TRANSLATING KINSHIP TERMS IN THE QUR'AN[1]

Abstract: *The present paper is designed to shed some light on the intricacies involved in translating Arabic kinship terms into English, as illustrated by three translations of the Qur'an, namely Pickthall, Shakir and Ali. The paper reveals that the problems in translation are threefold: (1) the Source Language (SL) putative kinship terms can be rendered straightforwardly into Target Language (TL) counterparts, but because of lexical incongruence existing between the SL and the TL, pitfalls in the translation emerge; (2) kinship terms in Arabic may be reciprocal, i.e., one term may be used interchangeably with another; this linguistic feature is Arabic-bound that cannot serve in the course of translation; and (3) fictive kinship terms may pose fewer problems than problem 1 and 2. The study concludes with some pedagogical implications that will hopefully help the translator in the field.*

Key Words*: the Qur'an, kinship terms, Arabic, English, translation problems,*

Introduction

Kinship terms refer to a system of social organization and are usually based on a genealogical origin, i.e., biological, cultural, or historical descent. Biological descent may include putative family ties in which someone is related to another by birth (i.e., consanguineous kin) rather than by marriage (i.e., affinal kin). Cultural descent refers to such kind of relationships created by marriage rather than by birth. Finally, historical descent refers to a more general relationship based on race or religion.

The *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary CCALE* (2003) defines kinship as "the relationship between members of the same family." More technically, Leach (1958: 143) defines kinship terms as "category words by means of which an individual is taught to recognize the significant groupings in the social structure into which he is born." Similarly, Farghal and Shakir (1994: 242) offer this definition: "kin terms are used to designate family relations among relatives (e.g., father-daughter, mother-son, brother-sister, etc.)."

A close look at the aforementioned definitions shows the 'real' kinship relationships. However, in anthropological studies on some (non)-Western languages and societies, the changeable nature of kinship terms is stressed. That is to say, 'real' kinships are no longer real, but they gain more and more pragmatic import, thus employed as fictive kinships, for instance. Titiev (1967: 44) notes that kin terms have nothing to do with genealogical connections (see also Mashiri,

[1] **Mohammad Ahmad THAWABTEH**, Al-Quds University, Occupied Palestinian Territories, mthawabteh@art.alquds.edu

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

2004). Farghal and Shakir (1994: 242) further stress the honorific nature of kin terms saying that they "are used connotationally to maintain and enrich social interaction among both related and unrelated participants." Titiev and Farghal and Shakir argument surpasses the dominant conceptualization of kinship terms offered by the *CCALE* and Leach.

The Translation of the Qur'an

Excelling in Arabic is the be-all and end-all to most Arabs in the *Jahiliyyah*[1] era. Arabs admired verbal prowess. Salloum and Peters (1990: ix-x) argue that "[i]t mattered not if they were rich or poor: everyone tried to excel in this field. Thus, Arabic developed an enormous vocabulary […] that is scarcely matched by any other language except possibly English." When Allah sent Prophet Mohammed to the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula, He granted him with a miracle in order to support the Divine message. The miracle was the Qur'an being written in Arabic. In this regard, Allah says: "We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand (and learn wisdom)" (Ali 43:3). However, Allah challenged the pre-Islamic eloquent Arabs to compose even a Qur'an-like Sura (chapter) saying: "And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (If there are any) besides God, if your (doubts) are true" (Ali 2:23). Labid, one of the seven legendary poets of the Golden Odes at the *Jahiliyyah* was overwhelmed by the power and elegance of the Qur'an that he refused to compose any poetry for the last thirty years of his life (Sindi, 2002)[2]. It ensues, therefore, that the Arabs as native speakers of Arabic did not take up the gauntlet in composing even a verse of their own language.

Viewed as "evaporation of the beauties of the original" (Tytler, 1790: 20) and/or as "an x-ray, not a Xerox" (Barnstone, 1993: 271), the translation of the Qur'an is then questionable. The main translators working on the Qur'an projects in the early translation into Latin, dated back to the twelfth century, described their "participation as a 'digression' from their scientific translations" (Pym, 1998: 130). "The abbot of Cluny remarks that it cost him 'many prayers and much expense' to have the *Qur'an* translated into Latin (ibid; italics in original).

