

Perception of Friday Sermons Translation in Islam and its Stakes before Converted Muslims

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Abstract— Friday sermon or Khutbah al Jumuah, as spread, is a fundamental rite in Islam. Each Friday noon, masses of crowds head to attend a religious speech. In Classical Arabic language only, practitioners are meant to listen to a religious preaching speech delivered by a single person called the Imam. The former is a person, who received religious knowledge studies at either the university or religious spheres. The imam's domain is put off translation, thus most of imams did/do not receive any translation skills, even in English, for example. For, as believed, it is compulsory in Islam to deliver sermons in Arabic language only. However, there are some oddities as newly converted Muslims who generate lack of comprehensiveness before these sacrosanct practices. Upon this, the aim of this work revives a query about sermonising and translation towards the oddity. Hence, to realise off tangible motives away of spirituality, an initiative is reacted to delve into the chronology of sermonising in Islam. The way the Messenger preached; in terms of language then the followers at the early stages of the spread of Islam? Then, it shades light on the contemporary view towards the subject of Friday sermon translation by means of the permanent comity for Fatwa upon several interrogations, besides the four schools' view in parallel. Finally, the research depicts, through samples of wrong or misleading translations of verses, how to be diverted to handicapped translation on pulpits in front of converted Muslims?

Keywords— Friday sermons, Arabic language, translation of sermons, the Imam, converted Muslims.

I. INTRODUCTION

Besides the Holy Qur'an is uttered in its original language during prayers, the Friday sermon is on the other hand a sacrosanct practise presented in Arabic language mainly too. Though all worshippers attend Friday sermons in Classical Arabic, most of them are not cognisant that no sacred text was left to depict the official language for this spiritual congregation. According to the religion of Islam, it is strictly denied to present this practice in Arabic language varieties even. Thus, nearly all imams are reluctant to the Arabic language diversion on any Arabic land. However, religious Muslim scholars had devised, through prophetic methodologies and hadiths tacitly speaking about this matter; that the Arabic language is solely fundamental for preaching.

On non-Arabic lands, after fatwa, most sermons appear to be moulded in Classical Arabic mainly as well, since translations are meant to be followed secondarily to barely 'approximate' spiritual doses. In reverse, most converted Muslims head to learn 'about' the Arabic language in order to

'feel' real meanings. In the hubs' translation then, the imam seems to be the only generator of spirituality via well selected interpreted words. As well, not only regular speech, verses, hadiths and sermons of the Messenger also might essentially be translated as factual references to explain more about this divine religion. In this concern, translation of sacred texts 'might' be an oddity regarding to stakes of weak or wrong understandings, as to English language for example.

II. LANGUAGE OF THE FRIDAY SERMON

More than forty hundred years, Friday sermons are still being delivered in Classical Arabic only. Likewise, sermons abroad are also meant to be presented in Arabic followed with translations depending on different imams' technics in performing so. But first, it is imperative to convey, via the passed on versions of religious Muslim scholars, what the religion dictates linguistically away of spirituality. For Muslims, fatwa is grounded on the four Schools: Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafei.

A. Diachronic and views of Muslims Scholars

All scholars agree that verbalising this practice in Arabic language is an inherited methodology; however, the scope of certitude of whether a particular language is compulsory or not is quite hazy. With the spread of Islam, the Friday sermon became a categorising common practice through time. It became a wild spread Arabo-Islamic ritual on each Friday regarding to the remarkable crowds that head to mosques. Meanwhile, other lands adopted this practice as the spread of Islam stretched off the Saudi Arabian land: Makah and Medina particularly. Although, the receiving lands had other mother tongues, Friday sermons sustained to be communicated in Arabic language. Earlier during and after the caliphates era, those who passed on about the Messenger Muhammad's life questioned about the on-going of these sermons, mostly when critical interrogations had raised about the linguistic matter of Khutbat al Jumuah whether in or out of the Arabian lands. At the moment, religious Muslim scholars commonly reacted to this concern by counting on different orientations. Most of their references were/are based on the method of either the Messenger, the righteous Caliphs, Sahabas (Prophet's Companions) or what came after as followers or regional Muslim leaders.

