

**Problems of Translating the Anthropomorphic Images of *Istwâ'*,
the Face and the Eye in the Qur'ân into English**

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Abstract

The current study is set to investigate the problems that face translators in rendering the anthropomorphic images of the Face, the Eye and Istwâ' of Allah in the Qur'ân. The anthropomorphic images are the physical movements and body organs used to refer to Allah in the Qur'ân and sunnah. The samples of the study are 14 images from the Qur'ân. The problem lies in the fact that two divergent Islamic trends differ in dealing with the anthropomorphic images. The Salafî trend affirms them without interpretation, likening, resembling, exaggeration, or denying. The other trend is the Khalafî who contradicts the Salafî. Seven translations are investigated in the study in order to have a broad scope of the problem and hence provide in-depth results. The study is qualitative and begins with a theoretical part followed by the analysis section. The study findings show that the anthropomorphic images aroused much argument and to solve this problem, there is an opinion that allows Ta'wîl (interpretation) when it accords with language, context, and jurisprudence. The study also finds that the image of Istwâ' is not liable to interpretation or imagination for any reason, and hence must be translated literally or in transliteration with explaining the theological reasons behind that in the footnotes. On the other hand, the images of the face and the eye can be interpreted according to the contextual meaning with affirming that Allah has a face and eyes. The study concludes that the translator should be

aware of the problems of translating anthropomorphism and then decide which trend to follow. Also, the translator should have the flexibility to shift from a translational approach to another according to the context and the meaning of each image.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism – Anthropomorphic Images – Translation - the Qur’ân - *Ta’wîl* - *Salafî* and *Khalafî* – Allah’s Attributes - *Istwâ’* of Allah

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Study

The current study is conducted to discuss the problems of translating the anthropomorphic images of the Face, the Eye and *Istwâ’* of Allah in the Qur’ân and the appropriate strategies that should be adopted to translate them appropriately. Translating the anthropomorphic images is one of the thorny problems in the Qur’ân. The anthropomorphic images refer to the human organs that are used to describe Allah in the Qur’ân and *Sunnah* like when Allah describes Himself as having a hand, a face, a shin, an eye, etc. The anthropomorphic images raised a lot of arguments in Islamic theology as they are not agreed upon with consensus among the different Islamic trends or methodologies.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study attempts to investigate the problematic points in translating the anthropomorphic images in the Qur’ân according to the *Salafî* and *Khalafî* approaches. I categorize the anthropomorphic images in the Qur’ân into 14 categories according to the organs of the body and selected the images of *Istwâ’*, the Face and the Eye for the analysis. Many translations of the Qur’ân do not give due care or concern to the anthropomorphic images so that many problems of *Ta’wîl* (interpretation), *ta’^ctîl* (inactivating/denying Allah’s attributes), *Tashbîh* (comparing), *tamθîl* (likening), and *taklîf* (exaggeration) could occur due to the translator’s unawareness of the Islamic theology or following a certain inappropriate approach in her/his translation. The core of the study is to attract the attention of the future Qur’ân translators to this problem by setting some rules in dealing with it.

Translating the anthropomorphic images requires that kind of a talented translator who knows well the Arabic language with all its features in addition to having deep knowledge of the Islamic doctrine in order to avoid giving distorted and inappropriate translations of the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân; thereof, it seems to be an arduous task. Nevertheless, this complicated problem has to be solved and translators should be fully aware of the appropriate approach they opt for. Misinterpretations occur when the translator has no background knowledge neither of the anthropomorphic images nor the way to be followed in rendering them. Sometimes the translator has no consistent strategy in rendering and dealing with the anthropomorphic images.

1.3 Research Questions

The current research is set to answer the following questions:

1. What problems do translators encounter in translating the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân?
2. Which translation approaches and techniques could be suitable for translating the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân?
3. How would adopting a certain Islamic approach or trend affect the translation of the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân?
4. How far could *Ta'wîl* (interpretation) be employed as a tool for understanding anthropomorphism in the Qur'ân and hence be adopted in translation?
5. What are the stipulations of legally accepted *Ta'wîl*?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Meaning and Etymology of the Term “Anthropomorphism”

The *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2005:388) points out that the etymology of the word anthropomorphism is derived from the Greek “anthrōpos” (human being) and “morphē” (form). It also adds that it refers to “people holding anthropomorphic ideas of the divine. (ibid)

As indicated in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978), the term anthropomorphism is defined as “the idea that gods, animals, or objects have human forms or qualities, or the belief that God can appear in a human or animal form.” However, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Science* (1998), “The term is then employed to explain both human and nonhuman non-intentional dispositions, and is applied to explain human intentional altruism by a gratuitous anthropomorphism of nonhuman dispositions”.

2.2 Anthropomorphism in Islamic Theology

The main concern of the current study is to detail and understand the problems of translating anthropomorphism in the Qur’ân, a review of anthropomorphism and the complicated theological problems related to it should be clarified. In Islamic theology, anthropomorphism is judged from two opposing trends; the *Salafî* and the *Khalafî*.

