The Translation of the Holy Quran

Muslims believe that the actual words of the Quran are divine words of Allah, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by Archangel Gabriel and are, therefore, untranslatable literally. Any translation of the words of the Quran will not be equivalent to the Quran, and in the opinion of most Muslim scholars, could not be considered holy like the Quran itself. For instance according to Muslim scholars the Quran in its Arabic script should not be handled by Muslims in a state of major ritual impurity (e.g. after sex before bath), but this does not apply to a translation of the meanings of the Quran according to Muslim scholars in general.

Muslim scholars agree that a literal translation of the text of the Quran is not achievable, and according to most of them is not permissible. In any case such a translation could be misleading. For instance, let us look at the following *aya*:

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\text{وَلا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَى عُنُقِكَ وَلََ تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ} \quad \text{(الإسراء/29)}
\]

A literal translation would say that you should not tie or chain your hand to your neck, nor extend it fully, whereas the true meaning of the *aya* is that you should not be too miserly nor overspend.

The Quran itself states that it is impossible to write anything like the Quran. To a Muslim this is true in Arabic as well as in any other language.

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\text{قُل لَّئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الإِنسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى أَن يَأْتُواْ بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لََ يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَا نَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا} \quad \text{(الإسراء/88)}
\]

i.e. Say: "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Quran they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support. (Al-Israa/88)

However, many scholars say that it is permissible to translate the meanings of the Quran, since such a translation makes it possible for Muslims who do not know Arabic to understand, albeit approximately, what the Quran says. Similarly, it also makes it possible for non-Muslims to form an understanding of the message of the Quran. Islam is a religion that asks its followers to spread the message of Islam, and reasonably correct translations can help a propagator of the religion in his efforts to teach and explain Islam to non-Arabs.
The Quran says:

الَّذِينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رِسَالََتِ اللََِّّ وَيَخْشَوْنَهُ وَلََ يَخْشَوْنَ أَحَدًا إِلََّ اللَََّ وَكَفَى بِاللََِّّ حَسِيبًا (الألحزاب/39)

(It is the practice of those) who preach the Messages of Allah, and fear Him, and fear none but Allah. And enough is Allah to call (men) to account. (Al-Ahzab/39)

It also says:

اذْعَ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ََلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ (النحل/521)

i.e. “Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.” (An-Nahl/125)

The prophet (PBUH) says:

بَلِّغُوا عَنِّي وَلَوْ آيَةً (ٌ... (رواه البخاري وآخرون)

i.e. “Convey from me even a (single) aya..” (related by Al-Bukhari and others)

Some scholars have argued that the translation of even the meanings of the Quran is not permissible, and yet there are some who have written arguing that even the tafsir (i.e. interpretation) should not be translated. One of their arguments is that no translation of the Quran or its meanings or interpretation was done in the days of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions, neither in the early centuries of Islam, and yet people embraced Islam in millions and recited the Holy Quran always in Arabic only. However, this is an extreme view, and is not the common view of contemporary scholars.

According to most Muslim scholars, a Muslim may not call the Adhan (i.e. call for prayers) or say his prayers except in Arabic. Only Abu Hanifah (80-150 H, 699-767 A.D.), the head of one of the four major Sunni schools of Islamic Jurisprudence, is said to have opined that Muslims may recite a translation in their prayers. His two companion scholars, Abu Yousuf and Muhammad opined that that was only allowed for those who did not know Arabic. In any case, this particular opinion of Abu Hanifah and his two companions is not followed today as far as we know.
The Quran itself stresses in several *ayas* that it is in clear and eloquent Arabic. Here are some of those *ayas*:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (الزخرف/3)

We have made it a Qur-an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand (and learn wisdom). (Az-Zukhruf/3)

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (يوسف/2)

We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur-an, in order that ye may learn wisdom. (Yusuf/2)

ْقُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا غَيْرَ ذِي عِوَجٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَقُونَ (الزمر/28)

(It is) a Qur-an in Arabic, without any crookedness (therein): in order that they may guard against Evil. (Az-Zumar/28)

كتَابٌ فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (فصلت/3)

A Book whereof the verses are explained in detail; a Qur-an in Arabic, for people who understand (Fussilat/3)

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ حُكْمًا عَرَبِيًّا (الرعد/37)

Thus have We revealed it to be a judgment of authority in Arabic (Ar-Ra’d/37)

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ (الشعراء/195)

In the perspicuous Arabic tongue (Ash-Shuaraa/195)

The miraculous nature of the Quran is not limited to its eloquence and its use of the language, but also to the fact that none of the statements in the Quran have ever been in contradiction with any newly discovered scientific findings in the fields of astronomy, geology, physics, medicine, etc., which could not have been known to any person in the days of the Prophet (PBUH) about 14 centuries ago. The only explanation possible is, therefore, that the Quran was a revelation from Allah. The Quran itself states:
Soon will We show them Our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that thy Lord doth witness all things? (Fussilat/53)