For this, the religious scholars parted into three independent views. Each group believed in its devising to the subject, since

unquestionable references were used.

i. First view

Supporters of this notion claimed that Friday sermons must be verbalised by selected imams in Arabic language only. They added however, in case 'all' attenders with no exception do not understand Arabic; it is then acceptable to launch in attenders' 'mother tongue'. This saying belongs to the Shafei School (as cited A'shashi, 1988, p.279.) and some from the Hanbali School (as cited in Ben Muflih, 1405 Hijri, pp. 117-133).

Yet, some Shafei books supplemented that the period of sermonising in non-Arabic language must be limited while attenders learn 'about' the Arabic language (as cited in Al Sharbini, 1998, p. 286).

Advocates of this view focused on two points: the 'obligation' of sermonising in Classical Arabic and the 'acceptance' of sermonising in non-Arabic languages. Accordingly, their reasoning, as they supposed, is adjusted to both conditions. In what concerns the requirement of its occurrence in Arabic language, they reminded that the holy Qur'an cannot be articulated except in Arabic language, so is the case for sermons of Khutbat al Jum'ah or Eids (Al Bahouti, 2003, p.34. Ben Muflih, 1405 Hijri, p.113. Abi Issac, 1997, p.159). Many strengthened this view by what Ben Muflih (1405 Hijri) recapped in his book 'Al Foro'e'. He stated, that sermons must be uttered in Arabic just as the Holy Qur'an (p.113). Then, he cleared out in his statement that reading the Qur'an in Arabic language is compulsory in Islam in all prayers, so sermons are as well. Meaning despite many verses cannot be understood, they can be memorised, and then used in worshipping again in the same language (case of Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia...etc.).

In what concerns acceptance, the compulsion falls, for the Qur'an itself is a sacred revelation from God; however, sermonising is a human speech, and thus it is acceptable to preach in other languages except Arabic. In other words, Qur'an and sermons are incomparable.

As a disregarding statement of sermons deliverance in non-Arabic languages, advocates (as cited in Ben Muflih, 1405 Hijri, 113) grasped that since the Qur'an and sermons are incomparable, then the obligation of communicating sermons in Arabic language becomes subordinate on both emigrated Muslims and converted ones. However, since sermonising maintains preaching for constant doses injection of faith, then sermons may not be verbalised in any 'language variety' that attenders prefer, which means 'some' divine Arabic words cannot be translated.

ii. Second view

Whether attenders are either converted Muslims or non-Arabic language speakers, supporters of this view make sure that sermons must be delivered in Classical Arabic only. Supporters of this trend are from the Maliki School (as cited in Annafrawi, 1995, p.306) and most of Hanbali School (as cited

in Al Merdawi, 1376 Hijri, p.390). They referenced to Sunnah, followers and their devising towards the matter.

Sunnah:

They reminded that one of the Prophet's companions named Malek Ben Huayreth recited a Hadith which says, "Pray as you saw me praying" (as cited in Al Bukhari, 2014, p 605). They asserted that the Messenger prayed and sermonised in Arabic language only, hence they sidestep going against the prophetic methodology.

Followers:

They added that most followers preached in Arabic language only after the death of the Prophet. Thus, as they held, it is important to follow them (as cited in Ibn Kudama, 1407, p 286).

Devising:

They toted up that since the practice is an obligation in Islam, then sermons must be released in Arabic just as 'Shahada' or expressing praise to be to God, for example (as cited in Ibn Sharaf, 2000, pp. 521-522).

Al Hudjailan (2002) criticised the three orientations by distinguishing and harking back that praying and sermonising are not the same religious activities. Besides, there is a difference between expressing praise and Shahada and sermonising, which is talking about different current matters (p.70).

iii. Third view:

Followers of this track recapped that the aim of having sermons in Islam is to preach and remind, yet this may happen in all languages of the world (as cited in Ibn Sharaf, 2000, p. 522). However, Al Hudjailan (2002) argued that it is outstanding to favour Arabic language as a 'frequent' usage (p. 70). He depicted that the religious Arabic language register has an unworldly spiritual affection on ears better than other language attempt to interpret (p. 70). Besides, he enhanced that both the Messenger and those after inherited the religion used Arabic as a main language for all natures of sermons (*Khutbah* or *Khutbat Al Haja'* necessity) (p. 70).

