

Metaphors in the Quran and its translation accuracy in Indonesian

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ABSTRACT

Metaphors (*majaz* in Arabic) are an important part of language style. In the Quran, they play a vital role in different interpretations of the Quran. The use of metaphors in Quranic verses may often cause semantic problems and varied interpretations for translation. The study of metaphors pertaining to the Quran aims to investigate accuracy issues in its translation. Previous studies on the translation of the Quran into Indonesian suggest that some metaphors are translated word-for-word. To some extent, the literal translation is an oxymoron leading to reduced nuances of meaning. The present study seeks to address two issues in relation to the use of metaphors: the actual translation product of Quranic metaphorical verses and translation techniques for Quranic metaphorical verses produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In doing so, this study examines the metaphors of 15 verses in the Quran. Findings show that containing metaphors (13 verses containing lexical metaphors, and 2 verses containing sentential metaphors). Regarding the techniques, in the translated Quran published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 13 verses were translated by a literal technique and 2 verses by a non-literal technique. The findings of this suggest that when translating Quran verses, metaphorical features should be taken into account. It is also imperative for future research to scrutinize the implications of different translations on the construction of meaning in the Quran.

Keywords: Metaphor; the Quran; translation

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, translation studies on metaphors in the Quran have contributed to a nuanced understanding of linguistics and cultural dimensions of a target language (TL) and a source language (SL). The interpretation of metaphors is strongly culturally conditioned. This is especially the case with translated metaphor. Adopting a metaphor to a new context a translator can choose among three possibilities: he or she can use an exact equivalent of the original metaphor (M→M procedure); he or she can seek another metaphorical phrase which would express a similar sense (M1→M2 procedure); finally, he or she can replace an untranslatable metaphor of the original with

its approximate literal paraphrase (the M→P procedure) (Dobrzynska, 1995). Eliman (2016) found that 90% of metaphor translations in the Quran to English failed to convey accurate meanings. The general strategies of translation are inept at affirming the rich nuance of metaphors in the Quran. More specifically, the strategies used do not fall into the types of metaphors. The concept of equivalence is believed to be a central issue in translation although its definition, relevance, and applicability within the field of translation theory have caused heated controversies. Indeed, "Equivalence" has provided a useful theoretical and pragmatic foundation for translation processes (Kashgary, 2011).

Metaphors in the Quran

Metaphors are part of Quranic discourse. Interpreting metaphorical verses in the Quran is hotly debated among scholars. Some argue that metaphorical verses are compulsory to be taken connotatively. This is because the Quran follows the development of language at a specific time. In this regard, Zarkasyi (1975) argues that at the time the Quran was revealed, Arabs used to make use of *majaz*, *tasybih*, and *kinayah* styles in their daily utterances. However, Sanqiti (2009) emphasize that metaphors, in linguistics, are connotative; therefore, as the words of God, the Quran, is impossible to have connotative meanings. It is the basis of considering metaphors as denotative in meaning. For that reason, it is necessary to conduct comprehensive studies on metaphors in Quranic verses.

Nurbayan (2009) argues that metaphors in the Quran contribute to polemics among scholars. The selection of a particular metaphorical meaning has profound legal and belief implications. Therefore, Sanqiti (2009) points out that metaphors are related to emptiness and lies by which people use to calumniate. On the contrary, Al-Tabari (2000) contends that metaphors reflect the beauty of language that exists in the Quran. Such metaphors have been used long before the establishment of the Quran. Linguistically, Alexandrien introduced the term in the first century AD (as cited in Syamsuddin, 2009, p. 12). Disagreement about metaphors in the Quran is a critical topic among translators. They need to consider prudence, appropriate methods, and suitable procedures.

In an Islamic tradition, the study of the Quran is divided into two topics; *ma haulal Quran* (the study of Quranic topics) and *dirasat fil Quran nafsihi* (the study of the Quran). From this perspective, metaphors can be categorized into the second topic as they are part of language structure in the Quran (Nawawi, 2017, p. 239). Metaphors are used as a language style in Arabic as a result of a long process of language development among Arabs. Historically, humans first used the word based on its original meaning: a connotative meaning. Overtime, humans modify their language practice by using, among others, metaphors and euphemism. In *balaghah*, metaphors are discussed in *bayan* with such topics, as *tasybih* and *kinayah*. Metaphor is an advanced topic of a language style, such as *tasybih* (parable). This study was initiated by the Prophet's closest companions to construct a moderate interpretation of metaphorical Quranic verses (Atiq, 1985).

