

**‘THE CALL TO ISLAM’ FOCUSING ON THE ROLE  
OF TRANSLATION AS A METHOD OF *DA`WAH*  
AND ITS IMPORTANCE TOWARDS  
THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
*MUALAFS* IN ISLAM**

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**Khulasah**

Terjemahan memainkan peranan yang penting sebagai metode dakwah dalam Islam. Melalui medium terjemahan berlaku pengembangan ilmu pengetahuan dari satu bahasa ke dalam bahasa yang lain dan dari satu budaya kepada budaya yang lain. Tujuan penulisan ini adalah untuk melihat perkembangan aspek terjemahan dalam Islam dan untuk mengenalpasti peranan terjemahan sebagai satu metode dakwah. Perbincangan mendapati terjemahan memainkan peranan yang penting sebagai aktiviti penghubung dalam membantu menyelesaikan permasalahan dan cabaran-cabaran dalam dunia Islam masa kini. Terjemahan juga penting sebagai satu strategi untuk menyebarkan ilmu dan kesedaran Islam dalam aspek kepercayaan, peraturan undang-undang dan sistem akhlak serta sebagai satu tamadun. Dapatan perbincangan juga menunjukkan bahawa terjemahan telah menyumbang kepada aktiviti-aktiviti dakwah kepada golongan muallaf dalam Islam.

**Kata kunci:** terjemahan, metode, dakwah, muallaf-muallaf, Islam.

### **Abstract**

Translation plays an important role as a method of *da`wah* in Islam. Through translation there exists an extension of knowledge and ideas from one language to another and from one culture to another. The objectives of this paper are to examine the development of translation in Islam and to identify the role of translation as a method of *da`wah*. The result shows that translation plays an important role as a mediating activity in helping to solve the problems and challenges in the Islamic world nowadays, and as a strategy for disseminating Islamic knowledge and awareness as a faith, a legal and moral system and as a civilization. The result also indicated that translation has contributed to the activities of *da`wah* to the *mualafs* in Islam.

**Keywords:** translation, method, *da`wah*, *mualafs*, Islam.

### **Introduction**

The field of translation is an important area nowadays. This field is beneficial in many human activities because most people can understand more if anything is delivered in his own mother tongue. When the information is disseminated through a foreign language, not all the information can be understood in its real meaning. Therefore, it requires translation to provide a better understanding and widen human knowledge.

There are studies which examine the role of translation in human life. For example, studies conducted by Zhai about the importance and benefits of the new translation teaching. Based on constructivism, with the help of multimedia network technology and by means of visual appreciation, the new translation teaching mode has many advantages such as expanding the amount of teaching information; realizing the student-teacher interaction to the largest degree; stimulating students'

translation interest; creating a real language environment. This can help students accurately understand the original context and gradually develop their cognitive abilities and translation capabilities in the process of the interaction with the environment.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the study done by Ishak *et al.* also showed the importance of the translation in educational activities specifically focusing on the significant of Malay mathematics old script translation. The study found the importance of the translation work that need to be emphasized. Stages of the translation period based on historical facts also been highlighted. The example of the translation from *Raudat al-Hussāb fī `Ilm al-Hisāb* that was written by Malay *ulama* in 1307H/1893A.D is also shown in the study. The book was printed in Egypt and has been used in teaching and learning among the student at the Holy Mosque (Masjid al-Haram). The study presented the introduction of this book with the hopes that the introduction is sufficient to stimulate interest in readers and researchers to embark and investigate the beauty and the power of script translation in providing more knowledge especially in the area of mathematical education.<sup>2</sup>

In the field of *da`wah*, translation is also very important especially in order to understand the teachings of Islam from its original sources that is the Qur`ān which is written in Arabic. Muslims need a translator to understand the contents of the Qur`ān in their own language. This shows that there is a very high need for translating the Qur`ān according to the *da`wah's* target groups.

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1 C. Zhai, "On The Importance of Movie Appreciation in Multimedia Network Translation Teaching," (Conference Paper) *Advances In Intelligent and Soft Computing* vol. 149 (2012), 553-557.

2 S.N. Ishak, N.H. Marzuki, J. Md. Ali, "The Importance of Translation Mathematics Old Script," *Malaysian Journal Of Mathematical Sciences* 3 (2009), 55-66.