The prior three views are referred upon the four fundamental Schools of Islam. As well, the founding fathers of these approaches stood by clarifications off originality, meaning the Messenger and Sahaba. Each group believed in its own method. For instance, the second view of Maliki, as phrased previously, stressed that sermons must be communicated in Arabic only, though attenders do not understand so. Abd al Aziz Al Hudjailan recapitulated that after scrutinising the history of sermons in relation to their linguistic issues referenced to evidences, he highlighted by precisising that it would be superior and privileged to have sermons occurring in Classical Arabic language mainly. Yet, he added that if attenders are distinguishable between converted Muslims and natives inside one mosque, then in this case it is superior to verbalise the sermon in Arabic language first, then translate (p, 70).

Above all, languages may be affected or die over time as the case of all languages. Arabic language did not change either in its system or in its practice except for some neologised, borrowed, extension vocabularies of many registers as the case in medical sciences, petroleum domain, astrology and satellites, military development, anthropology...etc. In communicating sermons particularly, followers wondered about which language should sustain this practice, since the only sermoniser was the Messenger whose language for preaching was Arabic language predominantly.

Accordingly, Sticking to the methodology/language policy of the Prophet later, did not preserve the rite alone as a religious practice, but Arabic language as well.

III. TODAY'S ISLAMIC COMITY FOR FATWA TOWARDS FRIDAY SERMONS' LANGUAGE USE/USAGE

Today, the occasion of both Friday and Eids sermons in non-Arabic countries follow further reasoning agreed by a number of religious Muslim scholars. The inquiry was developed regarding to some constant interrogations of Imams who perform abroad. As they noted, most converted attenders or even Muslims who do not understand Arabic find difficulties in terms of comprehensiveness.

Tangibly, this matter was upstretched by a controversial question sent from India to the Islamic Fiqh Council asking about the acceptance of *Khutbat al Jumuah* if communicated in the local language. Despite lack of intelligibility, some members from the comity did not accept the idea of translating, for they claimed that the Friday sermon compensates two Rakahs while the Dohr is four Rakahs.

The decisions of the Islamic comity for Fiqh settled, in the fifth circle's council run in 1402 Hijri in the fifth 'decision', that sermons may be uttered in local languages, though they are supposed to be conveyed in Classical Arabic language. Regarding the raised question, sermons do not lack correctness if they are uttered in non-Arabic language on 'non-Muslim lands'. However, they insisted on introductions and verses to be uttered in Classical Arabic in order to let hearers get familiar to the Arabic phonemes, and then the preacher follows with the local language.

Accordingly, today's permanent council for fatwa maintained the assessment made up by most Schools' supporters, meaning to lease and permit interpretations with conditions.

Another testimonial tells that the comity received once a question, which probes whether if an imam is obliged to use Classical Arabic on the minbar and the possibility to translate into English language. According to what they had answered, the Prophet did not stress in his hadiths that sermons must be uttered in Arabic language; however, he used to preach by using pure Arabic language for all types of sermons (Friday, Eid, battles...etc.), for it is both his own and his people's mother tongue. The council added that Muhammad used to send books in Arabic language to monarchs and kings of non-Arabic communities, although he was aware that they would

not understand the purpose. Purposely, the Prophet recognised that they would find a way to translate the content into Arabic language (Afifi, Ibn Al Baz, & Ben Ghadyan 1424 Hijri, pp. 254-253), meaning the reaction sets up tacitly the idea of learning more about 'Arabic language'.

The council favoured to lease imams abroad to sermonise in Classical Arabic language first, and then translate the principal if the majority of the population (not attenders) are more than the half. Otherwise, if most of the community is Arabic speakers, then sermons must be uttered in both languages. The council stressed that the sermon is a link and faith to God, the prohibition of evil deeds and the spread of peace between people. Furthermore, as they added, even the best sermons have no hubs if they are communicated with a cryptic code. (Afifi et al., 1424 Hijri, pp. 254-253).

