

The linguistic Variations In the translation of the literary devices in the Quran

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Abstract:

The linguistic variation is a branch of sociolinguistics that deals with differences that occur on language in social stage. Thus, to study this linguistic phenomenon we select a given topic which is the variation in translating the literary devices in the Quran and show how the translation of these narrative techniques might differ from one translation to another.

The eloquence in the Quran refers to the mastery of expression used in its verses, presenting a single meaning through various syntactic structures, characterized by precision and clarity in conveying the intended message. The Quran's eloquence is a miraculous aspect of both its wording and meaning, combining brevity and beauty in its expressions.

Keywords: the literary devices, the linguistic variation, translation, the Quran, culture, The Arabic language, eloquence.

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Introduction

The importance of rhetorical clarity in the Holy Qur'an is truly unique, for the Qur'an is the divine scripture revealed to the last of the Prophets and Messengers, our Master Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). It contains the words of Allah directed to humanity. The rhetorical miracle of the Qur'an is, therefore, a divine form of expression aimed at clarifying truths and legal rulings. The *bayān* in the Qur'an is characterized by clarity and precision in presenting these truths and rulings. It serves as a comprehensive guide that includes religious teachings, ethical values, and laws that organize human life. Clear expression facilitates the understanding and application of these teachings.

Moreover, the Qur'an is distinguished by its inspiration and linguistic creativity in employing eloquence and a beautiful style. It is also characterized by poetic-like structure and masterful use of the Arabic language, making its recitation a deeply moving and enjoyable experience.

The *bayān* in the Qur'an carries persuasive power and influence, as Allah Almighty uses strong proofs and convincing arguments to establish His truths and to call people to faith and piety. Furthermore, rhetorical expression in the Qur'an serves as a source of inspiration and spiritual strength, in addition to its unmatched linguistic perfection. However, a major challenge arises when attempting to translate such *bayān* into another language — English, for example. The question remains: can translation convey the intended meaning, or does it become a stumbling block for the translator?

To answer this question, we undertook this research under the title: **“Translating Rhetorical Expression (*Bayān*) in the Qur'an”**. The phenomenon of **linguistic divergence** poses a significant challenge to translators of the meanings of the Qur'an, particularly when it comes to rhetorical styles and parables. A translator who is unaware of this phenomenon often struggles to find equivalents for such rhetorical imagery. In some cases, they might simply render the original expressions into literal equivalents without considering the context or divine intent behind the Qur'an's rhetorical inimitability.

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The central question of this research is: **Does linguistic divergence affect the foundations of translating rhetorical expression in the Qur'an?** And, **does translating the Quranic *bayān* involve unique principles in conveying the words that reflect divine inimitability?**

Corpus of Study:

We selected examples of rhetorical expression from various Qur'anic chapters, ensuring diversity in the types of rhetorical imagery. As for the English translations, we relied on the versions of **Taqi al-Din al-Hilali & Muhsin Khan**, and **Abdullah Yusuf Ali**, aiming to clarify the issue of divergence in rendering rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an. Our research follows this structure: an introduction, two chapters (one on defining linguistic divergence and Qur'anic *bayān*, and another on translation strategies), and a conclusion outlining results and recommendations.

Chapter One: Definition, Significance, and Types of Bayān

Definition of Bayān

a) Linguistic Definition:

Bayān in Arabic refers to anything that reveals or makes something clear through various forms of indication. It includes eloquence and clarity of expression and also refers to the ability to express and structure speech in diverse ways.

b) Terminological Definition:

In rhetorical sciences, *bayān* is one of the branches of Arabic *balāghah* (eloquence). It refers to the art of expressing a single meaning in different stylistic forms and syntactic structures, with varying degrees of clarity, while matching the intended context. It encompasses a set of principles and tools used to deliver a single meaning through multiple creative rhetorical techniques, including **simile (tashbīh)**, **metaphor (isti'ārah)**, **metonymy (kināyah)**, and **figurative speech (majāz)**. Some scholars further divide *bayān* into *apparent* and *hidden* expression.