Thus, this papers looks at the role of translation as a method of *da`wah* in Islam and how this activity can contribute in the efforts of *da`wah* in Islam. Translation and *da`wah* should move simultaneously and both can play a significant role in the process of spreading Islam around the globe. History has also proven this to be true as can be seen from the development of translational activities throughout the Islamic civilisation. Thus, the following brief discussion will highlight the significant of translation as a method of *da`wah* and further reflect on how this liaison can help one in his understanding of Islam especially in the development of their spiritual aspects which is *īmān*.

Based on this discussion, it indicates the need to investigate the role of translation. Thus, the main objectives for this study are to examine the development of translation in Islam and to identify the role of translation as a method of *da`wah* to the *mualafs*.

## **Result and Discussion**

This study found that the activity of translation had grown over the years and this directly shows the importance of translation activities carried out in the Islamic community.

Generally, the development of translational activities in the Islamic tradition can be outlined as follows. Initially, Muslim scholars were concerned with the process of accumulating information and preserving written texts of several scholars from the previous civilization era. Most of the activities involved translating the writings of Greek authors such as Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Hippocrates and many Persian classics into Arabic.

Thus, translation activities were undertaken to enable the transmission of knowledge as well as the sharing and exchange of ideas among well-known Muslims and non-Muslim scholars of previous and present era at that time. This was further enhanced with the establishment of a library called Bayt al-Ḥikmah, which was not only a

translation institute, but was also considered a major intellectual centre of that period. The library was founded by the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833A.D) at the time of the `Abbasiyah government. This initiative has enabled the writings of more civilizations, other than Islamic, to be preserved, kept and studied by scholars of Islam.<sup>3</sup>

If we look back in history, we can find that translation has been the key player in disseminating knowledge from one language into another and from one culture into another. For example around 12A.D, there were works of translation of Ibn Sīnā's writings into Latin. Then, around 17A.D these works were translated again into Hebrew. This shows that translation is an old activity that has been practiced by man since ancient times in order to promote accessibility of knowledge worldwide. Likewise, what we can also see is that nowadays, many books from various sub-disciplines have been translated into various languages.<sup>4</sup>

History has clearly recorded that the first stage of the `Abasiyyah kingdom (750-848A.D) is an excellent phase during the greatness of Islamic civilization specifically and of human civilization generally. During that time, the world of knowledge contributed and played a big role besides the role of the caliph in constructing the civilization. During that time efforts towards compiling books in various fields of knowledge had taken place. This included the translation of books from several foreign languages into Arabic.<sup>5</sup>

In Nusantara, efforts of translating Islamic materials were done by scholars from this particular region, from

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<sup>3</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 37-44.

<sup>4</sup> Wan Fuad Wan Hassan, *Ringkasan Sejarah Sains* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Jarji Zaydan, *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*, vol. 3 (Beirut: al-Ḥayāt, t.t.), 167.

years ago until now. Scholars such as Syeikh Daud bin Abdullah (1769-1847A.D), Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi (10<sup>th</sup> May 1896- 13<sup>th</sup> October 1989), Syeikh Ahmad Semait (21<sup>th</sup> August 1933 -15<sup>th</sup> July 2006) and others have all played an important role in translating Arabic Islamic materials into the Malay Indonesian language.

Al-Ghazālī wrote in his book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* that the importance of understanding the message of the Qur'ān is to know Allah (*ma`rifah Allāh*), the Last Day and *al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*.<sup>6</sup> These three *ma`rifat* are three important doctrines in Islam. As for the other main doctrines and beliefs, they are considered escorts to these three. Furthermore, for this reason, the understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān is vital to strengthen the spiritual aspect of any Muslim. Hence, the importance of translation and interpretation of the verses of al-Qur'ān is unquestionable. Without understanding the meaning of the verses from the Holy Qur'ān, a production of a strong belief and high appreciation of Islam cannot be achieved.