Ibn Baz Abd El Aziz (n.d.) was asked the same question. He answered that the imam preaches in Classical Arabic language, and then translates in the language that the hearers understand. For, as he described, the aim is preaching, reminding and teaching converted Muslims the legislation's pillars of Islam and this can be possible by translation only (p. 370). He added that even a remarkable number of important Islamic scholars for fatwa did not come into an agreement about this matter (pp. 371- 375).

Some religious authorities did not allow imams to sermonise in any other non-Arabic language. They argued that the use of Arabic language urge people to learn more about it and so preserve it. They enhance that this is a short track to a quicker spread of the Arabic language. In addition, they claimed that they must sustain the way the Prophet sermonised without using any other language but the Arabic one, though all attenders during that era were Arabic language speakers. They depicted that the former enlarges more stretched sphere to the Arabic language on non-Arabic lands.

Many scholars on the other hand privileged to use peoples' language instead of Classical Arabic language. Following this outlook, these scholars foresaw that the land's standard language or vernacular use might be/is the shortest way to expound to practitioners the realism of Islam. Accountability depends on the quality scale of learning these intensified spiritual lessons. Subsequently, they added that in case of mixed ethnicity, it would be better to use for each sermon a language in order to grab confusions between attenders towards sermons' interpretations outdoors.

They strengthened that God sent Messengers speaking in their peoples' languages. As mentioned in the Holy Qur'an (Ibrahim, verse 4), "*Alif lam ra, this is a book which we have revealed to thee that thou mayest bring mankind out of any kind of darkness into light*". Also, in verse four, "*And we have not sent any Messenger except with the language of his people in order he might make things clear to them*" (as cited in Maulawi, 2004, p. 283). On basis of the preceded verses, they questioned how one could be guided from dark to light by unknown sentences? They enhanced that the Messenger requested Zeid Ibn Thabet to learn about the Jews' language in

order to write to them something persuasive, thus to read their books and explain meanings back to the Prophet. History books passed on that Zeid learnt Hebrew in fifteen days only after living in their social sphere. Most religious Muslim scholars asserted that Muhammad's companions (Sahabas) did not write in Arabic language when they addressed Rome and Persia. Before conquering their lands, they wrote to them by their own languages for conversion. Then, once they had settled down, they invited any lands' peoples to Islam again except in Arabic language only. Meanwhile, they urged people to learn 'about' Arabic language. Regarding those who found difficulties in dealing with it, conquerors (Muslims) then kept translating by focusing on Arabic language words use rather than giving much importance to the conquered lands' languages. They down gradely used code mixing first then code switching and continued to use less second languages more and more through time until the Arabic language was graved in the targeted societies.

As a recap to most researchers views, people are living in a moment where each tribe is reluctant to anything warns its origins, besides mother tongues heavily. Therefore, translation is compulsory as a first step.

IV. THE IMAM VERSUS TRANSLATING SACRED TEXTS TO WORSHIPERS

For those imams performing abroad, translation of sacred texts might be a serious subject. Not only as difficulty of achieving so, but rather as 'a divine message' to deliver correctly. Most bilingual imams are either autodidactic or copy from other translations. Yet on the one hand, the divine scripts translations to English language are few as the Prophet's sermons and hadiths. Otherwise, for the translations of the Holy Qur'an on the other hand, most of them are estimated particularly for verses that embody scientific miraculousness. If the former has to represent something, then this would be practical to reference concrete translations that are available in some books or on cyber sites. Most imams introduce the introduction of all types of sermons as dictated in the book "Selected Friday Sermons" by saying:

"All thanks and praises are due to Allah, whom we thank, seek for help and invoke His help. We seek refuge with Allah from the evils within ourselves. He whom Allah guides will never be misled and he whom He misguides will never find one to lead Him. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is his slave and Messenger".