According to al-Jurjānī in his book *Asrār al-Balāghah fī 'Ilm al-Bayān*, *bayān* is:

“A creative linguistic faculty that expresses thoughts and emotions.”

Thus, *bayān* is linguistic innovation and eloquence.

The Importance of Bayān

Bayān plays a significant role in communication, as it enhances understanding and effective transmission of meanings and ideas. Al-Jāhiz notes in this regard:

“The meanings held within people's hearts, imagined in their minds, hidden within their souls, and arising from their thoughts are concealed and unknown. One cannot know what is in another's heart or mind except through speech and expression. These expressive traits are what make those hidden meanings visible and comprehensible to others.”

Types of Bayān

1) Metonymy (*Kināyah*)

Al-Sakkākī defines it in *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* as:

“Abandoning explicit mention of something in favor of something associated with it, such that the listener infers the intended meaning — like saying: ‘So-and-so is long in his sword strap’ (meaning: he is tall).”

Types of metonymy:

- Metonymy of **attribute**
- Metonymy of **subject**
- Metonymy of **relation**

2) Metaphor (*Isti‘ārah*)

According to classical rhetoricians, metaphor is:

“The use of a word in a meaning other than what it was originally meant for in the language, via a process of transference, to achieve clarity and vividness.”

Difference from simile: a simile uses an explicit comparative word, while a metaphor omits it, leading to deeper integration of the borrowed image.

Components of metaphor:

- **Source (al-must‘ār minhu):** The original meaning, or the image being borrowed from (like the “vehicle”).
- **Target (al-must‘ār lahu):** The word/image to which the meaning is applied.
- **Metaphor (al-must‘ār):** The actual word or image carrying the new, borrowed meaning.

Types of metaphor:

- **Explicit metaphor**
- **Implicit metaphor**
- **Extended/metaphoric series**
- **Sensory–sensory or abstract–abstract metaphor**
- **Representational/illustrative metaphor**

3) Simile (*Tashbīh*)

Simile is defined as:

“The assertion that one thing is similar to another either in sensory perception or intellect. It may be explicit in speech or reside in thought.”

Components of simile:

1. The **subject** (what is being compared)
2. The **object of comparison**
3. The **comparative particle** (e.g., like, as)
4. The **basis of comparison** (the shared trait)

Types of simile:

- **With comparative particle (murassal)**
- **Without it (mu’akkad — confirmed)**

d) *Metaphor* (Al-Majāz)

Al-Jurjani defines metaphor as:

“Any word that is intended to mean something other than what it was originally designated for by its linguistic originator, due to a perceived relationship between the first and second meanings. This connection (or relationship) may be strong or weak.”

Elucidation (Bayān) in the Qur’an

Allah the Almighty says:

"Alif Lam Ra. These are the verses of the Book and a clear Qur'an" (Surah Al-Hijr, 15:1).

The word *Bayān* (clarity or eloquence) appears in the Qur’an, for example, in the verse:

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"He created man. He taught him articulation (Bayān)." (Surah Ar-Rahman, 55:3–4)

The concept of *Bayān* appears in the Qur'an **258 times**, while its morphological derivatives occur **28 times**.

Before delving into the concept of *Bayān* in the Qur'an, we should note that many Arabic linguists have explored this term. For example, Imam Al-Raghib Al-Isfahani, in his book "*Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*", defines *Bayān* and its derivatives (*bāna*, *istabāna*, *tabayyana*, *āyah mubīn*, etc.) as referring to **clear signs or evidence**, whether **intellectual** or **perceptible**.