Realising this, The Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) will be launching 10,000 copies of *tafsīr* al-Qur'ān in Mandarin by the month of Ramadan (2010) for the benefit of Chinese *mualafs* in Malaysia. Ten years ago, the same initiative was successfully carried out by JAKIM in producing the *tafsīr* al-Qur'ān in English. *Tafsīr* al-Qur'ān in Mandarin is believed to be essential as the use of this language is among the highest in the world. Thus, JAKIM also aims to distribute *tafsīr* al-Qur'ān in Mandarin around the world including Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and Australia. JAKIM will also be publishing al-Qur'ān translation in Tamil language for the Tamil-speaking community.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyyah, 2005), 15-20.

<sup>7</sup> Bernama, "Terjemahan Tafsir al-Qur'an dalam Bahasa Mandarin dan Tamil," Bernama.com website, accessed on 5 March 2010,

The holy Qur'ān is written in Arabic, a type of language which is known for its complicated structures. Generally the Arabic language, be it the classical or modern version, is known as language of a precise and delicate nature and one general feature of this language is that the words themselves carry deeper elements and transcendental meanings, which, for the Muslims, contain theological messages and divine revelations from Allah and thus should not be interpreted lightly. Subsequently, this has led to problems in efforts to translate this sacred book due to some difficulties in finding the right words to convey the intended message and hence preserve its sacredness. As Mohammad Khalifa states:<sup>8</sup>

Those who have tried to translate the Qur'ān from its Arabic original have found it impossible to express the same wealth of ideas with a limited number of words in the new language. Comparing any translation with the original Arabic is like comparing a thumbnail sketch with the natural view of a splendid landscape rich in colour, light and shade, and sonorous in melody. Scanty knowledge of classical Arabic would deprive anyone from appreciating the different shades of meaning rendered by the occasionally slightly different declensions of Arabic words. The Arabic vocabulary as used in the Qur'ān conveys a wealth of ideas with various subtle shades and colours impossible to express in full with a finite number of words in any other language.

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[http://web10.bernama.com/kpdnhep/v2/index.php?lang=my&sid=ne\\_wsdetailkbbm&id=479639](http://web10.bernama.com/kpdnhep/v2/index.php?lang=my&sid=ne_wsdetailkbbm&id=479639).

<sup>8</sup> Mohammad Khalifa, "Translation: Tried and True?," Cyberistan website, accessed on 30 June 2010, <http://www.cyberistan.org/islamic/translate.htm>.

For some, a translated text can never be a replacement of the original text because these people see translation as a traducement, a betrayal, and an inferior copy of a prioritized original.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, the translation of the holy Qur'ān is still necessary and should still be continued as it is the most convenient and important manner to spread the teachings of Islam and introduce it to the rest of the world. In this regard, the need for *tafsīr* (interpretation) of the Qur'ān is vital.<sup>10</sup>

The effectiveness of persuasion, style and manner of expression play an important role in preaching Islam. History has proven that Caliph `Umar al-Khaṭṭāb converted to Islam after listening to some early verses of Sūrah Ṭāhā. Obviously, the effectiveness of the language that pierced the heart is the strength that Allah bestowed as a word of very high effectiveness or termed as *qawlan balīgha*. Sometimes in many situations, persuasion does not require hard words as Allah knows the apparent and the hidden.

However, preaching using the mother tongue is the best approach for it results in a quick understanding and response. This can be learned from the stories of the Prophets; Prophet Musa a.s who spoke in the old Egyptian language, Prophet Isa a.s who spoke in the language of Hebrews and Prophet Muhammad s.a.w who communicated in Arabic.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the importance of translation must be acknowledged as a tool that helps

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<sup>9</sup> Bassnet and Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Yakub @ Zulkifli Mohd. Yusoff, "Keindahan Tatabahasa al-Qur'an: Satu Mukjizat," (makalah, Seminar Penghayatan Bahasa al-Qur'an, Pusat Bahasa, Institut Latihan Islam Malaysia (ILIM), Sungai Merab, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Zulkiple Abd. Ghani, "Bahasa al-Qur'an dalam Komunikasi Dakwah," (makalah, Seminar Penghayatan Bahasa al-Qur'an, Pusat Bahasa, Institut Latihan Islam Malaysia (ILIM), Sungai Merab, 2010).



bridge the communication gap between nations of miscellaneous tongues. In the case of *da`wah* to the *mualafs*, translation can be seen as one of the key players which can help to foster understanding and aids in the spiritual growth of these people. As Prophet Muhammad s.a.w says:<sup>12</sup>

إن الله وملائكته وأهل السماوات والأرض حتى النملة  
في جحرها وحتى الحوت ليصلون على معلمي الناس  
الخير. (رواه الترمذي وقال: حديث حسن).