2.3 Salafî Trend and Anthropomorphism

In his *Al-Mufasssirûn bayna At-Ta’wîl wal ’iṭbât fî ’Ayât As-Sifât* (Qur’ân Interpreters between Ta’wîl-oriented Exegetes and the Verification of Allah's Attributes-oriented Exegetes), M. Al-Maḡrawî (2000) gives a comprehensive account about the different types of Qur’ân interpretations and their attitudes towards the translation of anthropomorphism. Al-Maḡrawî distinguishes between two diverse types of Qur’ân exegeses; the *Salafî* and the *Khalafî*. Al Maḡrawî states the pious *Salafists* are those who followed and stuck to the rulings and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. They have some fixed basic principles about dealing with the anthropomorphic images of Allah. Al Maḡrawî (2000:93) points out the principal rules adopted by the *Salafî* trend in dealing with anthropomorphism. He asserts that all Muslims have to affirm the names and attributes of Allah by having evidence from the Qur’ân or *Sunnah* as it is an unseen matter which Muslims are commanded not to argue or discuss. He adds that believing in those names and attributes should be according to the orders and rulings set by

Allah, the Arabic grammar rules, and following the same way of understanding of the primary *Salafî* generations (98).

2.4 *Khalafî* Trend and Anthropomorphism

The *Khalafî* are all those who oppose the *Salafî* trend even if they lived in the age of Prophet Muhammad (Al Mağrawî 2000:254). They are the people who depend on their minds to understand the anthropomorphic images (347). Also, they deal with the anthropomorphic images metaphorically and allegorically by supposing other layers for the same anthropomorphic image (365). They think wrongly of *tafwîd* of the anthropomorphic images. *Tafwîd*, according to the *Salafî*, is that they understand the meaning of the attribute but they neither know its “how-ness” nor ask nor discuss it.

On the contrary, *tafwîd*, according to the *khalafî*, means the inability to understand its meaning though it is known to all mankind like the attribute of hearing, seeing or *Istwâ'*. They affirm that Allah *istaw'a* (established) on the throne but they claim that they do not know its meaning or its significance (447). Whenever they deal with an anthropomorphic image and find it opposes their spoilt principles, they interpret it by “*taw'îl*” according to their whims which distorts its meaning theologically (401/502). They believe in the possible according to the faculties of their mind only. Additionally, they deny the Prophetic speeches concerning the anthropomorphic images which are narrated by one narrator (*khavar al-ahâd*) (478).

The *Khalafî* approach and its followers negate the surface meanings of the anthropomorphic images diverting to non-apparent meanings: other allegorical ones. So, they oppose the *Salafî* Prophetic teachings and rulings concerning the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân and *Sunnah*. The *Khalafî* trend is the main umbrella that includes other sub-trends like *Al Jahmiyyah*, *Al Muctazilah*, *Ashcaria*, *Shicah*, *Matrudiyah*, and other sects.

2.5 Anthropomorphism and *Ta'wîl*

Based on the before mentioned data, *Ta'wîl* is forbidden and rejected in Islamic jurisprudence. However, there is another moderate opinion between the opponents and proponents of *Ta'wîl*. Al Julainid in his *Ibn Taimîah and his opinion of Ta'wîl* (1393 H- 176) allows *Ta'wîl* only in three conditions:

1. When the exegetist is well-versed in language usage and grammar to understand the embedded meaning of the word in different contexts;
2. When the word can be possibly understood according to the language norms;
3. If the interpretation has evidence from the opinions of the Prophet or his companions and accords with Islamic doctrine and jurisprudence.

2.6 Translating Anthropomorphism: Functional or Semantic

The translator has to decide from the very beginning the translation approach to be adopted during translating a certain work. In the case of translating the anthropomorphic images, the translator may resort to shifting between the functional and the semantic approaches according to the liability of the image to *Ta'wîl* or not. For example, the image of *Istwâ'* is not liable to *Ta'wîl* as the howness of *Istwâ'* is not known. So, reliable Muslim scholars forbid thinking of it and rejected discussing it as mentioned before. Therefore, it would be better to translate the image of *Istwâ'* literally without giving any other layers of meanings. On the other hand, the image of the eye in "تجري بأعيننا" accepts *Ta'wîl* since it meets the three conditions above mentioned. Thus, it can be translated functionally as "Under Our supervision / Guidance / Protection". This study tries to outline the benchmarks that may guide the translator to the appropriate translation approach to be followed for each anthropomorphic image.

3.0 Methodology of the Study

3.1 Sampling

The current study is a qualitative descriptive research that depends on collecting qualitative data and analyzing them from different perspectives. Samples of the study are taken from seven

translations of the Qur'ân chronologically arranged as follows; Shakir (1995) *The Qur'an*, Hilâlî and Khân (1996) *The Noble Qur'ân: English translation of the Meanings and commentary*, Saheeh International (1997) *Translation of The Meanings of the Glorious Quran*, Ghâli (2008) different date from the list of works cited *Towards Understanding The Ever-Glorious Qur'ân*, Abdul Haleem (2004) *The Qur'ân: A New Translation*, Asad (2007) *The Message of The Quran: Translated And Explained*, and Shabbir (2007) *The Qur'ân As it Explains Itself*. The samples of the study are represented by three images in the Qur'ân; *Istwâ'* (one verse for generalization to all *Istwâ'* verses), the face (8 examples), and the eye (4 examples).

