

# **Translation and Connecting Arteries of Arab Culture with the Gift of Human Civilization**

**By:**

**Dr. Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulayman**

The predecessors translated the best of human sciences and knowledge available in their time into Arabic language. They digested it along with their native Arabic language and, in the process; they produced the sweetness of Islamic civilization.

The question now is: How can this translation be done in today's sciences? How can their translation attain the required substance? The answer is: We need to learn from our experience and from the experience of others. The translation should be done according to a civilizational plan and vision that helps our effort and actualize our goal in enriching our Arabic language in a way that will enable us respond to the emerging challenge – the scientific and methodological challenge. It is in this way that we can make an originally creative contribution in the light of our Islamic civilization and our solid Islamic identity.

From the historical experience of our Ummah, we learn that the positive aspect comes from translation of the divine natural sciences which gave the Islamic universal vision the opportunity to be the fertile ground and the ideal foundation for nurturing the tree of sciences, and their scientific and experimental

methodologies that gave the contemporary man a dazzling base for civilizational achievement.

The negative aspect of Muslim translations comes from impacts of obsolete religions and philosophies that sank the Islamic culture into the abyss of these archaic superstitions and deceptions, distorted Israelite stories, and misleading philosophies that eventually overcame the pure Islamic vision and led the Ummah and its civilization into perversion, imitation, subordination, breakdown, dependency and jugglery.

Therefore, we need to realize anew that the challenge we are facing today is in the area of sciences and technology and divine laws in minds and manners. We need to direct our efforts towards scientific translation in these areas; and such translation should be carried out in the light of our universal vision and our sound civilizational identity. This is the opposite of the translations of books of philosophy and literature that are currently being done in a number of projects on translation of hundreds and thousands of books and stories many of which are driven by commercial considerations and factored by cultural war and its institutions that only increase our educated elites and youth in their state of being dazzled by and blindly following the others. This is how the civilizational effort of our Ummah is wasted. The situation is compounded by the barren and often repeated Byzantine argument that Arabic language is unable to accommodate modern sciences.

On the contrary, the Arabic language had in the past accommodated sciences of world nations; and these same sciences have been accommodated today by languages of many nations that are not as rich as Arabic in heritage and vigor. Even the dead Hebrew language revived by the Zionists within the last century is being used to teach modern sciences and thought. Every language is capable of accommodating sciences in line with its circumstances and possessed values. How then could Arabic language not be able to accommodate sciences and thought of the present age if they are treated with seriousness and correct methodologies that are compatible with the language methods and structures?!

If the challenge that faces the Arab and Islamic nations of today are essentially in area of sciences and technology, then we should focus our attention on the goal and benefit from experiences of advanced nations that succeeded – in spite of teaching their children in their own languages – in connecting the arteries of their culture to the achievements of modern human civilization, especially the major countries that are scientifically and technologically advanced. The essence of human experiment in the field of translation lies in cooperation between efforts of national institutions and those of businessmen in carrying out translations and spreading knowledge in first language.

In this aspect, efforts of national institutions perhaps need to be given priority, especially in areas of sciences and technology to enrich the Ummah's culture, spread the love of knowledge and organize learning by it. By this, the request for new translated scientific and knowledge materials will make translation commercially attractive for business people, thereby reducing the efforts and money being expended on national institutions.

The most important pillar in translation plan in all scientific fields generally and in areas of physical sciences, humanities and technology in particular is to translate the products of scientific periodicals in which every new scientific research – before anything else – is published. This should be given priority in translation.

As for books and textbooks, their contents are years behind what is published in periodicals. Above that, most of these books will be produced by local scholars who would have grasped the sciences and followed up every new thing in their researches and those of other scholars in lively scientific languages.

If the translation of periodical is commenced through efforts of national institutions, with the spread of knowledge and teaching with Arabic language, the translation will become a commercial project carried out by publishing and translating companies that will be established especially to enrich the Ummah's culture in this field, making use of all print, audio and visual means. All that the Ummah needs for a start is to train serious and able

cadres in the area of translation, according to the following suggested ways:

- Production of scientific and able cadres that are competent in their different scientific fields and proficient in languages of the scientifically and technologically advanced nations. This can be done by providing good optional academic programs in science schools and centers for training post-graduate students and participants in science student exchange programs.
- Establishment of colleges of languages and translation to produce linguistic and technical cadres that would support the efforts of the scholars and carry out scientific translations.
- Establishment of translation houses and employment of language cadres there; coordinating efforts of scholars and translators in producing scientific translations; publication of periodicals, reports and important scientific works at affordable prices and delivering same to libraries and educational institutions around the Arab world and all Muslim world universities for the purpose of spreading knowledge and scientific culture among children of the Ummah and actualizing the commercial demand for translation.