Verily Allah, His angels, the people of heaven and earth, even the ants in its hole, big fish (in the ocean), all prays to those who taught good to people.

The meaning of this ḥadīth, clearly shows the importance of good teaching. Good teaching means to teach about Islam to others. Meanwhile, the method of teaching is not identified in the ḥadīth. This means, all methods of teaching may be included in the meaning of this ḥadīth.<sup>13</sup> Surely, translation is one of them.

### **Translation Does Matter**

Generally the art of translation involves in interpreting the meaning of the source language and then transferring this knowledge, from the source language into the target language. To transfer or shift from one language into another is to alter the forms, because languages are different from each other. Thus, in the creation of appropriate, similar structures in the subject matter language text, the translator must use his/her own voice

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<sup>12</sup> Muḥammad Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb*, Vol. 1 (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2000), 144.

<sup>13</sup> Hafiz Firdaus Abdullah, *Berdakwah Melalui Penulisan Efektif* (Johor: Perniagaan Jahabersa, 2008), 7.

and his/her own style and understanding to create this equivalence of relationship in the translation process.

According to Larson, the best translation should have the following criteria:<sup>14</sup>

..... (a) uses the normal language forms of the receptor language, (b) communicates, as much as possible, to the receptor language speakers the same meaning that was understood by the speakers of the source language, and (c) maintains the dynamics of the original source language text.

However no language is rich enough that every word has the same meaning(s) and resonances as its equivalent in another language. Therefore, efforts to achieve or maintain the dynamics of the original text as Larson mentions above is not an easy task. Something is always lost or rather, modified, in this process. Translating al-Qur'ān especially has proven to be a formidable task.

Dr Laleh Bakhtiar, a Chicago Sufi whose Qur'ān's translation titled *The Sublime Qur'ān*, shares her thoughts on the translation of the holy Book:15

Clearly no translation of the Qur'ān can compare in beauty and style with the original Arabic, which has been described as: "by turns, striking, soaring, vivid, terrible, tender and breath-taking.

Nevertheless the importance of translation, be it for whatever reason, cannot be dismissed as this activity, which is as old as written literature itself allows for the

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<sup>14</sup> M. L. Larson, *Meaning-based Translation* (London: University Press of America, 1984), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Laleh Bakhtiar, "Preface," in *The Sublime Qur'an* (USA: Kazi Publications, 2007); Iranian.com, "*Qur'an and Women: A New Translation Challenges Traditional Interpretations*," Iranian.com website, accessed on 23 June 2010, <http://www.iranian.com/Books/2007/July/Qur'an/index.html>.

exchange of knowledge, ideas and thoughts regardless of the different tongues used throughout the world. Through translation there exists an extension of knowledge and ideas from one language to another and from one culture to another. This activity, has also contributed a great deal in connecting various cultures of the world, and subsequently led to the enrichment of human knowledge at large.<sup>16</sup>

In Islam as in all other religions, translation plays a big role especially in contributing to the development of *da`wah*. *Da`wah* in Arabic literally means to invite, in this case, to invite people to the way of Islam.<sup>17</sup> This call to Islam is an obligation as well as a responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of every Muslim to perform onto other Muslims and non-Muslims. Inviting others to Islam is a Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and all the other Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them all) appointed by Allah SWT.

*Da`wah* cannot be made without constant reference to the holy book of Qur`ān which is written in the Arabic language. Also, it was in Arabic with which knowledge of Islam was spread around the globe originally and it was in Arabic that people communicated the message of Islam previously. The Arabic language is also the language of learning of the Muslim Empires such as during the Umayyah's and `Abbasiyyah's periods as well as among the non-Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore Savory, *The Art of Translation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968). See also Isadore Pinchuck, *Scientific and Technical Translation* (London: Andre Deuch, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-`Arab*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā', 1999), 359-362. See also `Abd al-Karīm Zaidān, *Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Da`wah (Usul al-Da`wah)*, trans. H. M. Asywadi Syukur, vol. 1 (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Al-Ameen, 1984), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Wan Fuad Wan Hassan, *Ringkasan Sejarah Sains* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996).

