

Institution: SOAS
Unit of Assessment: 27 Area Studies
Title of case study: Promoting Inter-Faith Understanding Worldwide through an Accessible Translation of the Qur'an (Muhammad Abdel Haleem)
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>In his 2004 and 2010 Oxford University Press translations of the Qur'an, based on over 30 years of rigorous scholarship, Professor Muhammad Abdel Haleem sought to make, "the Qur'an accessible to everyone who speaks English". Numerous accolades, including membership of the Arabic language Academy in Cairo, approval of his 2010 translation by Al-Azhar University, sales of 250,000+ copies and his receipt of hundreds of laudatory messages from readers around the world attest to both the faithfulness of his translation and its accessibility to a wide readership. Abdel Haleem has contributed substantially to interfaith understanding through his translations and interpretations and assisted interfaith dialogue globally.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Abdel Haleem's secondary schooling took place at Cairo's Al-Azhar, the chief centre of Islamic and Arabic learning in the world, a prerequisite of entrance to which was perfect recitation of the Qur'an at age eleven, (a skill which Abdel Haleem has proudly retained). Even before completion of his PhD at Cambridge, Abdel Haleem was already teaching at SOAS, where he has remained since October 1971.</p> <p>Since 1993, Abdel Haleem's body of work on the interpretation and translation of the Qur'an comprises 4 monographs, 2 edited books, 21 book chapters and 8 articles in peer-reviewed journals. This was undertaken at SOAS as a senior lecturer (1991-1995), and later as King Fahd Professor of Islamic Studies since 1995. He is Founding Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies (1996) and Founding Editor of the <i>Journal of Qur'anic Studies</i> (1997). His achievements have been recognised through the award of an Honorary Doctorate in Islamic Studies by the University of Jordan, and of an OBE (2008).</p> <p>Abdel Haleem's translations of the Qur'an, published first in 2004, again in 2005 and significantly updated in 2010 with the addition of facing Arabic text, were in part motivated by written requests from readers, especially from the Muslim world, as only the original Arabic text carries religious authority. The 2010 version, like its predecessor, is officially endorsed by Al-Azhar University in Cairo, facilitating further sometimes large-scale dissemination throughout the Islamic world.</p> <p>The 2010 edition displays the traditional calligraphic pages alongside Abdel Haleem's English translation and includes an introduction treating stylistic features and issues of interpretation and translation. Each <i>sura</i> is preceded by a summary and the whole benefits from essential footnotes and an extended index.</p> <p>Among Abdel Haleem's many publications on the Qur'an, three listed below contributed particularly to the preparatory work underpinning his translations. Output c, <i>Understanding the Qur'an</i> of 1999, (and reissued in 2001 and 2010), closely examines the style and linguistic features employed in the description of various themes, including water and paradise, across multiple instances in the Qur'an. Indeed, it was through the process of examining the language of the Qur'an thematically, that Abdel Haleem believes he discovered new linguistic features of the text. The book also includes the chapter "Dynamic Style," drawn from research and a SOAS Bulletin publication of 1992, which he feels is one of his most significant contributions to the field of Qur'anic studies, "Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: Itifāt and Related Features in the Qur'ān." This subject had never before been studied by scholars in the West; since the publication of Abdel Haleem's article the theme has been referred to by many Western scholars of the Qur'an (for example, Neal Robinson, Ingrid Mattson and W. Wesley Robinson).</p>

Output d represents Abdel Haleem's first significant work of translation into English and as such his first exploitation of the practical skills and interpretative work and other analysis required to produce an accurate, fluid and compelling translation.

Output f, "Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Qur'anic Exegesis," was particularly important in its investigation of the importance of fully understanding context to the process of successful translation. Further, he demonstrates how the poor translation of just one key word can negatively affect understanding of a whole passage and contribute to contradictions across the text as a whole.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. *The Qur'an: English translation with parallel Arabic text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- b. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- c. *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999.
- d. trans. and intro. *Chance or Creation?: God's Design in the Universe* (Attributed to Jahiz). Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1995.
- e. "Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Qur'anic Exegesis." In *Approaches to the Qur'an*, edited by A. Shereef and G. Hawting, 71-98. Abingdon: Routledge, 1993.

Publications e and f were submitted to RAE 1996
Publications c and d were submitted to RAE 2001

The 2005 revised version of the 2004, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford University Press), was submitted to RAE 2008. *The Qur'an: English Translation with Parallel Arabic Text* of 2010 (also Oxford University Press) is listed in REF2.