Nevertheless, the translations of the Qur'an have received plethora of criticism by Muslim scholars. In the words of Kidwai (cited in Mohammed, 2005) the translations of the Qur'an have come as "a complete and exhaustive reply to the manifold criticisms of the Koran[3] by various Christian authors such as Drs. Sale, Rodwell, Palmer, and Sir W. Muir." Therefore, several translations of the Qur'an

[1] The *Jahiliyyah* era refers to the ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia 500-622 AD.
[2] http://www.radioislam.org/sindi/arab.htm, consulted on August 6th, 2011.
[3] Different spelling of the Qur'an.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

have come to the fore, of which are Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), Saudi-endorsed translation of Yusuf Ali (1872-1952) and the translation of Muhammad Shakir (1866-1939). "Pickthall was aware of the problems of the Christian missionaries' translations and sought to remedy the defects since some of the translations include commentation offensive to Muslims, and almost all employ a style of language which Muslims at once recognize as unworthy" (Mohammed, 2005: The Meaning of the Glorious Koran); Ali's "was the most popular English version among Muslims" (ibid: The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary); Shakir's "draws heavily—and without acknowledgement—on the work of Marmaduke Pickthall" (ibid: Conclusion).

With particular reference to Arabic, Salloum and Peters (1990: ix-x) claim that "nothing can be translated from Arabic satisfactorily. The Arabic version of the foreign is always shorter than the original. Arabic loses in translation but all other languages being translated into Arabic gain." It is then possible, according to Thawabteh (2011: 104), "to add that Arabic was one of few languages that had cultural impact globally." Sapir (1921: 194) explains: "There are just five languages that have had an overwhelming significance as carriers of culture. They are classical Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek and Latin." Likewise, Lefevere (1992:1) argues that "not all languages seem to have been created equal. Some languages enjoy a more prestigious status than others, just as some texts occupy a more central position in a given culture than others—the Bible, for instance, or the [Q]ur'an." Such claims, however, can probably be amorphous as each language is one-of-a-kind in its own. When it comes to the Qur'an, the translation is certainly a rip-off of the original as is the case in the translation from one language into another and from one text into another.

In what follows, we shall look at one of the problems in the translation of the Qur'an, namely translating kinship terms which fall into three major categories: putative kinship, reciprocal kinship and fictive kinship.

The Notion of Equivalence

It goes without saying that each language has its own nuances in terms of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, stylistics and culture. English and Arabic stand as a perfect example of a many unrelated languages. The former is an Indo-European language whereas the latter belongs to the Semitic language family. Infallibility of translation between the two language families is rather difficult, if not impossible.

The problem of equivalence has been burgeoning in Translation studies, and there is a consensus among translation theorists and practitioners that regards equivalence as absolutely essential to translation (Nida, 1964; Catford, 1965; and Newmark, 1988, among many others). However, each has looked at it from a different angle, thus varieties of equivalence has come to the fore: 'semantic equivalence'; 'functional equivalence'; 'stylistic equivalence'; 'formal

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

equivalence'; 'textual equivalence'; 'communicative equivalence'; 'linguistic equivalence'; 'pragmatic equivalence'; 'dynamic equivalence'; 'ontological equivalence'; 'semiotic equivalence' and so on so forth (Gorlée, 1994).

Perhaps it is true to argue that all these types of equivalence revolve around two poles: either target-oriented translation or source-oriented translation. In fact, there has been a tug-of-war between the two poles. Yet, both translations are applicable. Nida (1964) prefers 'functional equivalence' or 'dynamic equivalence' to 'formal equivalence' in the translation of the Bible.