Chapter Two: Divergence in the Translation of *Bayān* in the Noble Qur'an

The Concept of Linguistic Divergence

Linguistic divergence is defined as:

"A group of linguistic units that share the same social distribution."
(Hudson, 1980)

Ferguson defines a linguistic variety as:

"A collection of human speech patterns, homogeneous in structure, that can be analyzed using descriptive linguistic techniques. It contains a set of elements and their arrangements and functions within a broad semantic field, used in all natural communication contexts." (Ferguson)

The concept of linguistic divergence can be expanded to include **differences in dialects, regional and social variations**, as well as **cultural and historical influences** on language. This phenomenon can be explored through **applied linguistics** and the **historical development** of language.

Understanding linguistic divergence as a broad phenomenon helps us recognize the **diversity of language** and its **evolution across time and space**, shedding light on its **social and cultural impacts**. Analyzing these divergences enables us to better understand linguistic change and its influence on societies and cultures.

Patterns of Linguistic Divergence

Linguistic divergence can be analyzed in detail across various linguistic levels:

Phonetics

This involves studying pronunciation differences, phonetic elements, and variations in **intonation** and **rhythm**. It leads to the formation of **regional** and **social dialects**.

Some aspects include:

- **Pronunciation analysis:** Phonetics helps to identify how speakers pronounce words differently, examining features like sound articulation, length, pitch, and clarity.
- **Study of tone and rhythm:** Exploring how speakers vary in intonation and stress can highlight dialectal patterns and regional speech habits.
- **Phonetic response to phrases:** How speakers modulate their voices (tone, emphasis, scaling) can be part of expressive language use.
- **Influence on dialects:** Phonetic differences play a role in shaping dialects, especially across different geographic areas.
- **Phonetic tools and technologies:** Audio recording, sound analysis, and speech-processing technologies are useful for studying divergence in a scientific way.

In summary, phonetic analysis provides insight into how speakers differ in pronunciation and sound production, contributing to the formation of dialectal identities.

Definition of Translation

- **Linguistically:**
To *translate* means to **explain**, **clarify**, or **render speech** from one language into another. A *translator* (Tarjumān) is one who interprets or explains languages. The plural form is *Tarājim*.
- **Terminologically:**
Texts are divided into two categories in translation: **literal (word-for-word)** and **semantic (meaning-based)**.

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- **Literal translation:** Transferring words from one language to equivalent words in another while preserving the **syntactic structure** and **word order**.
- **Semantic or interpretative translation:** This involves rendering the **meaning** rather than the form. It mirrors the **interpretation** of the original without strictly adhering to its linguistic form. In essence, it **interprets the original message** rather than replicating its literal form, unlike literal translation.

Forms of Translation

1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is a type of translation that aims to transfer the original text into the target language as closely as possible to the original words and sentence structures, without focusing on altering meanings or analyzing the content. It is also known as *word-for-word* translation. This method is sometimes used for **technical**, **legal**, or **scientific** texts that require high precision in conveying terminology and vocabulary accurately.

However, literal translation may be unsuitable in some cases—especially when the original text includes idioms, unfamiliar expressions, or cultural references that need interpretation to be properly understood in the target language.

2. Interpretative Translation

Interpretative translation is a type of translation that aims to convey the **meaning and core idea** of the original text rather than simply translating the words literally. It is considered more **flexible and creative** because it allows for overcoming **linguistic** and **cultural** differences between languages.

In this type of translation, the translator analyzes the **concepts** and **meanings** and interprets them in a way that suits the **target language** and its **audience**.

Interpretative translation is often used in **literary** and **religious** translation, where these texts require a deeper understanding of the meanings and messages they carry. This type of translation can be more challenging for the translator, as it requires selecting the most appropriate

words and expressions to convey the meaning **accurately** and **elegantly** in the target language.

3. Equivalent Translation

Equivalent translation is an approach that aims to fulfill the **quality** and **meaning requirements** of the original text, seeking to strike a **balance** between the translated text and the original.

In this method, the translator strives to achieve the highest possible **cultural, literary, and linguistic equivalence** between the source language and the target language.