In contemporary Arabic analysis, metaphors are treated as an opposite term of *hakikat* (Muzakki, 2009). *Hakikat* is an agreed basic term as an initial meaning in language (Ibn Jinni, 1343; Ibnul Atsir, 1939). A metaphor is a voice (word or sentence) that represents an indirect meaning, as it reflects more than a single meaning (Sukamta, 2009). Jurzani (1988, p. 365), pinpoints that a metaphor is an expression whose meaning goes beyond its original meaning. Hasyimi

(1994), in a different sense, maintains that a metaphor is an expression used in different meaning as the relation and *qarinah* (signified) are closely intertwined. In this sense, a metaphor is a word used to represent indirect meaning (Lubis, 2011).

Translation of metaphorical verses in the Quran

Metaphors can be defined as a linguistic sign used in the predicative function outside its normal usage as determined by the code. Metaphorical sense emerges through exploiting the set of associations that accompany linguistic elements in the consciousness of code users. This pragmatic material is a more amorphous complex than ordinary linguistic meaning. The sets of associations fixed in the consciousness of native speakers of a given language make metaphorical communication always extremely 'sensitive' to the communicative context (Dobrzynska, 1995).

Furthermore, the studies on the translation of the Quran in Indonesian are also popular. Ainurrafiq (2015) found that there are typical mistakes in translation from Arabic to Indonesian; such as grammatical accuracy of the translation results are grammatically inaccurate sentential redundancy, inappropriate literal translations, and improper use of identical terms from a source language (assuming that people are already familiar with the terms).

Al Farisi (2010) reported that the translation of the Quran published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs adopted 60% literal strategy for translating *iltifat* verses. This was attributed to foreignization in translating the verses (Al Farisi, 2015). In a different study, Al Farisi (2013) revealed that 93.3% of the readers did not employ complex processing efforts to understand the translated version of *kinayah* verses with taboo expressions. The results showed the imperfection in translating Quranic verses into Indonesian. It is necessary for the government (Ministry of Religious Affairs) to consider some valuable insights into the quality of the translation product of the Quran.

Culture and language cannot separate from translation. Nowadays, the issue of bilinguality or knowing another language is not the only prerequisite for being a translator; in this fast-moving world, translators should be primarily cultural experts. In other words, they should know the two cultures (source and target) very well before starting to act as a translator. (Mahadi, 2015).

There are five conditions related to the naturalness level, such as (1) avoiding literal translation (Belloc, 1931), (2) making readers realize that it is a translation product (Rahimy, 2004), (3) adding appropriate words to a target language (Tytler, 1797), (4) understanding readers from their target language (Nida, 1943), and (5) using a communicative strategy (Newmark, 1998). In a broader context, reduction or addition can result in unwanted consequences for people who use translation works, such as translation texts in the fields of law, medicine, religion, and engineering (Nababan, Ardiana, & Sumardiono, 2012; pp. 39-57). A qualified translation

product has to meet the aspects of accuracy, acceptability, and legibility.

The typical problem in translation is finding equivalent words. Regarding the problem, Nida (1969) explains that there are formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses on the messages (form or content), while the dynamic equivalent is related to constructing equivalent nuances by considering the relationship between the substantial message in the source language and the target language. These problems are faced by many translators, as reported by Seong (2011) that it is hard to find the equivalent verb of Chinese and Malay.

In addition, cultural issues are embedded in the translation process. According to Larson (1998), cultural aspects are very important in translation, as translating is not merely about changing words, but also transferring cultural values of the words. For this reason, a translator needs to consider these two aspects. Meaning is a crucial and complex term in language. Therefore, a translator is highly recommended to be meticulous in seeing different languages from different cultures. A translator is to translate words (into target language) that can be accepted by the readers of the target language (Thriveni, 2002). As an example, Shanmugam (2010) shows that the proverbs in the Malay-speaking rhymes exhibit universal meanings; however, the metaphors are unique and distinctive. For this reason, the present study aims to examine the representation of metaphors in the Quran.