Insofar as the Qur'an is concerned, translators have a wide selection of equivalence levels. Pym (1998:131) made the following hierarchy for the twelfth-century Latin translations of Arabic protoscience as follows: (1) the translations of the authoritative texts should be literal; (2) secondary elaboration may be used; (3) translators should work in teams; (4) oral intermediaries may be inferiorized; (5) translation was legitimate conquest; and (6) not-Christian texts could be authoritative. Arguably, literalism enjoyed high status in Pym's hierarchies which may have deleterious effect on the translation as will be shown in section 4 below.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to investigate the translation of Arabic kinship terms into English, with reference to three translations of the Qur'an, namely Pickthall's (2002) *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: Explanatory Translation*; Shakir's (1989) *The Qur'an; and* Ali's[1] (1983) *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*. Although these translations are fully attested complete, they fall short of the original becasue Arabic Qur'an is characterised of incompatible power and elegance, not existing in the language of Arabic literature, or in everyday Arabic. "The often secretive and esoteric nature of the Qur'anic language should be given due attention in the course of translation (Thawabteh's, 2007: 72). God says: "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an, in order that ye may learn wisdom" (Ali 12:2). This should not be understood to mean at all that the translators are incompetent; rather, it suggests that kinship terms are diffiuclt to render. For the sake of the present study, conducting a full scale analysis of all occurrences of kinship terms in the Qur'an seems to be diffiuclt for the numerous examples the Qura'n displays. Most of which, however, are repetitious, that is falling within three categories, namely those akin to putative kinship terms, reciprocal kinship terms and fictive kinship terms. For example, a search in the title in SearchTruth.com[2] returns 74 hits with the word "brother", 22 hits for "sister", 5 hits for "aunt" and 118 for "father". Only representative examples are selected,

[1] http://www.altafsir.com/, consulted on August 6th, 2011.
[2] http://www.searchtruth.com, consulted on August 10th, 2012. The search is carried out in Ali's translation.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

totalling 8 in number. Examples are given in Arabic along with the English translations.

3.1. Significance of the Study

The notion of kinship terms cannot be thought of as a new topic, without any pedigree in the sociolinguistic studies of the past. In fact, there is extensive and burgeoning body of sociolinguistic literature on the use of kinship terms in Arabic (see for example Parkinson, 1985; Khuri, 1981; Shimizu, 1989; Farghal & Shakir, 1994). To the best of my knowledge, however, kinship terms in the Qur'an receive little attention. The present paper aims to lay the foundations for other studies as to kinship terms of address, and also, more importantly, to increase the Arab translators' awareness of one as yet neglected area of in the studies of the translations of the Qur'an— kinship terms.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Thus far, a theoretical framework is made. In what follows, we shall indulge in a few illustrative examples to corroborate and diversify our argument.

4.1 Putative Kinship

Putative kinship or real kinship depends on the social relationship between interactants. Abu Abbass et al. (2010: 3) argue that "[r]eal kinship relations are defined in terms of biology and marriage. Such relations often involve social and legal obligations for the two parties involved in the relationship." To elaborate on putative kinship, take Example 1 below:

Example 1

يأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ إِنَّآ أَحْلَلْنَا لَكَ أَزْوَاجَكَ ٱللاَّتِي آتَيْتَ أُجُورَهُنَّ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ يَمِينُكَ مِمَّآ أَفَآءَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ وَبَنَاتِ عَمِّكَ وَبَنَاتِ عَمَّاتِكَ وَبَنَاتِ خَالِكَ وَبَنَاتِ خَالاَتِكَ (Al-Ahzab 33: 50[1]).

(1) "O Prophet! Lo! We have made lawful unto thee thy wives unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thine uncle on the father's side and the daughters of thine aunts on the father's side, and the daughters of thine uncle on the mother's side and the

[1] In parentheses the name of the sura is first mentioned, followed by sura number, then verse number.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

daughters of thine aunts on the mother's side" (Pickthal 33: 50[1]).

(2) "O Prophet! surely We have made lawful to you your wives whom you have given their dowries, and those whom your right hand possesses out of those whom Allah has given to you as prisoners of war, and the daughters of your paternal uncles and the daughters of your paternal aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and the daughters of your maternal aunts" (Shakir 33: 50).

(3) "O Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowers; and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to thee; and daughters of thy paternal uncles and aunts, and daughters of thy maternal uncles and aunts" (Ali 33: 50).

