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A Contrastive Linguistic Study of Cultural and Stylistic Problems Encountered in Translating Quranic Culture-Bound Words into English: Polygamy as a Model

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ABSTRACT

The current study intends to explore through contrastive linguistic analysis some cultural and stylistic difficulties and problems encountered in translating Quranic culture-bound words such as Polygamy into English specifically in the work of Mohammed. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Mohammed. M Pickthall and Mohammed Khan and Mohammed Taj Al-Din Al-Hilali. Also, the study aims to identify the translation strategies employed by the three translators in rendering the Quranic culture-bound words in general and the lexeme Polygamy in particular. Moreover, the study revealed that the Qur'anic culture-bound words are remarkable occurrence in the Holy Quran and that the process of rendering them into English is generally problematic and difficult for the reasons such as linguistic and cultural differences and discrepancies. Finally, the study showed the three translators are not fully aware of the Quranic culture-bound words such as Polygamy and their implications, leading them to fall into the trap of inaccurate lexicalizations.

Keywords: *Quranic, Polygamy, Linguistic Analysis, Culture-Bound Words, Translation Strategies*

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1. Introduction

The translation is a hard and difficult job especially when it comes to Islamic *sacred texts*, such as the Holy Quran and Prophetic Hadith, which involve that the translators have great breadth and perfect knowledge of both languages, along with a full understanding of the tafisr (exegesis) according to Turner (1997). Rendering Quranic culture-bound words into English has attracted much attention in translation studies due to its atypical nature. Markedly, translating Quranic culture-bound words into English is challenging for translators of the meaning of the Holy Quran due to the cultural divergences between the Arabic language, as a source language, and English language, as a target language as per Khan (2008) who asserts that:

Certain lexical items of Arabic are purely culture-bound in the spatial and temporal contexts and whose translating may result in the ambiguity of the MessageAs it has already been mentioned that the Qur'anic terms and imagery are untranslatable. In such a situation, ultimately the translator; having no other option, paraphrases them which affects the dimension of the divinity of the Message (p.11).

According to Abdelaal (2019) "Translating such culture-bound terms is challenging on all levels. However, the challenge is higher when it comes to *Quranic culture-bound words (the italics are mine)* Furthermore, from linguistic factors Arabic language and the English language are different stylistically, pragmatically Morpho-Syntactically, Semotactically, and phonologically; whilst from non-linguistic factors, they are cultural, setting, language families differently as well. The Arabic language is a Semitic language whereas the English language is Indo-European. (Al-Saidi, 2013, Alhaj, 2019). According to Mahmoud (2008) "Arabic and English belong to two different language families. This comes as a result of two different linguistic communities and cultures." Most culture-bound words are rendition impenetrable, but some of these culture-bound words can be linguistically mastered and adopted into the target text. Unquestionably, the cultural stylistic problems bring about the succession in rendition from the Arabic language into the English language and vice versa.

In nutshell, rendering Quranic culture-bound words into English constitutes a big challenge for translators of the Holy



Quran and therefore, hence, some suitable translation strategies need to be employed.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is assumed that the problems in rendering culture-bound words into English are caused by two reasons, viz., the ability to recognize and interpret a culture-bound word correctly, and how to render the various features of the meaning of the source language culture-bound word into the target language (Alhaj, 2014, Baker, 1992)

It also assumed that the translators of the meanings of the Holy Quran into English face many stylistic problems and constraints in rendering Quranic culture-bound words. These stylistic problems and constraints are implanted in the process of rendering the Quranic text to the extent that at some stage, translators of the Holy Quran assumed that culture-bound words have made the rendition of the Quranic text unattainable goal.

1.2 Aims of the Research

The current study aims to attain the following objectives

- a) To probe the cultural and stylistic problems encountered in translation of Abdel Haleem, Khan and Hilali, and Pickthall of some Quranic culture-bound words into English?
- b) To explore how rendering Quranic culture-bound words such as *tā'adud azzawjāt* Polygamy into English constitutes a big challenge for translators of the Holy Quran
- c) To investigate the translation strategies employed in rendering Quranic culture-bound words into English.