Equivalent translation avoids making radical changes to the original text, or introducing new meanings, or omitting important ideas during the translation process. Instead, it aims to **preserve** as much of the **original meaning** as possible and express it similarly in the target language.

For example, if there is a cultural term or expression in the source text, equivalent translation seeks to find a **similar term or expression** in the target language that accurately conveys the same meaning.

Working with equivalent translation requires **flexibility** and an ability to understand the **cultural and linguistic styles** of both the source and target languages. The translator, in this approach, seeks to maintain a balance between **accuracy** in preserving the original meaning and **fluency** and **aesthetic expression** in the target language.

It should be noted that, in some cases, achieving complete equivalence between the original and the translation may be difficult. This may require making **compromises** or **adjustments** to ensure the target audience correctly understands the text.

The Problematic Nature of Translating Qur'anic Eloquence Using Literal Translation

According to the proponent of equivalence in translation theory, **Eugene Nida**, translation is the process of transferring a text from the source language into the target language through stages of **analysis, transformation, and restructuring**.

The Inimitable Eloquence of the Qur'an

The Arabic language is characterized by unique features that relate to creativity and depth. It uses letters that are both **simple in form** yet **powerful in meaning**. Among the distinctive features of Arabic letters is how they interact in roots. For example:

- The letters **ghayn (غ)** and **lām (ل)** suggest **permeation**, as seen in the words *ghillah* (thirst) and *ghaleel* (burning thirst), where something penetrates the body with heat.
- The letters **ghayn (غ)** and **mīm (م)** suggest **covering and enclosing**, as in *ghammamtuhu* ("I covered it") and *ghamām* ("clouds"), which is the plural of *ghamāmah*. One also says *ghamma al-hilāl* ("the crescent moon was covered") or *ghamma shay'* ("his heart was overwhelmed").

I. Simile

1) Explicit Simile

Verse:

"Race with one another in hastening towards forgiveness from your Lord and Paradise whose width is like the width of the heavens and the earth..."
(Surah Al-Hadid, 57:21)

- **Taqi al-Din al-Hilali's Translation:**

"Race with one another in hastening towards forgiveness from your Lord (Allah), and Paradise the width whereof is as the width of the heaven and the earth, prepared for those who believe in Allah and His Messengers. That is the Grace of Allah which He bestows on whom He is pleased with. And Allah is the Owner of Great Bounty."

- **Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Translation:**

"Be ye foremost (in seeking) forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden (of Bliss) the width whereof is as the width of the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in Allah and His Messengers: that is the Grace of Allah, which He bestows on whom He pleases; and Allah is the Lord of abounding bounty."

2) Emphatic Simile

Verse:

"And you see the mountains, thinking them solid, but they pass away as the passing of the clouds. It is the work of Allah, who perfected all things..."
(Surah Al-Naml, 27:88)

- **Taqi al-Din al-Hilali's Translation:**

"And you will see the mountains and think them solid, but they shall pass away as the passing away of the clouds. The Work of Allah, Who perfected all things. Verily, He is Well-Acquainted with what you do."

- **Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Translation:**

"Thou seest the mountains and thinkest them firmly fixed, but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away: (such is) the artistry of Allah, Who disposes of all things in perfect order: for He is well-acquainted with all that ye do."

Another example:

"As though they were rubies and coral."
(Surah Al-Rahman, 55:58)

- **Hilali-Khan Translation:**

"(In beauty) they are like rubies and coral."

- **Yusuf Ali Translation:**

"Like unto rubies and coral."

II. Metaphor

A) Explicit Metaphor

Verse:

"A Book which We have revealed to you so that you may bring people out of darkness into light..."
(Surah Ibrahim, 14:1)

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- **Hilali-Khan Translation:**

"Alif-Lâm-Râ. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur'an, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]. (This is) a Book which We have revealed unto you (O Muhammad) in order that you might lead mankind out of darkness (of disbelief and polytheism) into light (of belief in the Oneness of Allah and Islamic Monotheism)."