The fact today is that not many people, even Muslims themselves, speak Arabic. Thus, it becomes crucial to either teach Arabic or more importantly to provide translated literature on Islam in one's own mother tongue. Therefore the role of translation as a mediating activity in this galaxy of different languages cannot be denied in helping to solve the problems and challenges in the Islamic world nowadays in efforts to perform *da`wah* and to put in place the strategy for Islamic awareness as a faith, a legal and moral system and as a civilization to new audiences.

In addition, this study also found that the activity of translation is important to *mualafs* as a method of *da`wah*. As mentioned earlier, the Holy Book of al-Qur'an, was revealed in Arabic and it is also the source which is used a lot in *da`wah* activities as points of reference, as it portrays the absolute truth and the way of life in all aspects. To perform *da`wah*, means to preach Islam and to preach and present Islam effectively to the masses, one needs a common language as not everyone speaks Arabic.

Thus usage of the translation of al-Qur'an is of utmost importance. In fact, in historic times, the need to translate the Holy Book arose due to the rising number of non-speaking Arabic group of people who had embraced Islam.<sup>19</sup> Based on this need and the importance of spreading the word from Allah to society, efforts were made and are still being made to seriously translate al-Qur'an in numerous languages throughout the world.

It is firmly believed that Allah's blessing is acquired not just by reading the Holy Book but by understanding and accepting its message. For those who were born as Muslims, reading the Qur'an in Arabic is a must but a majority of the Muslims in this world read the Holy Qur'an without understanding most of what they have

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<sup>19</sup> A. R. Kidwai, "Translating the Untranslatable," Islamicity website, accessed on 24 June 2010, <http://www.islamicity.com/forum/>.

read. It is through reading the translation that one feels and understands the message that is being conveyed.

This is especially so in *da`wah* to the *mualafs*, in other words, the newcomers of Islam. At this point, the voice of Asiya N Rodrigo from Australia, a *mualaf* herself and a counselor by profession, who wrote about understanding the needs of the *mualafs*, and the common phases which all *mualafs* go through after conversion worth noted:<sup>20</sup>

While every convert is different, and his/her experiences may differ to some extent, the majority of converts do conform to a certain mold. There are identifiable phases many go through after conversion: elation, emphatic enthusiasm, fanaticism, disillusionment, weakness, and renewal. The factors that contribute to fanaticism, disillusionment and weakness vary from confusion about the multitude of ideologies within Islam to difficulties being accepted as a Muslim, difficulties fitting in with other Muslims, and disappointment with the wider Muslim community.

Most converts are not sufficiently prepared for the process of change, and few are equipped with the skills one needs to overcome the hurdles one inevitably faces along the way. In many, change happens too quickly, or inappropriately. When no-one seems to understand, and when Islam starts to become something it was never meant to be (a lonely torture), it becomes infamously easy to slip out of the fold of a once treasured religion.

Hence, measures must be made to counteract and prevent such experiences and to help these individuals develop and lead a healthy life within the sacredness of Islam. In cases such as the ones mentioned by Rodrigo above, *da`wah* is of paramount importance in promoting

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<sup>20</sup> Asiya N Rodrigo, "Understanding the Needs," *INSIGHT, Journal of Concept and Ideas* (2008), accessed on 15 June 2010, <http://www.ifew.com/insight/13037rvt/necessary.htm>.

and helping the *mualafs* to become strong, active and God-conscious individuals who are able to withstand scepticism and cynicism, not to mention scrutinization of the society as a result of their conversion. But *da`wah* must be done in a common language that the *mualafs* are able to relate to. This is where translation efforts, be it written or verbal translation comes in useful.

Interviewed with a local university lecturer, who has embraced Islam for more than twenty years on 22 June 2010 in her office, indicated that reading books on Islam that has been translated into English and Malay, has tremendously assisted her in comprehending these messages from God and has enabled her to recognise and appreciate the truth and meaning of the Qur`ān and hadiths. She believes that these translated books are of utmost importance not just to *mualafs*, but to all non-speaking Arabic community in their quest to be good, and god-fearing Muslims and Muslimah.

