

Quranic Verses in English for Academic Purpose

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ABSTRACT

This paper is essentially a discussion of the language and literary aspects of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran in relation to the original Arabic text. It also seeks to establish the suitability of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts in the teaching of imagery, especially at Islamic institutions.

BACKGROUND

Muslim educationists feel it is reasonable for students to try to make the Quran as a much a part of their lives as possible. Thus, they would no doubt consider it a great achievement if the Quran could be fitted to a large extent into any curriculum, especially at Islamic institutions, in any medium of study- including the English language and Literature curriculum.

It is important for Muslim students to have many opportunities to read and study the Quran along with their regular coursework. If this is not possible in the language of the Quran, which is Arabic, then these opportunities should be made available through the translations of the meaning of the Quran in other languages. This paper seeks to establish the suitability of using the English translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts in the teaching of figurative language, specifically imagery, to undergraduate ESL students, especially at Islamic institutions.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE TO THE FIELD OF ESL

Broadly defined and as mentioned by Laurence Perrine, a figure of speech is any way of saying something other than the ordinary or most direct way. Perrine goes on to say that figurative language is language using figures of speech and it is a form of expression that often provides a more effective means of saying what we mean than does direct statement (Perrine, 1983:571). The use of figurative language shows mastery in the language.

There is no doubt that to learn, understand and use figures of speech, one has to have acquire a good command of the language. Figures of speech enhance one's ability to communicate expressively and creatively in English; they enable the language user to prove or display his/her mastery of the English language.

Figurative language is language that contains figures of speech, for example, metaphor, simile, etc. which are expressions that make comparisons or associations meant to be

interpreted imaginatively rather than literally. It is reasonable to deduce that figurative language is essentially the language of poetry. Images that go beyond the fairly simple identifications of metaphor and simile are called symbols.

As discussed by Perrine, besides the fact that figures of speech help one to communicate more effectively, they also help us to exercise our imagination, add emotional intensity to otherwise merely informative statements, and bring imagery into verse which is a way to make poetry more sensuous; Figures of speech are also a means of concentrating thought and/or feeling, in other words, a way of saying much briefly (Perrine, 1983:578).

In the field of ESL, teachers are often on the look-out for appropriate literary texts to help students develop their ability in using the English language competently. Literary texts selected from any of the four major genres (novels, short stories, drama and poetry) are beneficial to the learner. The English language translations of the meaning of the Quran can be exploited in some of the courses being taught in the ESL curriculum to teach both imagery and Islam. The figurative language used in the Quran- its metaphors, similes, symbols, etc.- can certainly be looked at in more detail. Translators of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran, in striving to put across the closest meaning they can of the original Quran, do not neglect to use figurative language effectively. There are many techniques for teaching a language or aspects of the language in an ESL classroom . According to D.A. Wilkins, there is no single best way of teaching a language . He says that language teaching is a pragmatic business and what works is good, what does not work is bad. Nevertheless, he makes the statement that “ the ultimate aim of learning a second language must generally be to achieve the same flexibility, the same linguistic creativity that the native speaker possesses” (Wilkins, 1974:3).

Using appropriate literary texts in the ESL classroom can be beneficial to the learner from the perspective of both literature and language studies. Literary texts provide examples of language in use and thus can reinforce language learning as well as help to sharpen students’ aesthetic, intellectual and moral sensibilities since literature deals with life and issues in life, human beliefs, values and concerns. Literature can also help learners to develop or stimulate a reading habit.

Selecting literary texts for an ESL classroom is the first step in attempting to create a positive relationship between the text and the reader. Appropriate literary texts can help make language teaching and learning easier especially if these texts provide interest, context and variety for the learner. If the learner is interested in the text, he/she will be motivated to participate in class activities. The teacher will then be better able to organize activities which provide a context for the learners to get involved in the literature. Here the teacher’s aim is to help the learner understand the language and context of the literary text. Once this is achieved, the learners will be confident about delving further into the text for a deeper understanding which can stimulate their creativity and make them better able to analyse and evaluate the text itself. The learner will then be willing to read, explore and study other literary texts in the target language in and outside of the classroom. It is important that the learner enjoys interacting with the text because then learning reaches an optimal level.

When selecting appropriate literary texts, several objectives will have to be borne in mind. H.L. Moody discusses at length the selection of literary texts which revolves around three aspects- language, psychology and background (Moody, 1971:14). Briefly,

what can be expected from the teacher is that he/she should be able to estimate the language capacity or proficiency of any group of students and make his/her selection on that basis. In terms of psychology, Moody states that the teacher should select texts that will appeal to the stage of psychological development which a particular class has reached. For example, at the generalizing stage (from 16 years of age onwards), students are not only interested in practical details, but are prepared to abstract, generalize, to search for the underlying causes of phenomena to make moral judgements, and generally, to philosophize. Concerning the background aspect of selecting literary texts, Moody makes the point that literature offers one of the best possible ways for people living in one environment to learn something of the lives and problems of people in other parts of the world; and it is the teacher's responsibility to be able to guide his /her students through the changing scenes of life in whatever text the teacher chooses. It is important that a teacher lists his/her objectives before selecting a literary text because as Thomas K. Adeyanju says, "the whole process of outlining our objectives as clearly as we can is to guide us in choosing the literary materials that can best achieve them" (Adeyanju, 1978:136).

THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF THE MEANING OF THE QURAN TO TEACH IMAGERY TO ESL STUDENTS

The Quran contains an abundance of imagery. Imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of minds and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. Many Quranic images are conveyed literally. These constitute descriptive imagery whereby they clarify or give a vivid picture of something. Then, there are images which are conveyed by figurative language, such as in metaphors, similes, symbols, etc. Figurative and descriptive imagery when projected, appeal to one's senses. A Quranic image, like other images, may be visual (pertaining to the eye), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), or gustatory (taste). As mentioned above, there are images which are conveyed through the use of figurative language usually using these literary devices- metaphors, similes and symbols. As readers of the Quran, whether in Arabic or in any other language, one needs to identify and be able to interpret figurative language so as to achieve understanding and to be able to extract the deepest meaning of the message of the Quran.

It is important for ESL teachers to find as wide a range as possible of literary texts to use in the classroom because literary texts exemplify language in daily use. The rich variety of materials or literary texts can offer a wide range of activities so that the students will find pleasure and enjoyment in language and literature studies.

An ESL teacher wants to help learners develop their proficiency in order to use the target language competently. However, it should not just stop here. The teacher should strive to help the learner his/ her ability to constructively argue, converse and discuss with native speakers of the target language.

According to Earl W. Stevick, "learning a language (or anything else) is a matter of holding onto new words, new patterns, new skills and meaning" (Stevick, 1986:2). Memory is important in language learning and memory depends on mental imagery. In the article, "Imagine if....-Changing Assumptions and Learning Styles Through Imagery," McGillick and Mac Culum say that the mind works with images. They go on

to say that “non- verbal thinking precedes the development of language and continues to be the most important way of thinking throughout life despite the apparent dominance of verbal thought”. McGillick and Mac Culum also state that ideas that come to the minds of many great thinkers come in the form of images or feelings rather than verbal concepts (McGillick and Mac Culum, 1993:12).

Quranic imagery from the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran can be used as a literary text for the teaching of imagery. Specifically, these Quranic images:

1. Help learners to visualize what is mentioned in the Quran to encourage them to do good and avoid evil,
2. Provide a suitable teaching strategy since comparing and contrasting the images are possible,
3. Make teaching Quranic content while exploiting the figurative language in the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran possible,
4. Spark interest among students since the Quran is a familiar book to Muslim students and for many, it is an important part of their lives.

The techniques used to accommodate the Quranic images can be advantageous in these aspects:

1. Accessibility. A teacher needs only to make copies of specific verses from the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran that are intended for use for that particular lesson. Alternatively, a teacher can use some useful websites to download the material.
2. The techniques used to teach Quranic images are easy to organize.
3. The techniques used generate a good amount of English language use and communication among students.
4. Quranic images would appeal to the interest of Muslim students, in particular, since studying them is new in ESL.

USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

There are alternative ways to retrieve relevant information if one were to access or look into some useful websites.

1.English Index Categorization Alphabetical List of Topics in the Quran:

http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran/quran_index.html

2.Quranic Recitation with Translation in English:

On this website, if you scroll to the bottom, you will see a section for “Recitations with translations”. They have very comprehensive collection.

<http://quranicaudio.com/>

If you want to have more control, for example be able to listen from anywhere in the surah by selecting verse by verse, go to the site, launch quran explorer and in the translation drop down (on the right side) select the “Eng-Pictall-Audio”

<http://quranexplorer.com/>

Like the previous one, this one lets you select the surah and the verse but whats different here is that it will only play the english translation and not the arabic one with it. Go to options and select “Ibrahim Walk” as the recitation

<http://lightuponlight.com/QuranReader/>

3. Word for Word Quran Translation:

Non pdf version. Lets you play the audio as well as click on each word and hear its pronunciation. Also lets you navigate so you can jump to any verse of any specified surah

<http://www.allahsquran.com/learn/#>

(New) You can listen to the word by word translation from Uztazah Farhat Hashmi course. The best thing is that you can now listen to the word by word translation of a single verse or verses.

http://www.alhudapk.com/tqaudio_db/default.asp

4. Read the Quran with Translation:

This website has shaheeh international translation which I consider to be the best one available. It also lets you search the quran as well as play the audio by select the verse

<http://quranonline.net>

These websites have good look and feel and simulate a real reading experience such as the ability to “flip” the pages and zoom. The last one has color coded tajweed as well as madina mushaf.

<http://flashquran.com>

<http://quranflash.com>

This one claims to have verified the actual verses and has the right harakahs and symbols. It also lets you search by root words and play the audio

<http://www.tanzil.info/>

This one has translation in many languages

<http://quran.nu>

Has translation in many languages and recitations from various reciters especially in Urdu

<http://quranexplorer.com/>

5. Word for Word Quran translation

http://www.studyquran.co.uk/Quran_ArabicEnglish_WordforWord_Translation.html

Quran in PDF are ideal for offline use i.e. without internet connection.

6. Entire Quran in Arabic without translation

http://www.quranpda.com/Quran_Arabic_InPak_PDF.zip

7. Quran with English Translation

http://www.quranpda.com/Quran_Arabic_Eng_PDF.zip

(New) You can read the Quran in many languages all at once side by side. This website also has shaheeh international translation. The website is very simple and easy to use.

<http://quran.com/>

(New) Quran translation from the printing press in Medina. You can read the translation in English, Urdu and in other languages.

<http://www.qurancomplex.com/Quran/Targama/Targama.asp?>

CONCLUSION

In the academic setting, especially at Islamic institutions, attempts have been made to incorporate Islam into all courses. From the discussion in this paper, one is brought to see that the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran could make good literary texts for the teaching of figurative language, specifically imagery, to ESL students at the undergraduate level. The use of the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts in the ESL curriculum would be a sure way of incorporating Islam to a larger extent.

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