- **Yusuf Ali Translation:**

"A.L.R. A Book which We have revealed unto thee, in order that thou mightest lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light—by the leave of their Lord—unto the way of (Him) the Exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise."

B) Implied Metaphor

Verse:

"And when the anger subsided from Moses, he took up the tablets..."
(Surah Al-A'raf, 7:154)

- **Hilali-Khan Translation:**

"And when the anger of Mûsâ (Moses) was calmed down, he took up the Tablets; and in their inscription was guidance and mercy."

- **Yusuf Ali Translation:**

"When the anger of Moses was appeased, he took up the Tablets; and in the writing thereupon was guidance and mercy for such as fear their Lord."

III. Euphemism and Figurative Writing

Verse:

"If you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you comes from relieving himself, or you have touched women..."

(Surah Al-Nisa', 4:43)

- **Hilali-Khan Translation:**

"And if you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you came after answering the call of nature, or you have been in contact with women (by sexual relations)..."

- **Yusuf Ali Translation:**

"If ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from the call of nature, or ye have been in contact with women..."

Relative Writing

Verse:

"He said: I will not send him with you until you give me a pledge in Allah's name that you will bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded (and overpowered)."

(Surah Yusuf, 12:66)

- **Hilali-Khan Translation:**

"He [Ya'qûb (Jacob)] said: 'I will not send him with you until you swear a solemn oath to me in Allah's Name, that you will bring him back to me unless you are yourselves surrounded (by enemies).'"

- **Yusuf Ali Translation:**

"Said [Jacob]: Never will I send him with you until you swear a solemn oath to me in Allah's name, that ye will be sure to bring him back to me, unless ye are yourselves hemmed in (and made powerless)."

Verse:

"And do not make your hand tied to your neck, nor stretch it out completely, lest you become blameworthy and destitute."

(Surah Al-Isra', 17:29)

- **Hilali-Khan Translation:**

"And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift), so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty."

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- **Yusuf Ali Translation:**

"Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, nor stretch it to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute."

The Problem of Translating Qur'anic Eloquence Using Literal Translation

As defined by Eugene Nida, the founder of the theory of equivalence in translation, translation is “the process of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 12). This definition underscores the need to prioritize meaning and rhetorical effect, which poses significant challenges when translating the Qur'an, especially using literal methods.

1. The Inimitable Eloquence (I'jāz Bayānī) of the Qur'an

The Arabic language is uniquely characterized by creative depth, phonetic flexibility, and strong semantic density. For example, Arabic letters often carry layered meanings when combined: the pairing of “ghayn” (غ) and “lām” (ل) implies penetration or depth, as seen in words like "ghillāh" (thirst), suggesting something that enters the body with heat. Similarly, "ghayn" and "mīm" (م غ) indicate covering or enclosure, as in "ghammam" (clouds), from which the term “ghummah” (distress or covering of the heart) is derived.

II. Simile

1. Explicit Simile

Qur'anic Verse:

Sūrat al-Ḥadīd 57:21

Hilali & Khan:

"Race with one another in hastening towards forgiveness from your Lord, and Paradise the width whereof is as the width of the heaven and the earth..."

Yusuf Ali:

"Be ye foremost in seeking forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden (of bliss), the width whereof is as the width of heaven and earth..."

Comment: Both translations preserve the explicit comparison ("as the width"), but Yusuf Ali uses slightly more poetic structure ("Be ye foremost..."), enhancing the rhetorical impact while remaining faithful to the meaning.

2. Confirmed Simile

Qur'anic Verse:

Sūrat al-Naml 27:88

Hilali & Khan:

"And you will see the mountains and think them solid, but they shall pass away as the passing away of the clouds..."