1.3 Research Questions

To meet the stated objectives, the following research questions were raised:

1. What cultural and stylistic problems are encountered in the translations of Abdel Haleem, Khan, and Hilali, and Pickthall of some Qur'anic culture-bound words such as *tā'adud azzawjāt* Polygamy into English?
2. To what extent does rendering the Quranic culture-bound word *tā'adud azzawjāt* Polygamy into English constitute a big challenge for translators of the Holy Quran?
3. What is the influence of employing translation strategies to cope with these Cultural and Stylistic problems?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 The Concept of Stylistics

The term "stylistic" emerged in literature for the first time during the nineteenth century. The lexeme "stylistique"

was used by Littré in his French Dictionary in 1872. (Khan, 2008). Lately, 'stylistic' has obtained its proper sense, that is "linguistic study of the literary text. As Sharma (2005) notes:

Style has to do with those components of literary composition which give it an individual stamp, marking it as the work of a particular author and producing certain effects upon the readers. (p.123)

Stylistically speaking, Widdowson (1975) is of the opinion that stylistics is a domain where the two subjects Linguistics and Literary Criticism meet. It also gives a way of reflection between two disciplines - (English/ Arabic) Languages and Literature. The aim of stylistics is to connect the two approaches by expanding the linguist's literary institutions and the critic's linguistic studies and making their relationship clear and direct. According to Khan (2008) "both linguistic stylistics and literary criticism are inseparable and may prove supportive to promoting each other."

Style has a very intricate concept in linguistics. It refers to thematic and esthetic merits and values created by linguistic form, merits that transfer the writer's attitude, vision, and tone. Markedly, translators of literary texts should make a painstaking effort to achieve equivalence for style. Once the translators manage to convey the style to the most possible extent, make the language receptors of the target text aware not only of the meanings of the source text but also of spirits.

2.2 The Concept of Culture

Culturally speaking, the term Culture means the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression. (Newmark, 1988, Ghazala, 2015). Culture refers to all socially conditioned human life. (Snell -Hornby, 1988, Bassnett, 1980). A long time ago, a vital link between language and culture was found by Von Humboldt, Sapir, and Whorf, and that no language can exist unless it is rooted in the context of culture. In the same way, no culture can exist without having at its center, the structure of language, (Ghazala, 2015, Bassnett, 1991, Spair, 1956/ 1991, Whorf, 1991. Hofstede (1980) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (p. 21-23) Katan (1996, p.19) describes culture as:

... a shared mental or map of the world. The model is a system of congruent

and interred beliefs, values, strategies, and cognitive environments which guide the shared basis of behavior. Each aspect of culture is linked in a system to form a unifying context of a culture that identifies a person and his or her culture

In his turn, Gaber (2005) points out that "culture means all aspects of the life of a nation or group of people who live in a place and share the same language, beliefs, customs, traditions, and history". (p.18)

To conclude, culture and language are interlaced as there can be no language without culture and culture with language. It can be concluded that the cultural context can be recognized through probing the relation between thought, behavior, and language.

2.3 The Concept of Linguistic Culture

This concept relates to phonological, Morphosyntactic, and semantic factors in both source language and target language. These modules are the rules and precepts of traditional techniques for theoretical and practical translation. They also shape the fundamental of contrastive linguistic disciplines by which the source language and target language are juxtaposed such as comparing Arabic structure of sentences and with English sentence structure.