Example 1 above shows, the kinship terms, i.e., وَبَنَاتِ عَمِّكَ (lit. 'daughters of one's paternal uncle'),وَبَنَاتِ عَمَّاتِكَ (lit. 'daughters of one's paternal aunt'), وَبَنَاتِ خَالِكَ (lit. 'daughters of one's maternal uncle') and وَبَنَاتِ خَالاَتِكَ (lit. 'daughters of one's maternal aunt') can be functionally translated into 'cousin'. Having dealt with authoritative text, formal translation is employed, however. As can be seen in Example 1 above, the three translations seek to capture the source language image by means of employing formal translation as well as explanatory translation. Perhaps Ali's translation is a little target-oriented as it tends to avoid the repetition observed in translation 1 and 2. Nevertheless, formal equivalence may be a hindrance to the communicative thrust of the SL. This is due to semantic gap between the SL and TL. "The way a given language encodes experience semantically makes aspects of that experience not exclusively accessible but just more salient for the users of that language" (Kramsch, 2000: 13). Consider Example 2 below,

Example 2

(Maryam 19: 5) وَإِنِّي خِفْتُ ٱلْمَوَالِيَ مِن وَرَآءِي وَكَانَتِ ٱمْرَأَتِي عَاقِراً فَهَبْ لِي مِن لَّدُنْكَ وَلِيّاً

(1) "Lo! I fear my kinsfolk after me, since my wife is barren. Oh, give me from Thy presence a successor" (Pickthal 19: 5).

(2) "And surely I fear my cousins after me, and my wife is barren, therefore grant me from Thyself an heir," (Shakir 19: 5).

(3) "Now I fear (what) my relatives (and colleagues) (will do) after me: but my wife is barren: so give me an heir as from Thyself" (Ali 19: 5)

In Example 2 above, a kinship element ٱلْمَوَالِيَ (lit. 'relatives, my tribes and cousins on father's side') and its combination is deftly manipulated to form a function in the source text. The element designates certain signifieds in the source

[1] In parentheses the name of the translator is first mentioned, followed by sura number, then verse number.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

text, but seemingly fails to articulate itself in the translation, particularly in translation 2 above. The Arabic ٱلْمَوَالِيَ is translated into generic kinship terms—'my kinsfolk' as in 1 and 2 and ' my relatives' in 3. Having consulted the prominent exegetical work of Al-Qurtubi (1993, vol. 11, 53) as to verse interpretation, we found that ٱلْمَوَالِيَ means 'paternal cousins'. Nevertheless, the denotational meaning, with verse interpretation in mind, is not explicitly made by any of the three translators, giving rise to loss in translation.

Although the Arabic kinship-related item translated into English is a real one, they result in 'non-congruent items' (Shunnaq, 1993; see also Thawabteh, 2007: 106). For example, eight Arabic designations are observed when it comes to back translating English 'cousin' into Arabic as follows:

(1) the son of one's paternal uncle;
(2) the daughter of one's paternal uncle;
(3) the son of one's maternal uncle;
(4) the daughter of one's maternal uncle;
(5) the son of one's paternal aunt;
(6) the daughter of one's paternal aunt;
(7) the son of one's maternal aunt; and
(8) the daughter of one's maternal aunt.

If the lexical item 'cousin' is translated into one of the above eight designations, Shunnaq (ibid: 51) argues, "only one eighth of its congruency is produced." English does not make such kinship distinction, but Arabic does. A semantic gap is observed in translation 2 above. Whilst the speaker fears his sons of his paternal uncle in the SL, he is frightened of sons and daughters of paternal uncle, sons and daughters of maternal uncle, sons and daughters of paternal aunt and sons and daughters of maternal aunt.

However, in Example 3 below, وَلأَبَوَيْهِ (lit. 'parents') is a real kinship whose translation is carried out appropriately in the three translations.

Example 3

(An-Nisa 3: 11) ۚ وَإِن كَانَتْ وَاحِدَةً فَلَهَا ٱلنِّصْفُ وَلأَبَوَيْهِ لِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا ٱلسُّدُسُ مِمَّا تَرَكَ

(1) "and if there be one (only) then the half. And to each of his parents a sixth of the inheritance" (Pickthal 3: 11).
(2) "and if there is one, she shall have the half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have the sixth of what he has left" (Shakir 3:11).
(3) "if only one, her share is a half. For parents, a sixth share of the inheritance to each" (Ali 3:11).