THE STUDY

The primary data in this research were the metaphorical verses and their translations in the Qur'an published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The verses were treated as texts by emphasizing that they are a revelation of Allah. With this in mind, this is a qualitative study with an analytical discourse. The samples were taken purposively in accordance with the metaphorical aspects in the first chapter. After finding the metaphors, the translations were analyzed by considering the principles of translation.

This study involved primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were metaphorical Quranic verses and their translations in Indonesian; the secondary data were Qur'anic interpretation books providing additional insights and topics about the primary data. The books under the study were *Alkasysyaf* by Zamakhsyari (2009) and the *Almunir fil Aqidah qasysyari'ah wal manhaj* by Az-Zuhaili (2009). These books are considered relevant because there are linguistic descriptions of metaphorical verses. The books on *balaghah* supplemented the metaphor analysis.

This study examined the accuracy of the translation of metaphorical verses. The procedure used in this study included (1) identifying metaphorical verses, (2) explaining the translation products in Indonesian, and (3) analyzing the accuracy, clarity, and naturalness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study focus on metaphors and types of translation strategies by the translator of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The representation of metaphors was found in 15 Quranic verses. The types of metaphors were at lexical, phrasal, and causal levels. It was found that there are eight word-metaphors, *ختم* (Albaqarah 7), *اشترُوا* (Albaqarah 16), *عهد* (Albaqarah 27), *نشتروا* (Albaqarah 41), *اركعوا* (Albaqarah 43), *بِسْمِكُمْ* (Albaqarah 49), *وجهه* (Albaqarah 112), *السُّجُود* (Albaqarah 125). There are two phrasal metaphors, *الأرض تنبت مما* (Albaqarah 61) and *على ينقلب* (Albaqarah 163). In clausal forms, there are four findings, *واشربوا الأنهار تحتها من تجري* (Albaqarah 125) and *واشربوا العجل قلوبهم في العجل قلوبهم في* (Albaqarah 93).

Regarding the strategy, there are literal and non-literal strategies used by the translator. The literal strategy is identifiable in translating the words *ختم*, *تنبت مما*, *السجود*, *وجهه*, *بِسْمِكُمْ*, *اركعوا*, *نشتروا*, *ينقضون*, *اشترُوا*, *العجل قلوبهم في* and *واشربوا الأنهار تحتها من تجري*, *الأرض*. The non-literal strategy was implemented in translating the metaphorical expression *'عَقَبِيهِ عَلَى يَنْقَلِبُ'*.

It was found that there are 15 metaphorical Quranic verses. The metaphors could be seen in Al-baqarah 7, 16, 25, 27, 41, 43, 49, 61, 74, 93, 112, 115, 125, 143, and 144. Based on the analysis, there are eight word-metaphors in Al-baqarah 7, 16, 27, 41, 43, 49, 112 and 125. In Al-baqarah 7, there is a clausal-metaphor *'قُلُوبِهِمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ خَتَمٌ'* whose translation is "God has set a seal on their hearts." In this clause, there is a word *خَتَمٌ* (based on Ashihhah's dictionary, which means *balagha akhiruhu* (till the end or finish something) (see Jauhari, 2009, p. 305). In this specific context, the word was not translated as *'menutup/close,*' but *'mengunci/set a seal,'* which commonly refers to a close door, box, or enclosed object. In the respective verse, the word is suitable for the subject *'hati/heart.'* The construction, in *balaghah*, is defined as a metaphor. The translation of *خَتَمٌ* as 'lock' is a literal strategy. This translation is accurate, understandable, and grammatically correct. It is also acceptable as in the clause *'الصَّلَاةُ اشْتَرُوا الدِّينَ أَوْلَيْكَ بِالْهُدَى'*.

