, what is correct in Arabic is stated in the Koranic style.

Speaking of the attitude of the translator of this type of text, any translator faced with ideological texts such as the Qur'ān (or the *Sunna* —the behaviour of the Prophet),

during the translation process, is immersed in a translation situation. In this translation situation, the orientalist translators of classic Arabic texts follow, generally, an anomalous sequence when compared with what the translator's work should be.

According to the same author, in the case of a translation, the logical and correct procedure would be to apply the following sequence: read the text, understand the text, translate the text, read the translated text again and critically analyse the text. This latter part of the sequence is not the responsibility of the translator, but of person reading the translated language, who is more qualified to assess the exactness of a translation. However, the sequence followed by orientalist translating from Arabic is usually critique-translation-reading-understanding. Each one of these stages is carried out by the translator, who hardly leaves any margin for the reader to reach their own conclusions.

Upon altering the natural and logical sequence, the first sequence, for the second, anomalous and teleological (with prior objectives), apart from the intentions or aim (the function or objective) the translation is undertaken; from insufficiently developed reading skills, the consequence is an incorrect reading. In fact, the first strategy of a translator is that they must be a good reader; only good readers can be good translators. With regards to this, the words of Professor Tim Parks in 1997 book published in Washington by Cassell titled *Translating Style: The English Modernists and Their Italian Translations* states:

“The processes of criticism and translation are mutually enlightening. Comparison of the differences between original and translation provides material for reflections that lead straight to the heart of a writer’s poetics. Equally, a thorough critical analysis of an original text gives a translator a better sense of what it is he should be translating” (Parks, 1997: 201).

Linguistic and cultural prejudices affect the translation process and its quality, as no translator can avoid a personal relationship, to a varying degree, with the text being translated. This personal relationship affects the choice of the lexicon, the syntax and the style of the text into the translated language. Being that the translator is subject to the same emotional activity as other humans, the diverse empathy with the text, its author or its message decisively intervenes in the elaboration of their version of the original text and in the scope of their particular satisfaction with regards to that version.

When it comes to translating classic Arabic texts, more especially authoritative texts, the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*, there are a series of prejudices, if not preconceived ideas. We all have preconceived ideas when something new is introduced or that is still unknown to us, even though it is the first we have contact with it. Those preconceived ideas, using them as a working hypothesis or guidelines, help us to better understand and compare the new information and the discoveries that we make upon entering a new field. Only after comparing these preconceived ideas with the reality of the encounter do these disappear, or remain, become reinforced, altered, or weakened.

On the contrary, prejudices either remain or are intensified and harden as we learn more of that which we study or contemplate. Here is where the problem of prejudice resides to the extent that it hinders interaction with the facts as they really are and, therefore, the judgment produced will carry the imprint of that distorted vision. This distortion will increase even more in the translation of our judgment from one language to other; that is to say, from one viewpoint and behaviour to another.

Many prejudices about other cultures come from poor translations. In translators, these prejudices in turn incite new, poor translations.

“When we move to another language, ideas are arranged and produced differently. To learn a foreign language is to make a trip to other habits, other forms of thought and expression” (Brini 2000: 492).

The orientalist ideology and its role in understanding /translating the Qur'ān

One of the main questions affecting translations of the Qur'ān into western languages, more specifically into Spanish, is the choice of the translation paradigm and the comprehension paradigm of Koranic text, not in Spanish, but in Arabic. Influenced and constrained as we are by Jewish-Christian —or rather ecclesiastical— tradition, our sense of history and related historical events has this same Jewish-Christian tradition. With regards to the Qur'ān, this means accepting the Qur'ān and its genesis, both as a sacred text, which means a scope of ideas, similar in all aspects, *mutatis mutandis*, to that of the Bible and, especially, to the Gospel. The genesis of the Qur'ān is posed differently to that which happened with the Bible, both in time and in space. This all has a direct influence on the internal structure of the Qur'ān itself. Muslim specialists do not accept the constant comparison between the typologies that produce the Islamic

doctrine and the Western experience, whether theoretical or practical, for two main reasons:

- a) The specificity of the cultural positions in Islam places this at the same intellectual and civilization level that any other unique contribution by other groups of civilizations or ideologies.
- b) The fact that on occasion some of these stances of the Qur'ān coincide with other notable stances in theories belonging to other cultural environments, does not necessarily give rise to the exchange of terminology that seeks to prove an equivalence of concepts that could lead to identifying these aspects of the Qur'ān with others that are valid for other civilizations or religions. This attitude leads to confusion about the subject matter under study and the explanation given, thus leading to reductionism that gives way to greater ignorance about the object of study being analyze. It must be highlighted that the similarity that can be found between two different linguistic bodies does not necessarily mean that both share the same perspective. The use of common elements does not reflect a common conception.

This double error in the definition of the historical paradigm involving the Qur'ān unavoidably bears a corrupted understanding of the Qur'ān itself as far as the comprehension of its content, with regards to the treatment of subjects and motives already used in the Jewish-Christian Bible, with innovatively adapts to the Arabic taste when the Qur'ān was revealed. This is something that obviously leads to not understanding Koranic wording and its substitution for a semantic content with a Jewish-Christian ideology bias.

Therefore, we are talking about a *Christian, Jewish or Jewish-Christian* reading of the Qur'ān or, better stated, reading a more Jewish-Christianized Qur'ān. Thus, it would not be a case of reading the Qur'ān while bearing in mind a scientific perspective or the historical or sociological data that the Qur'ān itself and how it treats the subjects and the choice of subject, provides and the historical news about the socio-political and ideological situation at the time of Koranic revelation.