3.2 Procedures Adopted to conduct the Study

For the purpose of data collection, I followed some procedures. Firstly, I categorized the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân according to the organs of the body and the physical attributes related to Allah following the categorization of Ibn Khuzaimah (1998). I selected the images of *Istwâ'*, the face, and the eye to be analyzed in detail through random sampling. Secondly, I looked up the interpretation of each of the selected anthropomorphic images for investigation in the different Qur'ân exegeses to investigate whether each translation delivers the due intended meaning of the anthropomorphic image under study. Thirdly, I compared the seven translations of each anthropomorphic image under study with the verse's diverse exegeses; the *Salafî* and the *Khalafî*. Fourthly, I investigated how making use of translation theories such as the functional approach or the semantic one is so crucial for the translator in order to reach a compatible and accurate translation of the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân. Finally, I attempted to present a suggested translation for each anthropomorphic image if the existing ones do not conform to the due meaning. Additionally, I proposed suggestions for future translators of the Qur'ân about the appropriate methods and strategies to be adopted in translating the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân in general and the images of *Istwâ'*, the face, and the eye in particular.

4.0 Samples for Analysis

In the following part, the anthropomorphic images of *Istwâ'*, the face, and the eye are analyzed.

4.1 The image of *Istwâ'*:

The image of *Istwâ'* appears nine times in the Qur'ân, all of them have the same meaning. So, verse (5) in (*Surat Taha*) *Taha* Chapter is investigated as an example of the image of *Istwâ'* in the Qur'ân in general and the analysis of this image can be applied to the other images of *Istwâ'* in the Qur'ân:

(سورة طه 5)

﴿الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى﴾

Shakir

“Is firm in Power”

Hilâlî and Khân's Translation

“Rose over (*istawâ*) the (Mighty) throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty)”

Saheeh International

“Above the Throne established”

Ghâli's Translation

“Upon the Throne leveled Himself (How He has done so is beyond human understanding)”

Abdel Haleem's

“Established on the Throne”

Asad

“Established on the throne of His almightiness?”

Shabbir

“[He maintains Supreme Control over all that He has created]”

4.1.1 Interpretation of the Image

Salafî interpretations of the Qur'ân unanimously agreed with consensus that it means that Allah is established on His throne in a way that cannot be imagined or argued by anyway. However, the *Khalafî* exegeses have another view. They interpret and allegorized the image of the throne

in different ways; power and overall ruling of Allah over the universe, control mercifully the throne in a way that nothing is out of His knowledge, seizing the creatures' selves, actions, secrets, and sayings even before the one thinks of them, established on the throne of your heart to make you give Him some time to spend with Him, or finally deny the image entirely saying that it is not suitable to describe Allah as sitting on the throne as it is a humanlike body image.

4.1.2 Evaluating the Translations

Abdel Haleem, Ghâli, and Hilâlî and Khân seem to have adopted the conservative *Salafî* method of interpretation. Abdul Haleem and Saheeh International translates the anthropomorphic image as “established on the Throne.” They, both, did not interfere to give any other underlying meanings in footnotes or with-in-the text notes. Ghâli adds additional bracketed comments to show the *Salafî* interpretation in his translation by adding “(How He has done so is beyond human understanding).” Hilâlî and Khân’s translation follows the same way of Ghâli’s which is affirming the anthropomorphic image of *Istwâ’* and avoided giving an equivalent to the term “*Istwâ’*” as they consider it untranslatable and has no equivalent in English. Thus, they transliterate it and give an interpretive translation in order to avoid *Ta’wîl*. Asad renders *Istwâ’* as “established on the throne of His almightiness”. He then adds voluntarily the word “His almightiness” to give the reader the connotation that *Istwâ’* has an underlying meaning of power and almightiness. Shabbir adds the underlying meaning between brackets as saying “[He maintains Supreme Control over all that He has created]. Shakir’s translation is an illustrative one. He did not mention the word throne or the anthropomorphic image of *Istwâ’*. He followed the original *Khalafî* exegeses method saying “The Beneficent Allah is firm in power.”

From the analysis of the previous translations, there appears to be two divergent trends of translation of the anthropomorphic image of *Istwâ’*. The first trend of the *Salafî* is adopted clearly by Abdel Haleem, Ghâli, and Hilâlî and Khân and Saheeh International. The other opposing trend is the *Khalafî* method and it is adopted clearly by Asad, Shabbir, and Shakir.

Also, the image of *Istwâ'* is proved not to accept being interpreted as the act of *Istwâ'* cannot be imagined or discussed according to the views of the early reliable Muslim scholars.

4.2 The Face Image:

The image of the face of Allah exists in seven contexts in the Qur'ân. I analyzed them all.