Becoming a Muslim is not just about rote learning al-Qur`ān, or just about adorning the *hijāb*. There is so much more to becoming a Muslim and it is the responsibility of the Muslim community to convey the true message of Islam in a way which the *mualafs* understand and are able to relate to, so as to help ease the difficult process of becoming a newly converted Muslim.

It is also a fact that almost all *mualafs* are often shackled by their inability to master the basic letters of al-Qur`ān. A large number of them have a low level of proficiency in matters related to aspects on *tajwīd*. Maybe, such scenarios are the result of a number of factors: the conversion period is still new and lack of guidance from the others and, not to mention, his/her attitude and lack of interest to know and learn more.

Therefore, to become successful in one's *da`wah* activities, one must not only be well versed in what one wants to preach but one must also be able to convey the

message from Allah, which in this case message from the Holy Qur'ān, as accurately as possible. Regular talks and lectures, counselling and peer support groups must also be formed to ensure continuous support and development of these group of individuals. These talks, lectures and messages, must be conveyed in a common language known to all concerned. It would be pointless to interpret al-Qur'ān or read the explanations of ḥadīths to the *mualafs* in Arabic and expect these people to be able to understand and absorb the teachings of Islam in this manner.

In fact, even born Muslims who do not speak Arabic may find these talks, lectures or counselling sessions, if done in Arabic, frustrating and perhaps useless. Thus, the use of translation in transferring knowledge from one language into another, from one alien culture to another and in this case, transferring the word of Allah to new Muslim converts in a suitable manner using correct translation and interpretation to help promote and preach Islam, is unquestionable.

Basically *da`wah* can be categorized into three main categories; *da`wah bi al-ḥāl*, *da`wah bi al-lisān* and *da`wah bi al-kitābah*. Translation can be associated especially with preaching *bi al-lisān* and preaching *bi al-kitābah*.

*Da`wah bi al-lisān* is the method of *da`wah* using verbal language as the medium. Thus, language is very important in propagating Islam. Al-Qur'ān itself as a primary source of knowledge in Islam contains words of Allah sent to the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w to be preached to humankind. This can be understood from al-Qur'ān itself. For example:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّىٰ يَسْمَعَ كَلِمَ  
اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

And if anyone of the Mushrikūn (polytheists, idolaters, pagans, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah) seeks your protection then grant him protection, so that he may hear the Word of Allah (the Qur'ān), and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men who know not.

Al-Tawbah 9:6

يَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمُ الرَّسُولُ بِالْحَقِّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَامِنُوا  
خَيْرًا لَكُمْ ۚ وَإِنْ تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

O mankind! Verily, there has come to you the Messenger (Muhammad s.a.w) with the truth from your Lord, so believe in him, it is better for you. But if you disbelieve, then certainly to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Ever All Knowing, All Wise.

Al-Nisā' 4:170

قُلْ يَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِلَيَّ رَسُولٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَامِنُوا ۚ  
مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ ۗ  
فَأَمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ  
وَاتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

“Say (O Muhammad s.a.w): "O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah - to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Laa ilaaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He); It is He Who gives life and causes death. So



believe in Allah and His Messenger  
(Muhammad s.a.w)"

Al-`A`rāf 7:158

The language used in *da`wah* must be clear and understood by the audience. With the exception of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w as the last prophet, each of the prophets were sent to their people with their own language. This is important for two main reasons; for the people to understand the message, as well as for the prophets to be able to convey the message easily, fluently and clearly. Allah has commanded the prophets to convey the message clearly to prove their prophet hood.

وَإِنْ تُكَذِّبُوا فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أُمَمٌ مِّن قَبْلِكُمْ ۚ وَمَا عَلَى  
الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

And if you deny, then nations before you have denied (their Messengers). And the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the Message) plainly.

