On Finding Equivalents for Quranic Words in Al-Akmal

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The process of dictionary compilation, like translation, involves decision-making at several levels, one of which is setting the parameters of the language variety involved. In Al-Akmal, a forthcoming general Arabic-English dictionary, the variety for which the dictionary is compiled is Modern Standard Arabic MSA). This variety, however, has not been clearly demarcated by lexicographers. Nonetheless, one particular text that is historically located in Classical Arabic yet continues to be a central ingredient of MSA and the modern Arab culture is the Holy Quran. Hence, a dictionary that claims to represent MSA must incorporate the vocabulary of the Holy Quran. But the text of this holy book presents the lexicographer with several challenges: due to the various interpretations given to the words in the text, different and occasionally quite disparate translations have been given. To make things more complicated, translation procedures adopted by the various translators such as Yusuf Ali, Khan, Shakir and Pickthall vary. Thirdly, some words have survived in MSA in one or more morphological forms only. Thus, it is felt that the selection of meanings and English equivalents for the Quranic words must combine a variety of approaches including authentication of senses in classical dictionaries like Li-sanu L-Arab; respect of different interpretations; citation of words in their morphological forms as they are given in the Holy Quran and, where appropriate, quoting the whole or part of the aya in which the word concerned is given. Finally, the Anglicization of some Quranic words such as aya, Hadith and Sunna (along with suitable glosses) may be considered as part of the process of creating equivalence.