The metaphor could also be traced in *'الصَّلَاةُ اشْتَرُوا'* translated as *'menjualbelikan kesesatan dengan hidayah/perform a transaction between digression and holy guidance.'* As Abadi (2005, p. 1229), point out, the word *"اشْتَرُوا"* has the basic meaning of *'memiliki sesuatu dengan cara membeli/having something by buying.'* In this context, the word is referred to as *'exchanging.'* The people are exchanging digression with holy guidance. It implies that God uses the metaphor in transferring his message as he does not use the word *'يَتَدَلُّوا' /exchanging* but the word *'اشْتَرُوا' /buying.* In the Indonesian translation version, it is translated as *'mereka itulah orang yang membeli kesesatan dengan petunjuk/they are people who bought digression with guidance.'* It is indeed a literal translation; the words are translated word for word. However, the metaphorical aspect appears in the source and target language.

In Al-baqarah 27, there is the word *'ahdu'*

categorized as a metaphor. Asfahani (2009, p. 591), emphasizes that the word means *ihitfadh* (keep something). The word is originally used for the elders in talking about legacy. The message is called as *ahdu* because it is sacred for them. The word also has an alternative meaning; it is 'a serious promise.' In this context, *ahdu* refers to 'rop knot' by deleting *musyabah bih* to symbolize the typically of 'rope.'

In Al-baqarah 41, there is a metaphor in the statement *بِآيَاتِي تَسْتَرْوُ وَلَا تَسْتَرْوُ*. The use of "تَسْتَرْوُ" which means 'buying' is used for the word 'استَتَبِلُوْهُ' meaning 'changing.' In the translation made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the word تَسْتَرْوُ is translated as 'selling.' The original meaning of the word is 'buying' (Ibn Faris, 1979, p. 266). The translation was inaccurate, and the appropriate word is 'transaction' as it is not only forbidden to sell, but also buy.

In Al-baqarah 43, there are metaphorical words in a clause, and the words are 'الرَّاكِعِيْنَ' and 'ارْكَعُوا'. The words are categorized as metaphors as the word 'ruku' is used to refer to 'prayer.' The word "ارْكَعُوا" lexically means 'bending your head.' In praying rituals, *ruku* means bending your head, so it is in parallel with your knees; this is performed after reciting Al-fatihah (Abadi, 2005, p. 723). The strategy used by the Ministry in translating the word is a literal translation. Consequently, the word is inaccurately translated as the core message has vanished.

In Al-baqarah 49, the metaphor could be found in this statement (الْعَذَابَ يَسُوْمُوْنَكُمْ). This phrase (يسُوْمُوْنَكُمْ) initially means 'buying' (البيع في سَوْمٍ). Then, it is used to replace the meaning of 'feeling' (يَذِيْقُهُمْ) (Abadi, 2005, p. 1124; Jauhari, 2009, p.574). The use of the word (يسُوْمُوْنَكُمْ) for the meaning of 'feeling' is a form of metaphor. The Ministry translates the word as 'imposing.' It is not a connotative meaning; however, the reader can access the meaning. In addition, the aesthetic aspect of language is neglected.

In Al-baqarah 125, there is a metaphor in the clause *فَلَوْ بِنُكْمٍ فَسَسْتُمْ*. The meaning of the clause is 'kemudian hati mereka menjadi keras'/their hearts then become hard. This metaphor is at a phrasal level. The word 'hard' is attached to 'heart,' referring to the situation when people are refusing God as stone cannot accommodate water. In this verse, God portrays a hard-hearted man who looks like stone in the river. The original meaning actually refers to a man with full of great things, but God forces to close his heart from his guidance. In the translation made by the Ministry, it was translated by using a literal strategy. It meets the dimension of naturalness and is acceptable in Indonesian grammar.

In Al-baqarah 112, the metaphor could be identified in the word (وَجْهَهُ). A similar word was also found in Al-baqarah 144 which in this verse in the form of plural. The word is 'وَجُوْهُمُ'. In the translation of the Ministry, the word was translated as 'self.' However, Ba'labaki (1995, p. 1224), in the Al-mawarid dictionary, defines *wajh* as 'face, side, surface, and aspect.' The use of 'self' is referred to as Pars-pro-toto (a single part for

the whole thing). It is a non-literal translation. It is very natural and acceptable in the Indonesian context. The translation adapted the style of the source language. In the verse, the word (الوجه) pertains to the whole body. The word is debatable among scholars. Some scholars define the word as is, while some see the word in allegory. The word (الوجه) was not translated as 'face,' because it would lead to the interpretation of *mujassimah* (equating God with creatures). The use of 'face' for Allah is nothing more than just to strengthen the influence of God for the believers. Wherever they face, they would always feel that Allah always exists, and they would not be able to turn away from Allah.