Regarding the underlined clauses 'will never be misled' and 'will never find' it would be preferable to apply the grammar rule of the conditional case of type zero, for in the original text, the Prophets phrases that there is a kind of an absolute assertion that those God has led never get diverted from His path, and otherwise. In what concerns declaring *Al Shahada*, there is no need to enlarge and detail on the first part (no deity...), but it is important that the utterer re-declare and use

the verb 'witness' at the last part containing the word 'Muhammad'. In addition, the underlined word 'slave' standing alone in the sentence is mentioned in most translations, sometimes authors use 'servant'. In English language, the word servant has nothing to do in the context, for as the verse of surah 'A'tharyat' mentions '...I do not need from them to be given subsistence nor need I to be fed). Whereas, the word 'slave' may be confusing to converted Muslims too. One should not neglect that nearly all of the new worshipers are from different ethnicities: case of the rook and the owl in western and oriental cultures, for example. Thus, Slavery has a pejorative meaning in general. According to Al Nabolussy (n.d.), the words 'عباد' and 'عبيد' are two Arabic common nouns in a plural form to the same singular word 'عبد'. He added that both words are used in the Holy Qur'an: 'وَعِبَادِ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا...' (Surah Al Furqan, verse 68)

And in another verse:

'وَمَارِبِكَ بظلام للعبيد' (Surah Fussilat verse 46)

He simplified that when God used the word *عباد* he meant those who believed in Him and his Messenger (Islam); whereas, when He used *عبيد* He then meant all peoples, because, they are still under His mercy: health, the use of Oxygen, livelihood...etc.

After taking the preceded suppositions into considerations, the introducing mentioned besides declaring/ uttering *Al Shahada* would be as the following:

"All thanks and praises are due to Allah, whom we thank, seek for help and invoke His help. We seek refuge with Allah from the evils within ourselves. He whom Allah guides never gets misleading and he whom He misguides never finds one to lead Him. I bear witness that there is not deity except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is his believing slave and Messenger".

Within the same book, the author passed on the sermon of the prophet at *Khayf in Mena*. Muhammad phrased in *Arabic* "لزم جماعتهم فإن دعوتهم تحوط من ورائهم".

The translator rephrased this last part of the sermon by saying "...adhering their Jama'ah. Verily, the invocation of the leaders encompasses all those behind them". According to Ibn Al Qayem (n.d.) sticking to Muslims for better or worse prevent them all against those intruders who may take advantage if the chain is weakened by its own circles. In this case, the translation would be preferable to say, "Sticking to Muslims for better or worse prevent them from outsiders' evil intentions.

The book 'selected Friday Sermons' collects several prophetic sermons, but these sermons are characterised by numerous terminologies and tacit concepts. The Imam, the translator or the readership in general must appeal to the original texts written in Arabic. Many perceptions might be confusing or wrongly interpreted, as the difference between 'heir' and 'inheritor', 'fish, fishes' and 'whales', 'lions' and

predators’, ‘trepidation, fear or obedience’, ‘sacred’ and ‘sacrosanct’...etc. Many words seem to be lighting the same meaning, but in fact, they do mean other conceptions.

Likewise, referencing verses as proofs during sermons might be a heavy responsibility. In the Holy Qur’an, differences between terminologies are numerously spotted. For instance, Al Nabalssi (n.d.) illustrated that God differentiated between types of females in His sacred book through synonymies. As he explained, when God depicted a good morality of a given female he used the word ‘spouse’ as mentioned in the verse

“...أسكن أنت وزوجك الجنة...” (Surah Al Baqara, verse 35)

languages. Yet, it is indeed corrupted whether with meant intentions or not, since translators did not take terminologies differences into consideration and did not keep the real version to change meanings that was wrongly interpreted. Conversely, the Holy Qur’an sustained as it was revealed, since it is required to read it in its real version during prayers. In addition, the Prophets’ sermons are preserved as well in thousands of volumes. However, what is important to stress is that any translator whether professional or an autodidactic, an interpreter or an imam, must then make translations in teamwork. The knowledge of religious scholars and explanations are outstandingly important, yet the role of the translator is also fundamental, as he listens and considers minor details in order to pick up the write words. Moreover, he must be rather an ethnolinguistic translator, since he conveys knowledge to converted Muslims who come from other grounds. What is important to keep in mind is that translating sacred texts within sermons is a process of giving faith on form of spoken spiritual doses. These are sensations, which travel from the brain of the imam to the brains of receivers. (See Fig.1).

