

With the Name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful.

**RULING CONCERNING TRANSLATION OF THE FRIDAY SERMON INTO A
LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ARABIC – by Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Baz**

from *Fatawa li l-Musafirin wa l-Mughtaribin* (Legal Rulings for Travellers and Those Living in the West), 1st ed., 1413, pp. 83-87. Translation © Usama Hasan

Q: We had a disagreement regarding the permissibility of translating the Friday sermon into our national language. Some of us viewed this as permissible, others as not so. What is the ruling of the Shari’ah regarding this? Enlighten us, and may Allah enlighten you!

A: The people of knowledge, Allah’s mercy be upon them, have disagreed concerning the translation of sermons from the pulpit in Jumu’ah and ‘Eid prayers into non-Arabic languages.

Some of the people of knowledge, may Allah be pleased with them, forbade this, desiring the protection and longevity of the Arabic language. They desired also to follow the way of the Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and that of his Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, in delivering sermons in Arabic in the lands of the non-Arabs. They were also eager to encourage the people to learn the Arabic language and be concerned about it.

Other people of knowledge regarded it as permissible to translate the sermon into foreign languages if most or all of the audience did not know the Arabic language, in view of the purpose for which Allah legislated the sermon, i.e. to give people understanding of the rulings of the Shari’ah and Allah’s prohibitions, and to guide them towards noble character and praiseworthy qualities and warn against whatever opposes these.

There is no doubt that consideration of meanings and purposes is more important and more obligatory than consideration of words and rites, especially if the audience do not attach importance to the Arabic language and if the khatib’s preaching in Arabic does not influence them to race to learn it and be concerned about it; for in that case the purpose would not have been achieved, and the required aim of the Arabic language being pursued would not have been fulfilled.

Through this reasoning it becomes clear to one who considers, that the view of the permissibility of translating sermons into the languages of the audience, such that they understand what is said and comprehend what is meant, is better and has more right to be followed. This is especially the case if not translating the sermon would lead to argumentation and dispute. Hence, there is no doubt that translation in a case such as this is to be done, to attain what is beneficial for the people and avoid what will cause mischief.

If there are amongst the audience those who do understand the Arabic language, then the *khatib* should combine between the two languages, i.e. he should address the people in Arabic first, then repeat the sermon in the language understood by the other people. In this way, he will combine both desirable ends (i.e. speaking in Arabic and also making the khutbah understandable to the audience), all undesirable aspects will be eliminated and there will be no imbalances amongst the audience.

The evidence for this view from the purified Shari'ah are numerous. Amongst these are:

- 1) What has already been mentioned, i.e. the objective of the sermon being to benefit the audience, to remind them of the right of Allah, to call them to Him and to warn them against what He has prohibited – all of this can only be done in their language.
- 2) Allah Exalted sent the Messengers, peace be upon them, with the language of their people so that they would make them understand what Allah required of them in their own tongue, as Allah, Mighty and Majestic has said, **“We only sent a Messenger with the language of his people, so that he may explain to them.”** (Ibrahim:4) Further, He, Mighty and Majestic said, **“(This is) A Book which We have sent down to you, that you may bring mankind from the darknesses into the Light, by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the Mighty, the Praised.”** (Ibrahim:1) So how is it possible to bring them out from the darknesses into the Light if they do not understand what Allah means in His Book ? Hence it is known that there must be translation which will explain the meaning, and clarify for them the right of Allah Exalted if it is not immediately possible for them to learn the language of the Book and give it due attention.
- 3) The Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, ordered Zayd bin Thabit to learn the language of the Jews in order to exchange correspondence with them and establish the proof upon them, and to read their scriptures when these were brought and explain to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, what they intended.
- 4) When the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, attacked the lands of the non-Arabs, the Persians and Romans, they did not fight them until they had called them to Islam through the intermediary of interpreters. When they had conquered these lands, they called the people to Allah, Glorified is He, through the Arabic language and ordered the people to learn it. Those who were ignorant of Arabic, the Companions addressed them in their language and made them understand what was intended in the language which they understood. In this way the proof was established and all excuses were cut off. There is no doubt that this way must be followed, especially at the end of time, and during the strangeness of Islam, and the sticking of every group to its language. Hence the need for translation is an absolute necessity, and the call of a caller is not complete without it.

I ask Allah to enable the Muslims, wherever they may be, to understand His Religion, to stick to His Law and to be steadfast upon it, and to reform those in authority over them, and to grant Victorious Help to His Religion and to humiliate His enemies; He is Most Generous, Most Noble.