“Of all the great literature of the world, the literature produced by the Islamic system is perhaps the least accessible to European and American readers” (André Levefere 1997: 95)

Remember that translations of the Qur’ān are the main source of the moral and ethical education of the Muslims who only speak the translated language and who do not understand Arabic. The same holds true with all types of researchers (historians, sociologists, etc.) who to establish their thesis or corroborate their hypotheses, have access to the Qur’ān through translations only. This situation means that the translation of the Qur’ān seeks to be “adapted” from the original but within the limits of “acceptability” in the register selected for its conversion to the end language. To obtain a convergent “adaptation” and “acceptability,” there is no hindrance, or better said, need to use, in the analysis of the Koranic text prior to the translation (as a text with original linguistic and stylistic cohesion), the advances in linguistics, style and literary theory.

Islam is almost always judged, not from the positive data that it presents, but from the point of view of the Jewish-Christian experience and historiography, and within this, by means of those concepts that have reached us as orthodoxies, without bearing in mind the historical heterodoxies that have been contemplated or undergone, whether they have lasted or not. This not only implies missing out on or rejecting the opportunity for a realistic and truthful understanding of Islam but also, it would perhaps be more transcendent for Jews-Christians to learn unknown or disregarded aspects of their own religion or access those they already know from an unknown and innovative perspective, which would no doubt open up new possibilities of experiencing their spirituality. Thus, we believe that more exact conclusions could be reached with regards to Islam, among other usable strategies, if there were direct communication with the beliefs of pre-Islamic Arabia rather than with Christianity and Judaism, especially in terms of the current day official version.

This stems from the fact that orientalist, having been educated for the most part in Christianity and Judaism —whether sociologists or cultural and perhaps even more importantly, historiographers— when they translate, work on a selection of Koranic meanings, or other Islamic texts that agree with those that can be understood in more or less average terms. With this method, a “canon” is created (according to the meaning given to the term based on the theory of manipulation) of semantic terms and references

that constitutes the nucleus of the translation and the understanding of the text. This, in turn, provides the structure upon which the interpretation of the declaration being translated is laid. These terms and references respond to Christian and Jewish notions—with their closest socio-religious and historiographical references—and to the linguistic and notional constituents of their own languages. All other fragments of the Qur’ān, or other texts whose meaning and sense are all but invisible, are translated in the light of this first canon of translation, which becomes the true mould for the translation, with no further thought. This procedure does not revert back to, but rather it distorts both ends of the research effort: the compression of the original text and its translation. Occasionally, this is contemplated in orientalism and, for the benefit of everyone; such reflections must be carried out at some point.

The distorted behaviour of western arabists causes many unique aspects of the Qur’ān, in its nature as a special literary and religious work, to be completely out of focus and rebound on the impoverishment of its characteristics in the eyes of the arabist/translator. This even happens in the case of western Muslims, among them Spaniards. However, it also happens the other way around. In other words, there is a faulty understanding of numerous ideas that arise in the West on behalf of Muslims and Arabs, due to two main factors: self-sufficient reductionism that is similar and parallel to that of the West and the acritical fascination about everything from the West. We use the word *acritical* here in the sense of failing to assimilate those ideas coming from the West in all their consequences, largely because expectations are totally different or extremely different from Western expectations. Overcoming these two obstacles is also the task of Arabic translators.

There are verses of the Qur’ān that warn, in a clearly eschatological manner, against the negative consequences that could arise from hiding part of the meaning of the Koranic message when faithfully transmitting that message, whether or not you agree with it, accept it or criticize that message (Qur’ān 2:73-75). These verses are perfectly applicable to translators. Of course, it is not a matter of translating each and every nuance, or even certain interpretations of the Koranic texts, but rather, at least the overall meaning of those texts with no cutting or trimming. As everyone involved in translation knows, there is always a certain degree of what in English is known as “*lost in translation*.” In other words, there is always something that gets lost during the actual

translation process. This English translating expression covers all those aspects of meaning, nuance or emphasis which, for one reason or another, cannot be transferred into (or expressed in) the target language. It also indicates the loss of meaning when we verbalize, as we turn our thoughts into words. “*Lost in translation*” includes all the intentional and significant inflections that cannot possibly be transmitted to others, whether in the same language or into a different language.

That is the reason why Muslims do not consider a translated version of the Qur’ān as the revealed text and they are always referred back to the original the text in Arabic. In other words, and following Searle’s theory of speech acts, which he lays out with Austin’s philosophy of ordinary language, only the Qur’ān written Arabic has illocutive and perlocutive force. That is to say, the reader is only using the true Qur’ān when it is enunciated in its original Arabic rather than a translation and, its commandments or its asseverations only have force when they are understood in the original language of composition. It must be borne in mind that the illocutive and perlocutive quality of the original Qur’ān must be decisive when making decisions with regards to the options used to translate a fragment of the Qur’ān.

With the abovementioned information, we would like to state that translators and translations who are faithful to their work and their role as mediators are needed. This task is not only focused upon transmitting from Arabic and into Arabic what is written or said today, but, also, everything that has been written and said up until now, with the single aim of establishing communication between the Arabic and other civilizations, given that this communication has never taken place in the way it should have been carried out, as E. Said explains in his book, *Orientalism*.

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