4.2.1 The first example is in Surat Al-Kahf (The Cave Chapter), verse (28):

(الكهف 28)

﴿يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ﴾

Shakir

“Desiring His goodwill”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Seeking His Face”

Saheeh International

“Seeking His countenance”

Ghâlî

“Willing to seek his face”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“Seeking His approval”

Asad

“Seeking His countenance”

Shabbir

“Seeking His Approval”

4.2.1.1 Interpretation of the Image

Abû Bakr Al-Jaza’rî (1990:3/252), *As-Samarqandî* (1993:2/297), and *An-Nasafî* (nd:2/637) interpret the anthropomorphic image of face in the current verse as “seeking Allah’s satisfaction.” *Al-Qurtubî* (2006:13/258) and *Al-Ezz ibn Abd Al-Salâm* (1996:1/437) have similar opinions that the word face means “seeking Allah’s obedience.” Also, *Al-Baġawî* (2002:775)

refers to the face “seeking Allah and not seeking worldly profane desires”. Moreover, *Tafsîr Al-Jalâlayn* (nd:15/297) interprets the anthropomorphic image of the face as “desiring, through their worship, His Countenance, exalted be He, and not any of the transient things of this world — and these are the poor”. Furthermore, *Al-Wahidî* (1995:1/355) points out that the face means “(seeking His Countenance) by worshipping Him they seek only Allah's Countenance and good pleasure.”

4.2.1.2 Evaluating the Translations

The translations of Ghâlî “willing to seek His Face”, Hilâlî and Khân “seeking His Face”, and Asad and Saheeh International “seeking His countenance” stick to the literal meaning of the anthropomorphic image of “Allah’s face”. They avoid giving other layers of meanings or any allegorical connotations.

However, Abdul Haleem and Shabbir render it as “seeking His approval”, yet Shakir’s translation is “Desiring His goodwill”. They give the intended meaning from their point of view or depending on the *Khalafî* exegeses. They translate it as if it is a metaphor by giving different meanings like “Approval, and good will.” All these translations follow *Ta’wîl* method which is forbidden in the *Salafî* (*Sunni*) doctrine. An obvious note to be noticed from the previous examples is that not all the translators have knowledge about the issue of choosing a specific exegesis trend or methodology in translating the Qur’ân. For, example, the translation of Saheeh International renders the image of *Istwâ’* as “above the Throne established” which is a kind of *Ta’wîl*, and the image of *Al-Kursî* literally rendered as “His *Kursi*” which accords to the *Salafî* norms.

4.2.2 The Second Face Image is in *Surat Al-Baqarah* (The Cow Chapter), verse 115,

﴿فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَتَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ﴾ (سورة البقرة 115)

Shakir

“Therefore, whither you turn, thither is Allah's purpose”

Hilâlî and Khân's Translation

“So wherever you turn (yourselves or your faces) there is the Face of Allah (and He is High above, over His throne)”

Saheeh International

“So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah”

Ghâlî

“O, wherever you turn around, (then) hence is the Face of Allah”

Abdel Haleem's Translation

“The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His Face”

Asad

“And wherever you turn, there is God's countenance”

Shabbir

“Wherever you go, whichever way you turn, there is God's Countenance (Presence, and you remain in His Dominion).”

4.2.2.1 Interpretation of the Image

Al-Qurtubî (2006:13/259), *Aṣ-Ṣâbûnî* (1976:1/213), *Ibn ʿabbâs* (2007:19-20), *Al-Baġawî* (2002:59), and *Aṯṯalabî* (2002:1/263), and most of the *Salafî* scholars interpret the face image in this verse as “*qiblah*” or “direction of prayers”. This meaning is an accepted *Taʿwîl* since it affirms that Allah has a face without discussing its size, color, or any of its details and at the same time they think that the “face” in this context means direction of prayer “*qiblah*”. This opinion meets the conditions of the approved *Taʿwîl*.

4.2.2.2 Evaluating the Translations

It is clear that Abdel Haleem, Asad, Ghâlî, Hilâlî and Khân, Shabbir, and Saheeh International translate the face image in this verse literally without giving the implied meaning in this context. They translate it as “face” or “countenance”. They stick to the opinion that affirms the

anthropomorphic images without *Ta'wîl*. However, Shakir gives an awkward meaning “support” which is neither the implied meaning nor the literal one.

I think that the face image in this context may be better literally translated as “Face” to be loyal to the original text of the Qur’ân , and then give within-the text-notes between brackets mentioning the implied meaning which is “*qiblah*” or “prayer direction” to keep the reader acquainted with the intended meaning of the verse.