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

4.2 Reciprocal Kinship

Perhaps reciprocal kinship is Arabic-bound, in that a sort of reciprocity between kinship terms takes place. The shade of meaning of a kinship term does not reside inside the term itself, but reclines on the encyclopedic knowledge of the language the translator should have. Consider Example 3 below:

Example 4

وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۚ (Yusuf 12: 100)

(1) "And he placed his parents on the dais" (Pickthall 12: 100).
(2) "And he raised his parents upon the throne" (Shakir 12: 100).
(3) "And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity" (Ali 12: 100).

A cursory look at Example 4 shows loss in the semantic traits of the SL item أبويه (lit. 'parents'), translated into 'parents'. Unlike Example 3 above whereby formal strategy successfully is employed, all the translations in Example 4 kill the SL intended meaning stone dead, and the piece of information provided by the translation is fallacious indeed because Prophet Joseph's mother was dead throughout the sura and it was his maternal aunt intended in the text rather his mother.

Arabic partitions reality quite different from that in English. For example, Arabic is characterized by metaphoric kinship extension to show solidarity or deference towards co-participants. Maternal aunt is interchangeably used with one's mother (al-Tha'ālbi, 1972: 367). "Attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original", as Newmark, 1988: 38) states, seems to be far-fetched. To more appreciate the problem, consider Example 5:

Example 5

أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَآءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن بَعْدِي قَالُواْ نَعْبُدُ إِلَـٰهَكَ وَإِلَـٰهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَـٰهاً وَاحِداً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ (Al-Baqarah 2: 33).

(1) "Or were ye present when death came to Jacob, when he said unto his sons: What will ye worship after me? They said: We shall worship thy God, the God of thy fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, One God, and unto Him we have surrendered" (Pickthall 2: 133).
(2) "Nay! were you witnesses when death visited Yaqoub, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We will serve your god and the god of your fathers, Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq, one Allah only, and to Him do we submit." (Shakir 2: 133).
(3) "Were ye witnesses when death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said to his sons: 'What will ye worship after me?' They said: "We shall worship Thy God and the God of thy fathers, of Abraham, Isma'il and Isaac,- the one (True) God: To Him we bow (in Islam'" (Ali 2: 133).

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

In their endeavor to render آبَائِكَ (lit. 'your fathers') in Example 5 above, the translators produce more or less grotesque translations. In Arabic, the kinship term آبَائِكَ is interchangeable with paternal 'uncle'. The word أب (lit. 'father' singular) is retained not only for father, but also for paternal uncle and male offspring, a case that is common in the Sudanese kinship system (see Abu-Abbas, 2010). The translation shows that the Children of Israel were called when Jacob was dying. He reminded them of the principle of Islam their fathers held. However, Isma'il[1] was Jacob's uncle, not his father. Ali gave a footnote illustrating the Arabic kinship آبَائِكَ: **"**'Fathers' means ancestors, and include uncles, grand-uncles, as well as direct ascendants" (Ali 2: 133, footnote). As can be noted 'Descriptive Translation' strategy "whereby an expression in the SL is paraphrased by describing it conceptually" (Farghal & Shunnaq, 1999: 27) seems to be an outlet. This strategy Farghal & Shunnaq (ibid) further argue "often occurs when the translator comes across a referential or cultural gap where the SL concept is completely missing in the TL culture".

4.3. **Fictive Kinship**

Fictive kinship is a pseudo-kinship commonly found among religious societies. In Muslim societies such relationship is built on credo and ethos, associated with a particular group of people. Abu-Abbas et al. (2010: 3) state that fictive kinship "involves the extension of kinship obligations and relationships to individuals specifically not otherwise included in the kinship universe. […]. Members of religious groups often refer to each other as 'brother' or 'sister'." Take Example 6 below:

Example 6

إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُواْ بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (Al-Hujurat 49: 10).

(1) "The believers are naught else than brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that haply ye may obtain mercy" (Pickthal 49: 10).
(2) "The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you." (Shakir 49:10).
(3) "The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear God, that ye may receive Mercy" (Ali 49: 10).