In Al-baqarah 125, the metaphor was found in the word 'السُّجُوْدِ وَالرُّكْعِ'. It is categorized as a metaphor as the two words refer to 'prayer' (there are *ruku*/bowing and *sujud*/prostration). The words are partly but wholeheartedly referring to 'prayer, it is a metaphor. The metaphors are at a clausal level, namely 'الرُّكْعِ' and 'السُّجُوْدِ'. The analysis of the word 'الركع' has been explained in Al-baqarah verse 43. The word 'السُّجُوْدِ' also denotes the same reference. The Ministry translated the word using a literal strategy; generating an inaccurate and inappropriate message from the source language.

The metaphors, in a phrasal form, were found in two verses; Al-baqarah 61 and 143. In Al-baqarah 61, the metaphor is in the word (الْأَرْضُ تَنْبُتُ مِمَّا). In this case, there is an aspect of attributing the verb to the unreal actor, to attribute the word 'grow' (تَنْبُتُ) to 'earth' (الْأَرْضُ). The attribution is related to the indicator that the earth is a place for the plants to grow, but the real creator is God (Asasifah, 2014, p.844). It is a literal translation, which is accurate, natural, and understandable. In Al-baqarah 143, this clause 'يَقْلِبُ وَمَنْ عَقْبَيْهِ عَلَى', conveys a metaphorical language (Az-Zuhaili, 2009, p. 365). The translation of the verse is 'dan siapa yang membelot/and those who turn on their heels.' This is a non-literal translation. The translator does not translate literally but adopts the general meaning in Arabic. This is acceptable, and will not cause ambiguity. In fact, the literal translation of this clause would lead to difficulty for readers.

The metaphor in clause form was found in Al-baqarah 93 in the clause (الْعَجَلِ فُلُوْبِهِمْ فِي وَأَشْرَبُوا). The translation of the clause is 'dan diresepkanlah ke dalam hati mereka itu (kecintaan menyembah patung) anak sapi/and their hearts became filled with the love of the calf.' Their worshipping the calf can be attributed to the love of delicious drinks. It is a metaphor as the use of words (فُلُوْبِهِمْ فِي وَأَشْرَبُوا) to reveal the meaning 'telah ditancapkan ke dalam hati mereka rasa kecintaan yang mendalam dalam menyembah anak sapi/ their hearts became filled with the love of the calf.' In balaghah, it is categorized as the metaphor of *isti'arah makniiyah* (Az-Zuhaili, 2009, p. 248). The translation strategy is non-literal, as the word 'وأشربوا' was translated as 'and filled. This translation is not a lexical translation, like in *mu'jam*. The metaphor was also identified in Al-baqarah 25 with the clause 'الْأَنْهَارُ تَحْتَهَا مِنْ تَجْرِي'. The translation of it is "surga yang mengalir sungai-sungai di

dalamnya/gardens beneath which rivers flow.” The clause uses a metaphorical language style because what should flow is water (not a river). The translation is literal. Therefore, the metaphorical verses were also translated by using a metaphor to avoid the loss of some key meanings. The use of metaphors in both languages would eliminate some debatable interpretations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that metaphorical verses in the Qur'an take the forms of a word, a phrase, and a clause. When translating metaphorical texts, Quran translators should maintain authenticity or originality of Quranic messages represented in Quranic verses. They have to translate Quranic verses by using *tafsiriyyah* (a contextual approach to Quranic translation). This suggests that the translation version of Quranic verses does not rest on the literal meaning of the verses, as the translated words are based on the nuances of words which are closely related to the intended meanings. As the case of this translation in this study showed, translators ought to select phrases or texts in a target language which have equivalent meanings to the original words. Therefore, the translated verses may be longer than the original metaphorical verses. Thus, the implication of the study is that when translating metaphorical verses, translators have to focus on discursive meanings. Further textual studies will need to examine the meanings of metaphorical verses using different approaches.

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