2.4 The Concept of culture-bound words

Referring only to the source language culture, (Taylor, 1998). Culture-bound terms are parts of cultural reference, the latter includes signs, gestures, and symbols among many others. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the culture-bound words in language must be grasped in connection with broad areas of language use that are of a more universal nature (Taylor, 1998,). If whole words of a language were culture-bound, then mutual understanding and rendition would surely be impossible. Aixela(1996) mentions that after all, if the culture-bound word or cultural-specific item is not relevant enough for the effort of comprehension required of the language receptors or readers, it would be omitted to avoid language receptors or readers confusion and misunderstanding. (As cited in Elewa 2015,p. 49) .

Newmark (1988) points out five areas that culture-bound items may come from: (1) ecology (flora, fauna, winds, etc.), (2) material culture (artifacts food clothes houses and towns, transport), (3) social culture (work and leisure), (4) organizations, customs, ideas (political, social, legal, religion or artistic), and (5) gestures and habits.

To sum up, culture-bound words can be defined as words or lexemes that refer to objects and ideas close to a specific cultural class but not beyond. These culture-bound words are considered difficult by many translators since their literal rendition may be too unfamiliar to language receptors.

2.5 Translation and Culture

The translation is always situated at the center of the intercultural position so that the study of the translation works together with the cultural studies. Durdureanu, (2011). Venuti (2012) describes how the goal of the translation process is to even transfer the culture of the source language text to the target language text. The thrust must therefore be identifiable and close to the language receptor. The process always requires risk, so a translator has to do his/her best to tackle the problems that may arise. These clarifications show that translators will encounter problems when rendering culture-bound terms from a source language to a target language. Bassnett (2002) points up that no language is entirely the same in social actuality, so rendering culture-bound terms from a source language to a target language will always be not an easy task because the translator must give correct, adequate, and appropriate rendition. The cultural divergences between Arabic and English are one of the problems and constraints for the Quranic culture-bound words translators. Markedly, the Quranic culture-bound words by nature are open to multiple interpretations. Baker (2018) suggests that the problems and constrain in rendering culture are caused by the ability to recognize and interpret a cultural expression correctly, and how to translate the various aspects of the meaning of the source language cultural expression into the target language.

Linguistically speaking, the rendition of cultural expressions in general and the Quranic culture-bound words constitute problems for translators of the meanings of the Holy Quran whose tasks go beyond purely rendering from a source text to a target text. It is a process of rendering the style of language and, therefore, the culture of a source language to a target language. Thus, it is the main optimum, and need that a translator is aware of the cultural divergences and the spectra communication and discorsal strategies in both source language and target language. (Razmjou,p. 2004), Al-Haddad (1994) argues that the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic



complexity of the ST cultural expressions make rendering them a difficult task

The art of literary rendition is of special importance because literary work is a mirror of cultural relationships and intercultural communication. Markedly, the importance of literary rendition in transferring culture which is a matter beyond the shadow of a doubt, and it will recommence to be the most important medium of communication between different cultures. Furthermore, the rendering culture may also be encountered with problems and constraints, which may result in impediments and obstacles to the translator or the receiver of the rendition, therefore translating the intercultural communication is not an easy task. On account of the fact that language is anticipated to depict the lifestyle or activity in every idiosyncratic culture, there is always a possibility of problems and constraints will encounter translators in general and the translators of the Quranic culture-bound words in particular in their efforts to transfer a new culture.

The translation should deal with cultural differences and present them to the language receptor in a credible and reasonable way. This is because " language does not exist apart from culture "(Sapir, 1990,p.210) .

Prochazka cited in Nida (1964/1990) defines a good translation in terms of certain requirements, namely:

- a) He /she must understand the original word thematically and stylistically.
- b) He/ she must overcome the differences between the two linguistic structures
- c) He/she must reconstruct the stylistic structures of the original work in translation.

To conclude, in literary rendition, rendering of the original style of the source text is of great importance. Markedly, in this type of rendition, translators are needed to find not only word equivalence but also stylistic equivalence.