4.2.3 The Third Face Images are in *Surat Ar-Rûm* (The Romans Chapter), verses 38-39;

(سورة الروم 38)

﴿يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ﴾

Shakir

“Allah's pleasure”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Allah’s Countenance”

Saheeh International

“The countenance of Allah”

Ghâlî

“The Face of Allah”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“God’s approval”

Asad

“God's countenance”

Shabbir

“God's Approval”

4.2.3.1 Interpretation of the Images

At-Tabarî (1994:1/357), *Al-Zamakhsharî* (1998:1/314), *Ar-Râzî* (1994:1/357), and *Al-Alûsî*, *Qutb* (1972:1/104-105) interpret the face in this verse as “Allah Himself”. *Al-Qurtubî*

(2006:2/324-325), *Abû Bakr Al-Jaza'ri* (1990:1/102-103), and *An-Nasafi* (1998:1/123) comments that the face in this context means the “real face of Allah”. *Ibn Kaθîr* (2000:1/189-190) explains that it means “for those who desire to see the Face of Allah in the Doom’s day”. *Al-Mawârdî* (nd:1/177), *Al-Baġawî* (2002:1/59), *Ibn ‘tîa* (2001:1/200) and *Ibn Al-Jawzî* (2002:1/84) interpret that it means “it is better for those who seek the reward of Allah”. *Ash-Shawkânî* (2007:1/88) comments that it means “it is better for those who seek to get closer to Allah”. *As-Samarqandî* (1993:1/152) explains it as “seeking the satisfaction, approval, and consent of Allah”.

4.2.3.2 Evaluating the Translations

Abdel Haleem’s Translation and Shabbir translate the face in this verse as “Approval”. However, Asad, Ghâlî, Hilâlî and Khân, and Saheeh International render it literally following the strict *Salafi* methodology as “the Face” or “countenance”. Conversely, Shakir translates it as “pleasure” which is also inappropriate in this context as none of the researched exegeses mention that meaning.

Hence, it may be accepted to translate the face image in this context as “the Face of Allah” and to add between brackets the implied meaning which is the satisfaction or approval of Allah. This meaning accords with the three before mentioned elements of legally accepted *Ta’wîl*.

4.2.4 The Fourth Face Image is in *Surat Al-Insân* (Mankind Chapter), verse 9;

(سورة الإنسان 9)

﴿إِنَّمَا نَطْعُمُكُمْ لَوَجْهِ اللَّهِ﴾

Shakir

“For Allah's sake”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Seeking Allah’s countenance only”

Saheeh International

“Only for the countenance [i.e., approval] of Allah”

Ghâli

“Only for the Face of Allah”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“For the sake of God alone”

Asad

“For the sake of God alone”

Shabbir

“For the sake of God alone”

4.2.4.1 Interpretation of the Image in the verse

At-Tabarî (1994:1/357) comments on the image of the face in this verse as “satisfaction”. *Ibn Kaθîr* (1997:8/289), *Tafsîr Al-Jalâlayn* (2003:/579), and *Ibn Al-Jawzî* (2002/1498) interpret it as “for the sake of Allah's reward and beneficence only”. *Al-Qurtubî* (2006:21/466) and *An-Nasafî* (1998:3/578), explain that it may mean “for fear of the punishment of Allah and seeking His reward”. *Ash-Shanqitî* (1980:8/675) interprets it as “love of Allah”. *Abû Bakr Al-Jaza'ri* (1990:5/484), and *As-Samarqandî* (1993:3/430) explain it as “the Face of Allah”

4.2.4.2 Evaluating the Translations

In both verses, all the translators deal with the image of the face similarly. Firstly, Ghâli, Hilâlî, and Saheeh International translate literally the verse as “face” or “countenance”. They follow the Salafî approach of interpretation. Only, Saheeh International adds a voluntarily note between brackets showing the implied meaning of “approval”. Abdel Haleem, Asad, Shabbir, and Shaker translate it as “for Allah’s sake” which is acceptable also according to the exegeses listed before.

Saheeh International translation seems more elaborative and informative in addition to following the *Salafî* norms of dealing with the anthropomorphic images. Therefore, it can be considered an appropriate *Ta'wîl*.

4.2.5 The Fifth Face Image is in *Surat Al-Layl* (The Night Chapter), verse 20;

(سورة الليل 20) ﴿إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى﴾

Shakir

“Seeking of the pleasure of his Lord”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Seek the Countenance of his Lord”

Saheeh International

“Seeking the Countenance of his Lord”

Ghâlî

“Seeking the Face of his Lord”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“For the sake of his Lord”

Asad

“For the countenance of his Sustainer”

Shabbir

“Seek the Approval of his Lord”

4.2.6 The Sixth Face Image is in *Surat Ar-Ra'ad* (Thunder Chapter), verse 20:

الرعد 22 ﴿وَالَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِمْ﴾

Shakir

“Seeking the pleasure of their Lord”

Hilâlî and Khân's Translation

"Seeking Their Lord's Countenance"

Saheeh International

"Seeking the countenance of their Lord"

Ghâlî

"Seeking the Face of their Lord"

Abdel Haleem's Translation

"For the face of their Lord"

Asad

"For their Sustainer's countenance"

Shabbir

"Seeking the Approval of their Sustainer"

4.2.5.1 Interpretation of the Image in the verses

Al-Baġawî (2002:674), *Al-Matrudî* (1993:2/629) and *As-Samarqandî* (2004:2/191) interpret the face image in these verses as "satisfaction/approval". On the other hand, *Al-Jawzî* (2002:733) and *Al-Wahîdî* (1995:2/570) explain it as "seeking His reward".