[1] Alternative spelling for Ishmael, Ismail and Isma'il, the latter of which is colloquial.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

Example 6 above highlights the relation among believers and that the believers are indeed brothers in religion. The rendition of إِخْوَةٌ into 'brothers' may pose no problem insofar as the target audience is concerned as 'brothers' may also have religious connotation as *CCALE* (2003; emphasis in original) states: "You can describe a man as your **brother** if he belongs to the same race, religion, country, profession, or trade union as you, or if he has similar ideas to you." As can be noted, the item إِخْوَةٌ is formally and functionally rendered into English counterpart, bringing about more or less optimal translation. For more elaboration, consider Example 7 below:

Example 7

وَإِلَىٰ عَادٍ أَخَاهُمْ هُوداً قَالَ يَاقَوْمِ ٱعْبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ إِلَـٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَفَلاَ تَتَّقُونَ (Al-Araf 7: 65)

(1) "And unto (the tribe of) A'ad (We sent) their brother, Hud. He said: O my people! Serve Allah. Ye have no other God save Him. Will ye not ward off (evil)?" (Pickthal 7: 65).
(2) "And to Ad (We sent) their brother Hud. He said: O my people! serve Allah, you have no god other than Him; will you not then guard (against evil)?" (Shakir 7: 65).
(3) "To the 'Ad people, (We sent) Hud, one of their (own) brethren: He said: O my people! worship God! ye have no other god but Him will ye not fear (God)?" (Ali 7:65)

The terms of address 'brother' in 1 and 2 and 'brethren' in 3 are fictive in nature. A series of signs comprises a cogent argument in the minds of the SL readers, but does not necessarily exist in the minds of TL readers. That is, the SL term of address aims at creating an aura of social intimacy between 'Ad and his tribes to ' ward off evil'. Ali's translation is likely to be the most accurate rendition though the others are still possible choice.

Example 8

يَٰأُخْتَ هَارُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكِ ٱمْرَأَ سَوْءٍ وَمَا كَانَتْ أُمُّكِ بَغِيّاً (Maryam 19:28)

(1) "O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man nor was thy mother a harlot" (Pickthal 19: 28).
(2) "O sister of Haroun! your father was not a bad man, nor, was your mother an unchaste woman" (Shakir 19: 28).
(3) "O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!" (Ali 19: 28).

Example 8 above shows two kinship terms: one is fictive, e.g., يأُخْتَ (lit. 'O sister') and the other is putative, e.g., أَبُوكِ (lit. 'your father'). The Arabic fictive term of address is intended to show how one feels a connection with a woman, "for example because she belongs to the same race, religion, country, or profession" (*CCALE,* 2003). In Arab culture, fictive terms are employed by the language users

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

to achieve intimacy. The translations in Example 8 give plenty of opportunities for TL readers to forge their own interpretations within the realm of their cultural and linguistic repertoire in a way that is quite different from that of the SL readers. It is only Ali who has provided informational core and, more importantly, explicate in a footnote the potential ambiguity emerging in the course of translating يأُخْتَ.

Aaron the brother of Moses was the first in the line of Israelite priesthood. Mary and her cousin Elisabeth (mother of Yahya) came of a priestly family, and were therefore, 'sisters of Aaron' or daughters of 'Imran (who was Aaron's father). […] Mary is reminded of her high lineage and the unexceptionable morals of her father and mother. How, they said, she had fallen, and disgraced the name of her progenitors! (Ali, ibid)

With reference to this, Mary is connected with Araon not by birth, but in terms high moral he possessed. Mary was punctilious about not to impugn her progenitors' honor.

Very much to the point is vocative 'O' plus term of kinship 'sister' go hand in hand. In English, "the relative formality of terms of address is managed by means of vocatives, i.e., the use of the addressee's name … or a term of kinship … or endearment …" (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 115); they add that vocatives "are more closely connected with social intimacy and distance in interpersonal relationships and with the marking of discourse boundaries" (ibid).

5. Concluding Remarks

The present paper examines the translation of Arabic kinship terms into English, illustrated with three translations of the Qur'an. The study reveals deviation from kinship terms interpretative meaning(s). The study argues for the assumption that the onus is first and often last on the translator to provide as salient translation as possible. Although highly recommended in authoritative texts, formal-based strategies (e.g., literal translation or word for word translation) seem to be as a hindrance to communication in most of the examples discussed. Lexical incongruity existing between the SL and the TL pose formidable challenge. The challenge has become great because Arabic cut linguistic reality in a way that seems to be different from that of English as is the case reciprocal term of address in which a term is used interchangeably with another. As for fictive kinship terms, the examples discussed show few problems, but without the intervention of the translator, say, through footnotes, these problems may be demanding.