2.6 Previous Studies

Alhaj, et al (2019) explored constraints of translating some selected Qur'anic Verses (Āyahs) into English: A Sociohistorical Interpretation. The study indicated that there are some cultural and semantic constraints that encounter the translators of the Holy Quran when translating Qur'anic verses (Āyahs) into English because of linguistic-cultural barriers that occur between Arabic and

English cultures. Also, the results of the study have revealed that the translators of the Holy Quran have employed spectra of translation strategies such as omission, addition, cultural substitution, literal translation, adaptation, and back-translation.

Abdul-Raof,(2005) conducted a study entitled" Pragmalinguistic forms in cross-cultural communication: Contributions from Qur'an translation". The study showed that one of the problems that arises in translation between Arabic and English is the lexical gaps because English and Arabic are two different languages that express reality in different ways. Markedly, according to him, (ibid, pp. 115-130.) these lexical gaps might occur at different levels including the semantic and the morphosyntactic levels.

Haque, (2012) conducted a study entitled" Translating literary prose: Problems and solutions", showed that when the source and TLs belong to different cultural groups, it is truly difficult to find terms in the TL that express the highest level of faithfulness possible to the meaning of certain words.

Abdelwali (2010) conducted a study entitled "The Loss in the Translation of the Qur'an". The study aims at shedding new light on the challenges that the translators of the Holy Quran encountered at the linguistic-cultural and stylistic and lexical levels. The researcher also suggested some ways of boosting the domains of the Holy Quran renditions with a view to reproducing accurate and appropriate renditions both in form and content. Moreover, the study indicated that idiomatic expressions of the Holy Quran words and styles could not be apprehended in most of the English versions of the meaning of the Holy Quran.

3. Methodology

This part of the current study sheds light on the research method that is followed by the researcher in collecting data. The key focus will be on exploring how the Quranic culture-bound words are communicated to receptors of the English language and given back linguistically in the rendition.

3.1The Research Designs

This study is analytical descriptive qualitative in type, because of the difficult nature of the sacred text under investigation (i.e., The Noble Quran). Markedly, the translated texts were explored to pinpoint the translation strategies employed by the three notable translators of the Holy Quran, namely, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Muhammad

A. S. Abdel Haleem, and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. This study belongs to qualitative research of interpretive paradigm, which is applicable to descriptive translation studies. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the Arabic Ayahs containing the Quranic culture-bound words and compared and assessed them to the three different English translation versions of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an of three notable translators of the Holy Quran (Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. Finally, the researcher analyzed and evaluated the translated Quranic culture-bound words in terms of cultural equivalence, and cultural contexts as well as different approaches to translating the meaning of Holy Qur'an into English in general and Quranic culture-bound words in particular. Moreover, Quranic culture-bound words will be selected based on their outstandingly perspicuous linguistic-cultural usage.

3.2 The Data

The current study aims at exploring linguistic cultural and stylistic problems encounter by the translators of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an in translating some Quranic culture-bound words into English. The study also aims at probing how different translation strategies are employed in the selected three English translations of the Holy Quran authored by Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem, and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall to tackle linguistic cultural, and stylistic problems when rendering Quranic culture-bound words from Arabic into English. These three translations were selected because they belong to two different far-between periods of translation, which can explain clearly the differences among translations of the Holy Quran throughout a long period of time (Alhaj,2020), as well as the three notable translators are from different ideological, educational, and cultural backgrounds (Muhammad,2017).

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

To procure the aims of the current research paper, a qualitative research method is taken by the researcher. Moreover, this method is apt to this study because the rendition of the Holy Quran is multiplex and difficult and cannot be enormously and profoundly probed using any other possible approaches (Creswell,2007).In practice,5 verses) of the

phenomena under the investigation, that is, linguistic cultural and stylistic problems encountered in rendering some Quranic culture-bound word into English. Appropriately, three notable translations of the meanings of the Holy Quran were taken on Mohammed, A,S,Abdel Hakeem, Mohammed M.Khan and Mohammed Taj Al-Din Al-Hilali and Pickthall.