- Encouraging the private sector to participate fully or partly in phases of translation production, and expansion of this participation as time goes and demands increase. The experiment should be consolidated as the case is with the today's advanced nations.

As far as economic aspect of these suggestions are concerned, we have previously made it clear how translation can play an effective role in enriching the Ummah's culture, connecting its intellectual arteries with the products of world civilization and ensuring skilled, serious and creative participation, facilitated by universal Islamic civilizational vision. It is then that the Ummah can reclaim its human civilizational role. This will save the nation the enormous amount being spent on legions of English teachers unto whom millions of students are assigned. It will equally save it the huge amount spent on books and spare it the time that is being wasted and learning opportunities that are being squandered. Resources that are being expended on providing private tuitions and fruitless support lessons will also be saved.

Likewise, reorienting throngs of teachers of English language towards participation in translation works and in diplomatic and commercial areas is another way of making English language an optional course in different levels of public education. If this experiment of teaching foreign languages as optional courses succeeds, the success will not be limited to our country. Rather,

it will – by the Grace of God – go beyond it to the entire Arab world. This will save the Ummah multiples of resources and make it an act of magnanimity that will ever be acknowledged for this generous nation.

The costs of optional classes will be minimal for all in comparison to the costs of the present compulsory study of English. In spite of this, there will be no loss or reduction in the number of those who will learn English language. On the contrary, the number of students who will seriously study lively foreign languages will multiply, especially, English language due to its social and scientific significance that these students and their guardians will realize. The advantages of learning English can only be attained by those students who take their study very seriously. Then the guardians will not have to give free rein to their wards and their teachers for there will still be time. Whatever they miss, they will be able to make up for in the future. They will then not have to worry; for both the student and the teacher will be successful, according to the school report.

The costs of these optional classes and the expenses of the works of colleges of languages and translation will not be more than the annual budget of one of our major universities not to speak of the impact of this civilizational project that will – by the grace of God – be extensive and far-reaching, thereby representing a cornerstone for reshaping the future of this nation

in a bigger and greater manner that will be compatible with potentialities of the age and its intellectual horizons.

As for the economic gains that come from developing the nation's creative talents and cultural value and development of its technological productivity energies, they are definitely greater than what we could enumerate.

Benefits can be derived from the experiment of King Fahd University of Petroleum and Mineral Resources and the experiences of International Islamic University of Malaysia as well as experiences of other universities of advanced countries in equipping students linguistically and effectively training them for researches and postgraduate studies to enable them study with foreign languages.

It is worth mentioning here that advanced universities make knowledge of foreign languages a condition for admission to post-graduate studies because that level of education is more that of research and civilizational communication which are out of the scope of the majority of people and most students. Language training centers in these universities are for those who are not qualified or completely qualified in the required languages, according to the needs of the desired specialization.

Similarly, I hope that a study will be undertaken on the experiences of advanced nations in area of translation and teaching of physical sciences and technology in those nations' native languages with the aim of identifying the best



methodologies and means that are suitable for conditions of the Arab people and the nature of Arabic language. It is also required that scientific cooperation and communication between Arabic language academies in Arab countries be documented, their efforts in the service of the language and translation into it be supported and terminologies be unified in all Arab countries and their educational institutions and mass media.

The universities, ministries of education, ministries of information and the print, audio and visual media institutions are requested to work towards unification of linguistic terminologies and publicizing their usage in all aspects of life.

Conclusively, I hope that we will not postpone laying down principles and foundations for ending decades and centuries of dependency and backwardness, and taking – along with all intellectual, educational and media institutions – serious scientific steps towards achieving intellectual independence, reclaiming our identity and bringing back our performance vitality so that the Ummah can take up its deserved position that matches its message and mission and fits its potentialities in the course of human civilization.