Finally, in order to ensure a translation of good quality, compulsory cultural knowledge of both the SL and TL are highly needed for the translator. The translator should exercise extreme caution when it comes to translating a term of kinship.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

Bibliography

Abu-Abbas, K. et al., 2010, „Fictive kinship names in Jordanian Arabic", *Ononomasiology Online, 11*, 1-10.
al-Qurtubi, A., 1993, *Ajāmi' Li'aḥkam al-Qrān,* (vols. 1-20), Beirut, Dar il-kutb al-'ilmyyah.
al-Tha'ālbi, A., 1972, *Fiqih al-Lughah wa Sir al-'Aarabyiah*, Edited and explained by Mustafa Al-Saqa, Ibrahim A. & Abd il-Hafeez S., eds. Cairo: Mustafa il-Babi il-Halabi.
Barnstone, W., 1993, *The poetics of translation: History, theory, practice*, New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
Carter, R., McCarthy, M., 2006, *Cambridge grammar of English,* Cambridge University Press.
Catford, J., 1965, *A linguistic theory of translation: An essay in applied linguistic,* London, Oxford University Press.
Collins Cobuild English Dictionary, 2003, Version 4.11. Birmingham, HarperCollins Publishers.
Farghal, M., Shakir, A., 1994, „Kin terms and titles of address as relational social honorifics in Jordanian Arabic", *Anthropological Linguistics, 36*, 2, 240-253.
Farghal, M., Shunnaq, A., 1999, *Translation with reference to English and Arabic: A practical guide,* Jordan, Dar Al-Hilal for Translation.
Gorlée, D., 1994, *Semiotics and the problem of translation: With special reference to the semiotics of Charles S. Pierce.* Amsterdam & Atlanta, Rodopi.
Khaleel M., 2005, „Assessing English translations of the Qur'an", *Middle East Quarterly,* Spring, 58-71.
Khuri, F., 1981, „Classification, meaning and usage of Arabic status and kinship terms", *International Journal of Sociology of the Family, 11*, 2, 347-366.
Kramsch, C., 2000, *Language and culture,* 2nd Impression. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Leach E., 1958, „Concerning Trobriand clans and the kinship category 'tabu'", Goody J (ed.), *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lefevere A., 1992, *Translation, history and culture*, London & New York: Routledge.
Mashiri, P., 2004, „A sociolinguistic interpretation of the social meanings of kinship terms in Shona urban interactions", *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 22*, 1&2, 27–42.
Newmark, P., 1988, *A Text book of translation,* New York, Prentice Hall.
Nida, E., 1964, *Towards the science of translation,* Leiden, E.J. Brill.
Parkinson D., 1985, *Constructing the social context of communication: Terms of address in Egyptian Arabic,* Berlin, Germany, Mouton de Gruyter.
Pym, A., 1998, *Method in translation history,* Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing.
Salloum, H., Peters, J., 1996, *Arabic contributions to the English vocabulary: English words of Arabic origin,* Beirut, Librairie du Liban Publishers.
Sapir, E., 1921, *Language, An introduction to the study of speech,* New York, Harcourt Brace & World Inc.
Shimizu, Y., 1989, „The vocative use of kinship terminology among Arab Muslims: A case study of a North Jordanian village", *The Japanese Journal of Ethnology,* 55,4, 433-454.
Shunnaq, A., 1993, „Lexical incongruence in Arabic-English translation due to emotiveness in Arabic", *Turjumān* 2,2, 37-63.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)

Thawabteh, M., 2007, *Translating Arabic cultural signs into English: A discourse perspective*, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Granada, Spain.
Thawabteh, M., 2011, „The other side of the coin of lexical borrowing from Arabic into English", *TranscUlturAl,* 1, 4, 103-122.
Titiev M., 1967, „The Hopi use of kinship terms for expressing social and cultural values", *Anthropological Linguistics,* 9,6, 44–49.
Tytler, A., 1790, *Essay on the Principle of Translation*, London.

BDD-A13354 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:53:28 UTC)