Al-`Ankabūt 29:18

The clarity of the message conveyed is not measured from the point of the *dā`īs* own level of knowledge, but rather, it is calculated on the basis of the level of understanding of the message received by the hearer or reader.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُم ۚ فَيُضِلُّ  
اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them. Then Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

### Ibrāhīm 14:4

In this verse, "in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them" the word clear here is taken from the part of the receiver. The language used in conveying the message of Islam also has to be clear in the sense that it has to be specific in what it means. The *dā`ī'* has to state the meaning of any words which might have more than one meaning clearly in order to avoid misunderstandings on the part of the receiver.<sup>21</sup>

It is in this context of *da`wah* that translation plays an important role. Even though Muslims are encouraged to learn Arabic since the Qur`ān<sup>22</sup> and ḥadīth of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w is in the Arabic language, but the translation of it may help these non-Arabic speakers to understand clearly the message revealed without also forgetting that they have to at least make an effort to learn the Arabic language for it is the language of the last revealed book.

In this case, the translated text becomes a guide towards a better understanding of the messages of revelation. As stated earlier, in terms of Islamic *da`wah*, translation can be said to play a considerable role, for by having a good understanding of the same religion, people of different language and culture will get this message from Allah and subsequently be able to appreciate its true meaning as intended by the creator. Also by having works translated into various languages as needed by different nations in this world, the message of Islam can be materialised.

Knowing a language or several foreign language(s) is important in the process of *da`wah*. People are approached better through their own language. They will feel the

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<sup>21</sup> Abdul Karim Zaidan, *Dasar-dasar Ilmu Da`wah*, 261-262.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Qur`ān is sent down in Arabic. And this is stated in the Qur`ān itself. See for example in Yūsuf 12:12, Ṭāhā 20:113, Al-Zumar 39:28 and al-Naḥl 16:103.

closeness and appreciation if they were approached by someone using the same language that they speak. This aspect is connected to the role of translation for it is through the medium of translation that people have been approached for knowledge and information. Rapports can be built and trust instilled. This in turn helps make the process of preaching Islam easier.

Thus in order to master a certain language, the translator needs to make an effort to learn it. Translation is actually one medium which is frequently utilised in *da`wah* activities. Through the efforts of translation, the message of Islam can be conveyed to everyone regardless of race and religion, using the language they understand. Fourteen centuries ago, the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w has preached for us to learn as many languages as we possibly can so that Muslims will be able to communicate with various other races whilst at the same time perform *da`wah*.<sup>23</sup> Prophet Muhammad s.a.w said:<sup>24</sup>

قَالَ زَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ أَمَرَنِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ  
فَتَعَلَّمْتُ لَهُ كِتَابَ يَهُودَ وَقَالَ "إِنِّي وَاللَّهِ مَا أَمَرْتُ يَهُودَ  
عَلَى كِتَابِي". فَتَعَلَّمْتُهُ فَلَمْ يَمُرَّ بِي إِلَّا نَصَفَ شَهْرٍ حَتَّى  
حَدَّقْتُهُ فَكُنْتُ أَكْتُبُ لَهُ إِذَا كَتَبَ وَأَقْرَأُ لَهُ إِذَا كَتَبَ إِلَيْهِ

Narated Zayd ibn Thābit, the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) ordered me (to learn the writing of the Jews), so I learnt for him the writing of the Jews. He said: I swear by Allah, I do not trust Jews in respect of writing for me. So I learnt it, and only a fortnight passed before I

<sup>23</sup> Mohd. Ali Hashimi, *Keperibadian Muslim (Shakhsiah al-Muslim)*, trans. Tahir Daeng Mengati (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Salam, 1992), 82- 83.

<sup>24</sup> Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash`ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Kitāb al-`Ilm, ḥadīth number 5 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 2008).

mastered it. I would write for him when he wrote (to them), and read to him when something was written to him.

Knowing other languages can also help Muslims conduct *da`wah* and convey the message of Islam to all, thus fulfilling their obligations. Muslims in the present day are required more so to learn other foreign languages. By knowing other language apart from their own mother tongue, Muslims can also specialise in various other fields of study which may help him understanding the present problems of the *ummah*. Majoring a foreign language such as Arabic can be useful for Muslims in understanding the huge treasure of knowledge that can be obtained from the classical books in this particular language. Muslims will also be able to defend Islam and correct any misguided and wrong interpretation of the word of Allah whenever necessary, especially from non-Muslims who do not know Islam very well or have bad intention towards Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Academic writings also play an important role in translation works. The process of translation involved in academic writings contribute towards the dissemination of knowledge.<sup>26</sup> These kind of progression helps the process of *da`wah* if the works are involved in the distribution of Islamic knowledge. The other type of *da`wah* which is closely linked with translation is *da`wah bi al-kitābah*. The Arabic word *kitābah* means writing. Based on the first revelation, the message to write is clearly understood.

