

*The Importance of Scholarly Translation for the Progress of Nations*  
*by Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman*

**Why do we need to give priority to Scholarly translation?**

In order to understand the critical importance institutionalized scholarly translation for the development and advancement of nations in general, and our Ummah in particular, we ought to understand the following fundamental concepts:

- 1- It is no longer possible for nations to live in isolation. Nations have to interact with other nations. This interaction can either be positive or negative. Positive interaction by keeping pace with latest developments, while negative interaction is characterized by scientific and technological backwardness and cultural stagnation with serious national and cultural repercussions.
- 2- Scientific and technological advancement forms the bedrock of progress and economic development of nations, giving them competitive edge over others.
- 3- Nations cannot excel except by using their first language.
- 4- All advanced nations, impart information to their people in the language of the people. They provide the essential mechanisms necessary for doing business in people's own language.
- 5- All advanced nations teach all disciplines to their children in their native languages and do not demand the study of foreign languages until students reach higher educational levels, as higher studies are basically concerned with research. However, native language remains the medium of instruction even for higher courses.
- 6- The number of people, who genuinely need to communicate in foreign languages, does not exceed 1%. This group includes university professors, researchers, diplomats, high ranking officials, businessmen, and others

work with tourism sector. People working in the tourism sector need to know only a limited number of words to engage in basic minimum communication. A case in point is the example of Mecca traders who do business around the Grand Mosque. They communicate with pilgrims from all over the Islamic world in the language of the pilgrims themselves, even though these traders have not received any formal training. They have acquired their linguistic skills through day-to-day interaction with the pilgrims. Tourism institutes provide similar training.

- 7- Educational policies of advanced countries have integrated the study of foreign languages as optional subjects in their public education system, making scope for the acquisition of multiple languages by students. This motivates students, teachers and parents to seriously pursue foreign languages. This approach requires strenuous efforts and astronomical sums of money. In spite of the efforts exerted and money spent, 99% of those thronging classrooms hardly benefit from that approach.
- 8- Literal translation of hundreds or thousands of classics or commercial translation of stories and novels do not satisfy the scientific needs of nations.
- 9- The need of the hour is to provide accurate and timely translation of reputed scientific journals, as these periodicals are the fundamental sources of latest information in all scientific disciplines. This can be followed by translation of major works and reference materials of different disciplines.
- 10- Appropriate mechanisms must be put into place to facilitate the use of national language by citizens for conducting their day-to-day affairs.
- 11- Arabic language does not belong merely to 300 million Arabs; rather it is the language of Islam which is close to hearts and minds of diverse peoples of the Islamic Ummah. If Arabic adapts itself with modern sciences, it may well become the first world language for scientific and religious discourse for the diverse communities of the Islamic Ummah.
- 12- We cannot indigenize science and technology in our nation as long as we continue to teach our students, including those pursuing higher education,

in foreign languages (English being the instruction language in most Islamic countries). If we do not teach our children our first language, knowledge will be monopolized by a handful of uncreative and barren elite that is merely capable of mimicking and imitating and not capable of making original contribution to any discipline.

- 13- Arabic should be the instruction language for all courses and levels of education.
- 14- Scholarly translation—particular academic periodicals—must constitute the core of translation activities.

**What are the measures and mechanisms required for institutionalizing translation?**

- 15- There is a need to establish a translation center devoted to scholarly translation services. As this center begins to function and cater to the needs of the public, it will become a self-sustaining and viable entity by virtue of its utility and valuable contributions. As such scientific centers and universities will be encouraged to use Arabic as the medium of instruction. The private sector will begin to take interest in the value of scholarly translation, and make worthy contribution to this field, as rising demand will make scholarly translation a commercially viable undertaking. This will go a long way in sharing the burden of government organs and non-profit organizations in this field.
- 16- Neglecting scholarly translation to Arabic has been a victim of tragic negligence on part of the Ummah. Despite low costs involved in translation, its impact will be felt not just on a city or a country; rather it will positively affect the whole Ummah. The cost of running a translation institute is definitely far less than cost of running a large university in our countries. Further, it will save the mammoth amounts we allocate for teaching foreign language to our children.

- 17- A study must be conducted to assess the experiences of other nations like Japan and countries in Europe and America that have successfully adapted and integrated their languages with modern scientific usage through scholarly translation. These countries represent models of development without giving up their national languages.
- 18- Once this process is started, all hurdles will be overcome. Demand will trigger supply. With firm determination and tenacity, we are capable of changing the sorry state of the Ummah, and join the ranks of advanced nations in the modern world.

**Riyadh, 20/9/1428 AH**

**Corresponding to 2/01/2007 AD**