Yusuf Ali:

"Thou seest the mountains and thinkest them firmly fixed, but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away..."

Comment: Both translations render the confirmed simile "مَرَّ السَّحَابِ" (like the passing of clouds), yet the poetic rhythm of Yusuf Ali's version gives it a more evocative flow.

Another example:

Sūrat al-Raḥmān 55:58

Hilali & Khan: "(In beauty) they are like rubies and coral."

Yusuf Ali: "Like unto Rubies and coral."

III. Metaphor

a) Declared Metaphor

Sūrat

Ibrāhīm

14:1

Hilali & Khan: "...in order that you might lead mankind out of darkness (of disbelief) into light (of belief)..."

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Yusuf Ali: "...that thou mightest lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light..."

Comment: Both translations correctly interpret the metaphor of “darkness” as disbelief and “light” as guidance, although Yusuf Ali’s use of “depths of darkness” adds expressive depth.

b) Implied Metaphor

Sūrat al-A‘rāf 7:154

Hilali & Khan: "And when the anger of Mûsâ (Moses) was calmed down..."

Yusuf Ali: "When the anger of Moses was appeased..."

Comment: Both translations reflect the personification of “anger” as something capable of “being silent,” which is a powerful metaphor. The rendering retains the metaphorical impact, although some literality is lost.

IV. Idiomatic and Cultural Expressions

a) Euphemism in Legal Purity Contexts

Sūrat al-Nisā’ 4:43

Hilali & Khan: "...or one of you came after answering the call of nature, or you have been in contact with women (by sexual relations)."

Yusuf Ali: "...or one of you came from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women."

Comment: Yusuf Ali’s use of archaic euphemism (“offices of nature”) reflects older English styles, while Hilali and Khan opt for clearer modern English. Both struggle with the idiomatic and euphemistic expressions of the Arabic original.

b) Relative and Hyperbolic Expressions

Sūrat Yūsuf 12:66

Hilali & Khan: "...unless you are yourselves surrounded (by enemies)."

Yusuf Ali: "...unless ye are yourselves hemmed in (and made powerless)."

Sūrat al-Isrā’ 17:29

Hilali & Khan: "Let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth..."

Yusuf Ali: "Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, or stretch it to its utmost reach..."

Comment: Both translations render idiomatic expressions with explanatory additions. Hilali and Khan explicitly state "like a miser," which helps readers, while Yusuf Ali opts for the older "niggard," which may be obscure today.

Example 1: Sūrat al-Baqarah (2:17)

Arabic:

...مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا

Hilali & Khan:

"Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire; then, when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness. (So) they could not see."

Yusuf Ali:

"Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see."

Analysis:

- **Hilali & Khan** use a more direct, explanatory style (e.g., adding "(So)" for clarity), leaning toward didacticism.
- **Yusuf Ali** maintains a more literary tone, employing phrases like "utter darkness" that resonate poetically.

Conclusion: Yusuf Ali's translation prioritizes rhetorical beauty, while Hilali & Khan focus on simplifying and interpreting the meaning.

Example 2: Sūrat al-Nūr (24:35)

Arabic:

...اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

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Hilali & Khan:

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche and within it a lamp..."

Yusuf Ali:

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp..."

Analysis:

- **Hilali & Khan** insert clarifying parentheses: "(if there were)," framing the parable as non-literal to avoid theological ambiguity.
- **Yusuf Ali** allows the metaphorical image to unfold without interruption, preserving its spiritual and contemplative resonance.

Conclusion: Yusuf Ali retains the metaphor's aesthetic openness; Hilali & Khan prioritize doctrinal clarity.

Example 3: Sūrat al-Kahf (18:45)

Arabic:

...فَأَصْبَحَ حُشَيْمًا تَذُرُّهُ الرِّيحُ...

Hilali & Khan:

"...and it becomes dry, broken pieces of stalks, which the winds scatter..."