أَقْرَأْ بِأَسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (١) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ  
(٢) أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ (٣) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (٤) عَلَّمَ  
الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (٥)

<sup>25</sup> Mohd. Ali Hashimi, *Keperibadian Muslim*, 84.

<sup>26</sup> Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 37-44. See also Mohd. Azhar Abd. Hamid, *Meningkatkan Daya Fikir*, 151.

Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists), Has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught (the writing) by the pen, Has taught man that which he knew not.”

Al-`Alaq 96:1-5

From the time of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w, writing has been one of the most important medium of *da`wah*. The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w had sent letters to the government leaders such as Kisra of Persia, Hercules of Byzantium, Mauqauqis of Egypt and Negus of Ethophia.<sup>27</sup> This practice has been pursued then by other Muslim leaders. Book writing, articles in magazines and newspapers are among the effective mediums for *da`wah*; more so if the writings are translated into various languages. Through the translation, the message of Islam can be conveyed to non-Arabic speakers.

As mentioned earlier, in order to convey the message of Islam through the medium of writing, Muslims should know various languages. Here is where the process of translation plays a vital role. The first revelation asks us to read. In order to understand what we are reading, we have to learn several languages. Thus the knowledge we acquire is not limited to one source of language. Various methods in *da`wah* can convey the message to its target readers accordingly. Therefore the need for knowledge and ability to speak and understand various languages is vital. The *dā`ī* should know the needs of their target audience. Therefore, packed with this knowledge, the informative *dā`ī* would be able to assimilate the information in the form of writing. The efforts will be put up to format strategies so that the necessary information

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<sup>27</sup> Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), *Tafsir al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1980), 53.

can be brought forward and conveyed to the target audience with the language that can be easily understood by all. This is in line with the Prophet encouragement to study foreign language.

عن زيد بن ثابت قال أمرني رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أن أتعلم السريانية

Narrated by Zayd bin Thābit, the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) instructed me to learn Syriac.<sup>28</sup>

The conscious effort and need to translate will actually help motivate one to learn the subject matter. This means that a good translation must be provided with sufficient knowledge of the subject matter that is being translated so that it is suitable for its intended purpose. This is important in order to avoid any misinterpretation. Nida and Taber explain the process of translating as follows:<sup>29</sup>

Translating consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.

Equivalent in this sense means that every effort must be made to translate the message from the source language into the target language as closely as possible so that the meaning and message is transferred well. The same requirement is needed when one wants to translate the meaning of the Qur'ān or Ḥadīth. However, the first requirements must be to master the Arabic language itself in order to get a full grasp of the complexity, structure and culture of this language. Following from that, one must

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<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad bin `Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥwāzī*, ḥadīth number 2715, (n.p.: Dār al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyyah, n.d).

<sup>29</sup> Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969).

understand fully the *asbāb al-nuzūl* or the reasons (*asbāb al-wurūd*) for certain hadith which came from the Prophet.

### **Conclusion**

With religious texts that are used to pass on the word of Allah, translating these texts as accurately as possible is of utmost importance. This is because a wrong translation can seriously mislead the untrained reader and in turn, may result in some misunderstandings of the Qur'ānic texts/hadiths he/she reads. Nowadays Islam has come under extreme criticism as a religion of hatred and terrorism. Thus, an accurate translation which leads to correct understanding is especially needed to show the whole world that Islam is in fact a beautiful religion which promotes peace, patience and truth, among others.

To be a good translator, one must be not only be at ease with the source language, but also be a skilled speaker and writer in the target language. Thus, learning another language and at the same time having the ability to spread the word of Allah into several different languages should be a priority of all Muslims. Translation plays an important role as a method of *da`wah* in Islam. Through translation there exists an extension of knowledge and ideas from one language to another. Therefore the role of translation as a mediating activity cannot be denied in helping to solve the problems and challenges among the Muslims or *mualafs* nowadays and to put in place the strategy for Islamic awareness as a faith, a legal and moral system and as a civilization.

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