4. Findings & Discussion

Source Surrah:" Women "An-Nisa: ayah, verse 3

Transliteration:

ST: وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَنِّي وَثَلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ ۖ فَمَنْ حَفِظْتُمْ أَتَىٰ تَعْبَلُوا (النساء:3)فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَلِكَ أَنِّي أَلَّا تَعُولُوا

(1) **Abdelhaleem:"** if you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry whichever[other] women seem good on you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], **then marry only one, or your slave(s): that is more likely to make you avoid bias"**. (Women: 3)

(2) **Khan and Al-Hilali:** “ And if you fear you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan- girls , **then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four;** but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or(the slaves) that your right hands possess. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice. (An-Nisa:3)

(3) **Pickthall:** And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, **marry of the women, who seem good to you, two, or three or four;** and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice(to so many) then one(only) or(the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice.(Women:3)

4.1 The Meaning of the Ayah:

Meaning; when anyone of you is a guardian of an orphan -girl and he fears that he will not hear the same bridal -money of the like of her, let him marry other women of his choice; as there are lots of other women of whom it is made available for him to marry whom he desires. It is narrated on the authority of' Urwah ibn Az-Zobeir that when he asked Aishah; the mother of the believers about the saying of Allah, the Almighty:" And **if you fear you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan-girls"** she answered" O my nephew!. It happens that the orphan girl is to be in the guardianship of her patron in whose wealth she has a share. When he admires her wealth and beauty, he wants then to marry her without giving her the bridal -money justly



which she is to be given if she is married to another man. Therefore, they were forbidden to get them in wedlock without presenting them their bridal money justly; or that those guardians are to marry of the women whom they may desire ". "*two, or three or four;*" meaning, you can get in wedlock two or three or four women whom you desire other than those in your guardianship. Imam Ash-Shafi said:" The admitted Sunnah of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) proves the fact that none but the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is allowed to have more than four in wedlock at the same time". What is stated here by Ash-Shafi is admitted by the scholars; except for some of the Shia'ah scholars who said that is lawful for the Muslim to have nine wives, and even it is lawful for him to have a limitless number of wives in wedlock at the same time. " but if you fear that *you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (the slaves) that your right hands possess* "i.e. whoever fears that he will not be able to deal justly if he has more than one wife; as Allah states:"*You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire*", let him then have only one wife equally; despite being a recommended matter to handle all of them equally," *That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice*". Some scholars said " That would rather prevent you from having a large number of children" "*nearer to prevent you from doing injustice*" What is right in this regard is the saying of the majority of the scholars who said that you must not be unjust ." *and if you fear poverty* " meaning, to become one of the needy.

4.2 Historical and Cultural background of Polygamy in Islamic Culture

Polygamy is one of the cultural aspects that differentiates the Muslim culture from the Western culture. It is a matter of fact to say that the Muslim culture-bound word polygamy was and been commonly practiced by Muslims since the beginning of Islam (Aziz, 1982, 27). Many Muslim scholars believe that polygyny is a needful and advantageous practice

It is difficult to find a proper equivalent for the Arabic word, The English word "polygamy" may not be connotationally fitting in some contexts because it is not allowed in Western culture to have two wives. This can lead to ambiguity in the English-Arabic rendition.

In some contexts, a footnote translation strategy is a must to clarify the ambiguity of the matter. In our actual Arabic culture, there is one kind of marriage, it is a religious one. However, in some Western cultures, there are two kinds of marriage, religious and civil. For example, the former in English culture needs registration in a registry office. This kind of religious marriage may not be known absolutely by an Arabic language receptor.