4.2.5.2 Evaluating the Translations

Asad, Ghâlî, Hilâlî and Khân, and Saheeh International translate the face image in the verses under study "Seek the Countenance/face of his Lord" which is a clear adoption of the *Salafî* methodology that rejects interpreting the anthropomorphic images. Yet, Abdel Haleem's translates the first image as "For the sake of his Lord" and the second image as "the Face of their Lord". This shows his unawareness of and not adopting a certain method in dealing with the anthropomorphic images. Shabbir's translation of both images is "Seek the Approval of his/their Lord". Shakir translates it as "Seeking of the pleasure of his Lord" which does not exist in any of the reliable exegeses.

A moderate “functional” translation that may give the implied meaning and conserve the context of the original text might be “Seek the Countenance/face of their/his Lord (meaning: For the sake/approval of their/his Lord)”.

4.2.7 The seventh face image is in *Surat Ar-Rahman* (The All-Merciful Chapter), verse 27:

(سورة الرحمن 27) ﴿وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ﴾

Shakir

“And there will endure forever the person of your Lord”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“And the Face of your Lord”

Saheeh International

“And there will remain the Face of your Lord”

Ghâlî

“And there (still) remains (forever) The Face of your Lord”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“All that remains is the Face of your Lord”

Asad

“But forever will abide thy Sustainer’s Self”

Shabbir

“But forever will abide the Countenance of your Lord.”

4.2.8 The Eighth face image is in *Surat Al-Qasas* (The Narratives Chapter), verse 88:

(سورة القصص 88) ﴿كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ﴾

Shakir

“Everything is perishable but He”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Everything will perish save His face”

Saheeh International

“Everything will be destroyed except His Face”

Ghâlî

“All things perish, except His Face”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“Everything will perish except His Face”

Asad

“Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self”

Shabbir

“Everything will perish except His Eternal Self”

4.2.6.1 Interpretation of the Image

Tafsîr Al-Jalâlayn (nd:532), *Ash-Shawkânî* (2007/1436), *Al-Qurtubî* (2006:20/132), *Al-Zamakhsharî* (1998:6/9), *At-Tabarânî* (nd:10/210), *An-Nasafî* (1998:3/412), *Ibn Al-Jawzî* (2002:1379), *Ibn ‘tîa* (2001:5/229), *As-Samarqandî* (1998:3/412) and *Abû Bakr Al-Jaza’rî* (1990:5/228) comment that “the face of Allah” in these verses means “the self of Allah” or “Allah Himself” without denying that Allah has a face that suits His Majesty and Highness.

4.2.6.2 Evaluating the Translations

Abdel Haleem, Ghâlî, Hilâlî and Khân, Shabbir, Saheeh International translate the image of the face in this context literally as “the Face of your Lord” which is a purely conservative *Salafi* explanation. However, Asad gives a pragmatic translation, conveying the implied meaning from his point of view which is “Sustainer's Self”. Yet, Shaker tries to give the implied meaning as well but he uses the word “person” which seems human like. In the second example, Shaker translates it as “He”. It would be better to translate it as “self”. In my point view, the image of the face in this context clearly refers to “Allah” by mentioning the part and meaning the whole.

So, in these verses, the face is mentioned to refer to Allah. Thus, it can be translated as “Allah (lit. the Face of Allah)”.

4.3 The Eye Image:

The image of the eye of Allah exists in four verses in the Qur’ân.

4.3.1 The first example is in *Surat Al-Qamar* (The Moon Chapter), verse (14):

(سورة القمر 14)

﴿تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا﴾

Shakir

“Sailing, before Our eyes”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Floating under Our Eyes”

Saheeh International

“Sailing under Our observation”

Ghâlî

“Running under Our Eyes”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“That floated under Our watchful eye”

Asad

“Which floated on the water before Our very eyes”

Shabbir

“And it floated before Our eyes”

4.3.1.1 Interpretation of the Image

The approach of the people of *Sunnah* and *jamâ’ca* affirms the fact that Allah has eyes without delving into any embedded interpretations or imagining its color, size, or length. They, also, think that people must not think of Allah’s eyes form or shape as if they are like our eyes which consist of nerves and cells. However, the *Khalafî* trends tend to interpret and imagine it without

having evidence for that. They sometimes interpret the “eye of Allah” as a metaphor of protection and care of Allah not as seeing or watching. The *Muʿtazilites* think that Allah does not have any eyes. They think that Allah sees with all his “self” not with his eyes, they deny the fact that Allah has eyes even if it is mentioned in the Qur’ân and *Sunnah*.

4.3.1.2 Evaluating the Translations

The eye is another organ of the body that is mentioned here with reference to Allah. Six of the seven translations under study translate it literally as “the eye”. Abdul Haleem translates it as “Our watchful eye” which gives the connotation of the omniscient control of Allah. Saheeh International translates it as “Sailing under Our observation”. Both Abdul Haleem and Saheeh International deal with the image as a metaphor; they try to give what they think to be the underlying meaning or the metonymical meaning. Thus, they follow the *Khalafî* method in dealing with the anthropomorphic images of the eye.

