The Loss of Oral Performative Semantic Influence of the Qur'an in Its Translations

Authors : Alalddin Al-Tarawneh

Abstract : In its literal translation, the Qur'an is frequently subject to misinterpretation as a result of failures to deliver its meaning into any language. This paper relies on the genuine aspect that the Qur'an is an oral performance in its nature; and the objective of any Qur'an translation is to deliver its meaning in English. Therefore, it approaches the translation of the Qur'an beyond the usual formal linguistic approach in order to include an extra-textual factor. This factor is the recitation or oral performance of the Qur'an, that is, tajweed as it is termed in Arabic. The translations used in this paper to apply the suggested approach were carefully chosen to be representative of the problems that exist in many Qur'an translations. These translations are The Meaning of the Holy Quran: Translation and Commentary by Ali (1989), The Meaning of the Glorious Koran by Pickthall (1997/1930), and The Quran: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings by Sahih (2010). Through the examples cited in this paper, it is suggested that the agents involved in producing a 'translation' of the Holy Qur'an have to take into account its oral aspect which yields additional senses and meanings that are not being captured by adhering to the words of the 'written' discourse. This paper attempts in its translation into English.
Keywords : oral performance, tajweed, Qur'an translation, recitation
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