4.3 Linguistic Cultural and Stylistic Analysis of the Translation

The conjunction "and" in the Qur'anic Arabic text of the ayah has been dropped by Abdelhaleem which affects the syntactic context of the ayah, seems awkward and is confusing concerning its lexical context acceptable to the target text receptor. Parenthetical explanations concerning lexical and cultural contexts for better comprehension have rarely been used by the three translators as in. "If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them]", but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (the slaves) that your right hands possess. and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one(only) or(the captives) that your right hands possess

The Quranic culture-bound word *tā'adud az-zawjāt*, polygamy, is limited to the Islamic culture. It means "polygyny is the most common and accepted form of polygamy, entailing the marriage of a man with several women; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygyny>. In the three renditions of the Quranic Arabic culture-bound word *tā'adud az-zawjāt*, polygamy in the ayah is inaccurately rendered by the three translators because of its nonequivalent in the target language This gives it statements and framing that makes it narrowly accessible when rendered into English culture.

Not different from Al-Hilali & Khan's rendition of the ayah "then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four;" is Abdelhaleem's, where he relates the pragma stylistic connotation of *tā'adud azzawjāt* in English. The two renditions have understandably pointed that the limited number of wives is four and this is seen in the use of the coordinating conjunctions (or). As for Pickthall's rendition, it doesn't have the same semantic manifestation of the renditions as (Al-Hilali & Khan, and Abdelhaleem) because it doesn't indicate the alternative of the number of wives through

the use of the conjunction (or) between the numbers. His rendition may be realized that a Muslim man may marry nine wives at the same time, a case that is contrary to the content of the Quranic source text (Al Azzam et al.2015, Ibn Al-Jawzi 1987:7-8; Al-Razi 2006:337).

The three translators used literal translation to render the lexeme "fa-inkihū" "فَانكِحُوا" into "marry" and "may marry" In contrast, Khan and Al-Hilali and Pickthall used the imperative mood(marry) which seems an order to be done by Muslim whilst, Abdelhaleem used the modal verb" may" to touch on permission as it seems in his translation" you may marry whichever[other] women seem good on you, two, three, or four.". Moreover, the imperative mood sentences in the translation of Khan and Al-Hilali and Pickthall which makes direct commands and requests, and so on have their strange structure, which needs to be reconstructed and expressed in their particular tone; if not, they may be misunderstood by the English language receptor.

The usage of imperative by Khan and Al-Hilali and Pickthall seems also inappropriate in the context of "fa-inkihū" "فَانكِحُوا", other rendering such as" Abdelhaleem" is appropriate and maintain intensity. Pickthall used literal translation to render; مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ malakataymānukum which are rendered into" that your right hands possess". This rendering gives no specific identification about the essence of the source meaning of مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ malakataymānukum, hence confusing and complex communication. Moreover, Abdelhaleem, and Khan and Hilali follow the same literal translation to render مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ malakataymānukum", into" or your slave(s), or(the slaves) that your right hands possess" respectively, which seem inaccurate rendering, and it is just translationese because it underscores the issue of slavery and the possession of wives as if they were married to suit one's desires,hence their renderings are out of context.

5. Conclusion

The current study has focused on exploring some cultural and stylistic difficulties and problems encountered in translating some Quranic culture-bound words into English with special references to the rendering of culture-bound words such as "polygamy; tā'adud az-zawjāt; The study has explored three translations namely Abdul-Haleem, Mohammed M. Pickthall and

Muhammed M.Khan and Mohammed Hilali. Based on the theoretical part and data analysis, the current study has come up with the following conclusions: Firstly, the meaning of the Quranic culture-bound words in the Quranic texts is quite difficult. This is because the Quranic culture-bound words involve very subtle differences in meaning that are difficult to be understood by lay translators. Secondly: The three translators are not fully aware of the Quranic culture-bound words and their implications, leading them to fall into the trap of inaccurate lexicalizations, which renders the fidelity of the ST message as being incommunicative. Thirdly: The Quranic culture-bound word tā'adud az-zawjāt, polygamy, is limited to the Islamic culture. Finally, the three translators failed to render The Quranic culture-bound word tā'adud az-zawjāt, polygamy into English and their renderings are just translationese.

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