4.3.2 The second eye image is in *Surat Hûd*, verse 37:

(سورة هود 37)

﴿بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا﴾

Shakir

“Before Our eyes”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Under Our Eyes”

Saheeh International

“Under Our observation”

Ghâlî

“Under Our Eyes”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“Under Our [watchful] eyes”

Asad

“Under Our Eyes”

Shabbir

“Under Our Eyes”

4.3.3 The third eye image is in Surat Taha, verse 39:

(سورة طه 39) ﴿وَلِتُصْنَعَ عَلَىٰ عَيْنِي﴾

Shakir

“Be brought up before My eyes”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Under My Eye”

Saheeh International

“Under My eye [i.e., observation and care].”

Ghâlî

“Be worked out under My Eye”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“Under My watchful eye”

Asad

“Formed under Mine eye”

Shabbir

“And reared you before My Sight”

4.3.4 The fourth eye image is in Surat At-Tûr (The Mount Chapter), verse 48;

(سورة الطور 48) ﴿وَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا﴾

Shakir

“Before Our eyes”

Hilâlî and Khân’s Translation

“Under Our Eyes”

Saheeh International

“You are in Our eyes [i.e., sight]”

Ghâlî

“Under Our Eyes”

Abdel Haleem’s Translation

“Under Our watchful eye”

Asad

“Within Our sight”

Shabbir

“[In Our eyes = Under God’s affectionate support and care]”

4.3.2.1 Interpretation of the Images

Ash-Shawkânî (2007:1428) and *Ibn ‘Īṣā* (2001:5/215) had different explanations for the Eye image in these contexts. They say that it may refer to the angels, Allah’s knowledge, Allah’s orders, Allah’s revelations. *Tafsîr Al-Jalâlayn* (2003:529), *Al-Baġawî* (2002:1253), *Ibn Al-Jawzî* (2002:1371), *Ash-Sha‘rawî* (1991:23/14767), and *Al-Qurtubî* (2006:20/83) point it out as “Under Allah’s Observation, knowledge and Protection”. *Abû Bakr Al-Jaza’rî* (1990:4/171) explains it as “Our observation, guidance, and instruction”.

4.3.2.2 Evaluating the Translations

Abdel Haleem, Ghâlî, Hilâlî and Khân, Shabbir, and Shakir translate the eye image in this verse literally as “eye”. They all avoid interpreting its implied meaning. Saheeh International translates the first image as “Our observation”, the second as “Under My eye [i.e., observation and care]” and the third one as “in Our eyes [i.e., sight]”. Asad renders it as “Eyes/sight”, but he adds the implied meaning “under Our Protection” in the footnotes which is more elaborative and conservative at the same time. Saheeh International’s translation is different in the second

“Under My eye [i.e., observation and care]” and third image “You are in Our eyes [i.e., sight]” from the first one “Under Our observation” though they have the same meaning. The translation of the first image is more informative and elaborative. The translation of the second image is functional and loyal to the original text at the same time. The third image is more conservative and loyal to the original text on the expense of the meaning; the embedded meaning needs to be elaborated in footnotes or within-the text-notes.

A suggested translation for the first image that conveys the underlying meaning of the verse and preserves the same style and word choice of the original text may be “Saheeh International’s translation “Under My eye [i.e., observation and care].” Concerning the second verse, the translation of Shabbir “[In Our eyes = Under God’s affectionate support and care]”. The reason for that is that they conform to the interpretations mentioned before and that they are less confusing for the target reader.

5.0 Findings and Conclusion

5.1 The Study Findings

The research findings can be displayed as follows:

1. Some translators do not have the needed knowledge about the appropriate method of dealing with the anthropomorphic images in the Qur'ân. That is to say, the translator sometimes deals with the anthropomorphic images by adopting the *Salafî* approach and in other contexts the same translator deals with them by adopting the *Khalafî* one. For example, Abdul Haleem sometimes follows the *Salafî* method in translating anthropomorphism like in “floated under Our watchful eye”. In other verses, he adopts the *Khalafî* approach like in “seeking His approval”, “Established on the Throne”, and “Seeking His approval”.
2. It is outstanding for the translator of the Qur'ân to study the appropriate doctrine of anthropomorphism that is accepted by the majority of the Muslim scholars with consensus. The majority of Muslim scholars are called *ahl al-sunnah wal jama'ah*. They think that the anthropomorphic images of Allah must be affirmed without any kind of negation, denying, resembling, likening, or exaggeration. They must be handled and dealt with as they are mentioned in the Qur'ân and *Sunnah*. Also, they reject *Ta'wîl* “interpretation” of the anthropomorphic images.
3. These different and divergent ideologies may affect the translator's rendering of the anthropomorphic images. Thus, the translator has to specify from the very beginning the approach s/he is going to adopt in his translation.
4. *Ta'wîl* can be accepted if it accords with language, jurisprudence, and context. It is not totally rejected. So, the translator may adopt the semantic approach in translating some anthropomorphic images like “*Istwâ*”, and shift to the functional

approach when translating images like “the face” and “the eye” as long as the *Ta’wîl* meets the three stipulations.