Since FY 2007-8, the Centre of Islamic Studies has received in excess of £900,000 to support the research activities of Abdel Haleem and his colleagues as well as research facilitation activities.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Abdel Haleem's translations have sold more than a quarter of a million copies internationally and many pirated versions of the 2010 edition are available for download from websites in Pakistan and elsewhere; in February 2013 it was available on the notorious, 'Pirate's Bay' website, now blocked by leading search engines. According to OUP and Amazon.co.uk, Abdel Haleem's translations are the world's bestselling Qur'an translations. As of November 2013, the 2010 hardback edition was ranked 11th and the paperback at 2nd for sales on Amazon.co.uk in the category "Religion of Islam," with the Kindle edition at no. 8, and 35th in the category "religious history of Islam" in the UK and 6th in the US. (1, 2 and 3 below)

In keeping with Abdel Haleem's desire to create a widely accessible, naturalistic English translation of the Qur'an, many Amazon reviews of the 2010 edition written by readers themselves Muslims and non-Muslims highlight ease of reading and improved understanding, both as a consequence of the language employed in the translation and of the additional notes and footnotes and other explanatory material, examples of which include:

- a review of May 2011 --"I have been searching for something like this for many years and it seems my prayers have finally been answered. If you are looking for an easier to read translation this Quran really hits the nail on the head. Not only is this a translation, the

author has explained the reasons behind the verses, making the quran more digestible and also readable. Excellent version, would recommend to muslims and non muslims alike”;

- a review of July 2011 -- “*Abdulhalim did a great job in translating the Quran, and he included a very useful explanations that helps any non-Muslim to follow and understand the Quran”;*
- a review of February 2012 -- “*It was so good to see a learned translation of the Quran in a coherent and fluently readable English. A great work”;*
- a review of January 2013 – “*This translation is a great improvement over earlier translations for me. The English is much more understandable but still conveys the meaning accurately, so far as I can tell. The language still retains much of the powerful delivery one would expect”;*
- a review of July 2013 – “*I’m really enjoying to read this particular translation of the Qur’an, because of the flowing nature of the English. It’s very enjoyable to read..... There is a little sentence before every chapter to explain where the chapter was revealed (Makkah or Madinah) and a short context, which I like ... In a few instances where the context needs to be made a clear a short footnote is included, which again is kept nice and concise”.* (3)

The translation is now available in Kindle and Google ebook editions available online, and OUP has commissioned an audio version at the request of readers.

Further impact on a broad readership is corroborated by bulk purchases made by religious organisations internationally and through promotion of the translation by interfaith organisations. In 2010 the Department of Islamic Affairs in Abu Dhabi bought 15,000 copies for free distribution in hotels. In 2011, *Why Islam?*, a project based in Southern California under the Islamic Circle of North America with branches all over the United States, requested 20,000 copies a year for free distribution. The book is widely available in UK mosques; for example, Palmers Green Mosque makes bulk orders of the book to sell at a reduced price to its community. (1) The *Building Bridges* Seminars on Muslim-Christian relations, convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, use only Abdel Haleem’s translation in its literature and annual omnibus featuring content of the seminars, whose multi-faith readership is considerable. (4)

The translation is widely used in teaching at a number of levels internationally. In 2010 Wayne University in the United States bought 200 copies. In 2011 a professor at the University of Qom in Iran requested copies for his teaching and research activities in two undergraduate courses writing: “*There are two undergraduate courses of studying Islamic works in English translation which are taught in the discipline of English language and literature in Iranian universities. As in both courses it is natural to encounter texts with fragments from the Qur’an, I used to introduce a number of English translations, all purchased before yours. Since your translation was published, I have been keen to use [it] for my teaching and research activities.*” (4)

It should be noted that Qom is the main centre of Shi’i studies and Abdel Haleem is a Sunni. For this professor in Iran to accept and use a translation by a Sunni scholar is a telling example of how widely this translation is accepted.

A professor at the university of Waterloo in Canada has written to Abdel Haleem:

I would like to express my gratitude for your English translation of the Quran. Of all the translations I have read, I find yours clear, succinct and easy to understand. I have used it in my classes and I always encourage non-Muslims to read the introduction you have provided, clarifying so many misconceptions. I appreciate your description of how Muslims and non-Muslims alike have taken Quranic verses out of context, to justify their acts. (4)

Further impact through dissemination of the translation and its underpinning research is evident in

Impact case study (REF3b)

Abdel Haleem's participation in a range of literary festivals, public debates and inter-faith meetings. He spoke at the Emirates Airline Dubai Literary Festival (March 2011) on the subject of translating the Qur'an, and participated in the *Times* Cheltenham Literary Festival (October 2010), where the book stock sold out in the first two hours, to an audience of several hundred. He was at the Madrid inter-faith dialogue conference chaired by HM King Abdallah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (July 2008).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Corroboration of sales figures, additional formats in which the translation is available and bulk order purchases: Senior Commissioning Editor Oxford World's Classics, OUP.
2. One of many pirated copies of the translation was found in January 2013 here: http://asadullahali.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/the_quran.pdf
3. Amazon.co.uk reader reviews of the 2010 edition: http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/019957071X/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending
4. Correspondence with Building Bridges and professors in Qom and University of Waterloo can be provided on request.