Yusuf Ali:

"...becomes dry and crumbles away, like the chaff which the winds scatter..."

Analysis:

- **Hilali & Khan** use technical expressions like "broken pieces of stalks."
- **Yusuf Ali** uses poetic imagery such as "chaff" and "crumbles away," enriching the metaphor.

Conclusion: Yusuf Ali's version evokes the Qur'anic rhetorical impact more strongly, while Hilali & Khan opt for lexical precision.

Example 4: Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt (29:41)

Arabic:

...بِمَثَلِ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ

Rhetorical Device: Representative Simile

Polytheists are likened to a spider’s fragile web.

Hilali & Khan:

"The likeness of those who take (false deities as) Auliya' (protectors, helpers) besides Allâh is as the likeness of a spider..."

Yusuf Ali:

"The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is that of the spider..."

Analysis:

- **Hilali & Khan** add doctrinal commentary—"false deities"—to clarify the theological stance.
- **Yusuf Ali** preserves the broader metaphor without interjection.

Conclusion: Yusuf Ali maintains the allegorical subtlety, whereas Hilali & Khan stress creedal interpretation.

Example 5: Sūrat al-Taḥrīm (66:6)

Arabic:

...عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاطٌ شِدَادٌ...

Rhetorical Device: Metonymy

The harsh angels represent divine wrath and might.

Hilali & Khan:

"...Over it (Hell) are (angels) stern (and) severe..."

Yusuf Ali:

"...Over it are angels stern (and) severe..."

Analysis:

- Both translations are very similar; however, **Hilali & Khan** clarify "it" as referring to Hell with a parenthetical note.
- No metaphorical interpretation is explored in either version.

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Conclusion: Both translations are literal, but Hilali & Khan include a theological clarification.

Example 6: Sūrat al-Nūr (24:39)

Arabic:

..وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعَةٍ

Rhetorical Device: Representative Simile

The deeds of disbelievers are compared to a mirage seen by a thirsty traveler.

Hilali & Khan:

"As for those who disbelieved, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert..."

Yusuf Ali:

"But the Unbelievers — their deeds are like a mirage in sandy deserts..."

Analysis:

- **Hilali & Khan** are more concise and didactic.
- **Yusuf Ali** adds poetic descriptors like “sandy deserts,” enhancing imagery.

Conclusion: Yusuf Ali’s version amplifies the poetic and visual effect; Hilali & Khan prioritize conceptual clarity.

Example 7: Sūrat al-Ra‘d (13:17)

Arabic:

..فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً

Rhetorical Device: Allegorical Metaphor

Foam represents falsehood—temporary and vanishing.

Hilali & Khan:

"As for the foam, it passes away (wasted)..."

Yusuf Ali:

"Thus doth Allah (by parables) show forth Truth and Vanity: For the scum disappears like froth cast out..."

Analysis:

- **Hilali & Khan** use straightforward language: “passes away.”
- **Yusuf Ali** elaborates the allegory using expressive words like “scum,” “frost,” and “vanity.”

Conclusion: Yusuf Ali reveals the rhetorical depth and thematic contrast between truth and falsehood; Hilali & Khan explain the image plainly.

Example 8: Sūrat al-Qāri‘ah (101:4–5)

Arabic:

كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ . وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِئْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ

Rhetorical Device: Two Similes

- People are likened to scattered moths.
- Mountains are likened to carded wool.

Hilali & Khan:

"Like moths scattered abroad... And the mountains will be like carded wool."

Yusuf Ali:

"Like scattered moths... And the mountains will be like carded wool."

Analysis:

- Both maintain the original imagery.
- **Yusuf Ali** slightly emphasizes poetic rhythm and lexical elegance.

Thus, both translations are faithful to the similes, though Yusuf Ali tends to preserve a more poetic tone.