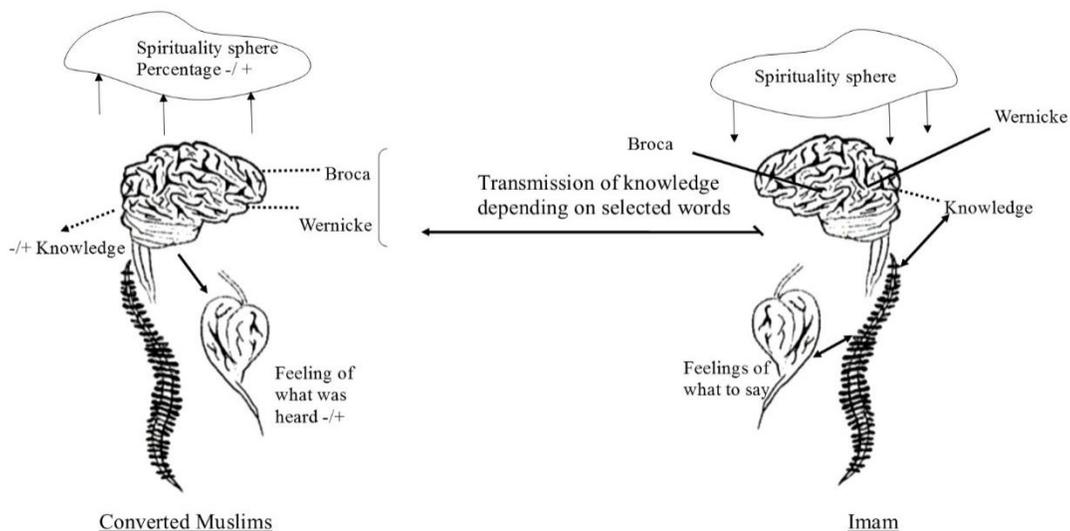


Fig. 1. Process of translating sacred texts

Whereas, when He depicted a bad morality or a disbelieving He used ‘woman’ as mentioned in the verse

“...امرأة نوح وامرأة لوط...” (Surah A’ttahreem verse 10-11).

This might give an over view how should many terminologies be reconsidered.

V. CONCLUSION

Translating the Friday sermon by the sermoniser himself might be a bipolar responsibility, since even professional translators of this domain neglect many details while translating sacred texts. For instance, the bible is also considered as a book of a divine religion, some said it was corrupted, others said it is the same version except in other

As mentioned in figure one, the quality of translation may weaken or transfer approximate sensations. Then, spirituality of listeners may be jarred and filled on basis of what is/was selected on the level of Broca and Wernicke mechanism. If doses of faith cannot be that much of benefit to converted Muslims, likewise spirituality marks its absence.

Overall, Away of spirituality and divinity, one might find difficulties to explain himself before others within the same language, then how about exchanging sacred messages from a language to another. All languages of the world whether codified or not have the same level of literal beauty, but in different norms. Hence, some authors succeeded to translate literal books and had indeed a better readership than the real

version edition itself. Others failed to transmit the message of what words speak of themselves between lines. In what concerns sacred texts however, there will be neither better translations of terminologies of the Holy Qur'an or prophetic sermons, nor equivalences, yet there still will be neglected hidden difficulties and estimated translations, since the original texts are either the speech of God or His Messenger. Feeling a lack of correct faith doses is may be what urges converted Muslims to learn 'about' the Arabic language and to feel what was hazy at the early stage of conversion. If this is the case as the Arabic language is being stretched more and more on all lands of the globe, then the religion of Islam has an intentional religious linguistic policy.

Some say that religious languages never die, though they vanished in fact as Latin for example; however, the language may not be vanished on basis of which type of language policy is implemented to it. Religious languages of human language policies die, but the language of the divine language policy does never die.

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