5. The Image of *Istwâ’* cannot be discussed or imagined by all means. Hence, it must be translated literally or in transliteration. The translator may mention that it is not allowed in Islamic doctrine to discuss this image and explain why in the footnotes or in within-the text-notes to be reader-friendly.
6. The images of “the eye” and “the face” can be translated by following *Ta’wîl* but with giving the literal meaning between brackets as within-the text-notes or in the footnotes.
7. Following *Ta’wîl* method does not mean that we negate that Allah has a face or an eye, etc. Nevertheless, it is important to note that we affirm the fact that Allah has an eye, a face, a hand, etc. But the image may have different meanings in different contexts as long as it accords with language rules, jurisprudence, and context.

5.2 Conclusion

At the end of this research, suggested recommendations are represented to help translators avoid mistakes in translating the anthropomorphic images of *Istwâ’*, the face, and the Eye in the Qur'an:

1. In this study, it has been assumed that there are two diverse trends in dealing with the anthropomorphic images; *Salafî* and *Khalafî*. The problem that encounters the translator is her/his unawareness of the importance of the issue in Islamic doctrine. They may follow the *Khalafî* approach in some verses and follow the *Salafî* in other situations without being aware that s/he is doing so. That is why, the translator has to study the features and basics of each approach and then decide which approach to adopt and when to shift between the different approaches.

2. *Ta'wîl* is not totally rejected and forbidden in dealing with the Qur'ân as some conservative scholars assume. It may be allowed or supported on three conditions; when it is impossible to understand the surface meaning of the context; when the interpreted term is accepted in language; when the interpretation has evidence from the opinions of the Prophet or his companions and jurisprudence.
3. The before mentioned ideologies are all mirrored and crystallized in the different exegeses of the Qur'ân. So, translators have to be aware of the ideology imposed in each exegesis and avoid following or adopting deviated cults and interpretations.
4. The image of *Istwâ'* cannot be interpreted or discussed unanimously. However, the images of the face and the eye can be interpreted and their embedded meaning can be clarified after consulting reliable and authorized exegeses.
5. The image of the eye has different meanings in the Qur'ân. Sometimes, it means "protection", "guidance", "knowledge", "instruction", and "observation". This variation of meaning depends on the context. So, the wording is one, but the meanings are different, such words are termed homographs.

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Symbols Used in the Phonemic Transcription of Arabic

The transcription symbols used in this study follow the IPA conventions, with some modification for typing convenience. Following is a list of these symbols:

A. Consonant			
Symbol	Description	Examples	
/ʔ/	ء	Voiceless glottal stop	/ʔat/ "she came"
/b/	ب	Voiced bilabial stop	/bostân/ "garden"
/t/	ت	Voiceless alveolar stop	/kitaab/ "book"
/θ/	ث	Voiceless dental fricative	/naθr/ "prose"
/j/	ج	Voiced palatal affricate	/burj/ "tower"
/ħ/	ح	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative	/ħarb/ "war"
/kh/	خ	Voiceless velar fricative	/khawf/ "fear"
/d/	د	Voiced alveolar stop	/diin/ "religion"
/ð/	ذ	Voiced dental fricative	/ðahab/ "gold"
/r/	ر	Voiced alveolar trill	/qird/ "monkey"
/z/	ز	Voiced alveolar fricative	/zâra/ "he visited"
/s/	س	Voiceless alveolar fricative	/rasm/ "drawing"
/sh/	ش	Voiceless palato-alveolar fricative	/šahr/ "month"
/ṣ/	س̣	Voiceless alveolar emphatic fricative	/sawm/ "fasting"
/ḍ/	د̣	Voiced emphatic stop	/maraḍ/ "sickness"
/ṭ/	ت̣	Voiceless alveolar emphatic stop	/maṭar/ "rain"
/ð̣/	ذ̣	Voiced dental emphatic fricative	/ð̣ahr/ "back"
/c/	ع	Voiced pharyngeal fricative	/ʕaql/ "mind"
/ġ/	ق	Voiced uvular fricative	/ġawθ/ "help or aid"
/f/	ف	Voiceless labio-dental fricative	/saqf/ "ceiling"
/q/	ق	Voiceless uvular stop	/qalaq/ "anxiety"
/k/	ك	Voiceless velar stop	/kahf/ "cave"
/l/	ل	Voiced alveolar lateral	/qalb/ "heart"
/m/	م	Voiced bilabial nasal	/min/ "from"
/n/	ن	Voiced alveolar nasal	/nawm/ "sleep"
/h/	ه	Voiceless glottal fricative	/fahm/ "understanding"
/w/	و	Voiced bilabial semi-vowel	/lahw/ "play"
/y/	ي	Voiced palatal semi-vowel	/yad/ "hand"
B. Vowels			
/i/	ي	High front unrounded vowel	/qist/ "justice"
/î/	ي	High front unrounded long vowel	/karîh/ "hateful"
/a/	ا	Low central unrounded short vowel	/sadd/ "dam"
/â/	ا	Low central unrounded long vowel	/qitâr/ "train"
/u/	و	High back round short vowel	/xubz/ "bread"
/û/	و	High back round long vowel	/nûr/ "light"

NB: length in both consonants and vowels is marked by a double symbol as in /kaatib/ "writer" and /mudarris/ "teacher"