Commentary on the Translations:

One of the most important conclusions drawn from the translated examples—based on the translations of Al-Hilali and Abdullah Yusuf Ali—is that the phenomenon of rhetorical variation (*bayān*) in the Qur’an becomes more evident when rendered into English. This is due to the diversity of its forms and meanings, making the translation into English a fertile ground for translational challenges, especially when rhetorical figures

— The linguistic Variations In the translation of the literary devices in the Quran are isolated or stripped of context due to the absence of a clear conceptual equivalent in the target language.

For example, Al-Hilali translates the second person pronoun "you" plainly, while Yusuf Ali uses the archaic "ye." Likewise, Al-Hilali translates the verb "جاء" as "come," whereas Yusuf Ali renders it as the more literary "cometh."

Arthur J. Arberry, one of the translators of the meanings of the Qur'an into English, also emphasizes the uniqueness of the Arabic language as employed in the Qur'an. He sides with Muslim scholars who believe that translating the Qur'an is impossible due to its linguistic inimitability. Arberry himself admitted that he never truly understood the phrase "**every** translator is a traitor" until he undertook the challenge of translating the Qur'an. He acknowledged that the eloquence and rhythm of the Arabic used in the Qur'an possess a unique power and emotional depth, rendering any translation a poor copy in comparison to the brilliance of the original.

Nevertheless, Arberry pursued his translation of the Qur'anic meanings, calling it an almost impossible task, in an attempt to replicate—even if partially—the rhetorical and rhythmic form of the original text.

Both translators—Al-Hilali and Yusuf Ali—strived in their own ways to render each selected verse in a way that comes close to the meanings intended in the original Arabic. They also employed exegesis (tafsir) as a tool to better grasp those meanings, since linguistic analysis alone is insufficient in such cases. Interpretative translation becomes necessary, which involves the translator adding certain words or phrases to clarify obscure meanings in the source text. For example, in the verse:

"وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ"

Al-Hilali translates it as:

"(And let not your hand be tied (like a miser))"

Here, the translator adds explanatory phrases to interpret the metaphor "hand tied to the neck," clarifying it as a reference to miserliness.

Such additions may be integrated into the body of the text, and this technique is also found in some literary translations to clarify allusions or references to diverse topics made by the author.

4. Conclusion:

Literal translation (as used frequently by Hilali & Khan) can preserve denotative meaning, especially in legal or theological contexts. However, it often fails to capture the aesthetic and rhetorical power of Qur'anic discourse. Interpretative or dynamic equivalence (favored by Yusuf Ali) tends to better reflect the Qur'an's stylistic beauty but risks subjective intrusion. Translating Qur'anic rhetoric requires a hybrid approach that combines faithfulness to the source text with rhetorical and cultural sensitivity.

One of the key conclusions we draw from this study is that the Qur'an is the divine book revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It serves as guidance for Muslims and is also a linguistic miracle that no scholar, thinker, or linguist can replicate or fully explain. The Iraqi translator Dawood Joseph described it as the most sublime literary work of all time.

As previously discussed, the translation of the Qur'an depends on multiple approaches. Beyond translation techniques, cultural context plays a major role. Some rhetorical images may be understood universally, regardless of linguistic, cultural, or religious differences. For example, in *Surat Al-Baqarah* (2:74):

"Then, after that, your hearts were hardened and became as stones or even worse in hardness."

Here, likening the heart to a stone to symbolize hardness is a metaphor widely understandable across cultures. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, one of the characters says:

"My heart is turned to stone."—a very similar image.

However, there are other rhetorical figures that are culture-bound, meaning they are understood within one culture but may not be easily interpreted in another. For instance, in *Surat Al-A'raf* (7:40): **"And they will not enter Paradise until the camel goes through the eye of the needle."**

The translators Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan here provided a literal translation, followed by a commentary to explain the intended meaning—namely, to express impossibility. This serves to aid the understanding of both Arab and non-Muslim readers who may not grasp the figurative expression as it appears in the original Arabic

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