



Translation of the Anthropomorphic Expressions in the Qur'an

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1. Introduction

The exploitation of the anthropomorphic expressions (i.e., those expressions embodying the names of human body parts) in reference to objects and concepts falling out of their literal scope gives rise to the question of their translation. This is because when each of them is used in a certain register, herein the Qur'anic is intended, it will have a relevance to that specific register, i.e. context will have a bearing on how it should be rendered. The current study attempts an issue of this like: it investigates whether or not the translators -named below- have been successful in rendering the names of these expressions in the Qur'an. This is carried out by adopting an explicit scheme of sense categorisation which will serve as a clue in the judgment of happy and unhappy translations. And as an eventual step, a number of conclusions will be put forward.



2. Anthropomorphic Expressions

The familiarity of anthropomorphic expressions (Anth Exs, henceforth) to us makes the name of any of them a ready choice for carrying out the duty of referring to objects which are either remote, or for which there are no specific names (Stern, 1960:344-5). For this, the vast use of these expressions in the Qur'an is merely to reflect the idea of the understandability of the Qur'anic message among humans.

In a natural course of the use of any lexical item, either literal or non-literal (figurative) senses are triggered in a specific situation for a specific purpose. Consequently, in a tentative summarising observation of the sense categories involved in the use of the Anth Exs in the Qur'an, the following seem to be the most frequent senses used, and by large, the only, as is shown in the following section.

3. Sense Categories

3.1 Literal Meaning

The literal use of lexical items involves the bringing of an already formalized form of language to describe life around in a very factual and accurate way (Saeed, 1997: 15).

3.1.1 Polysemy

In the strict sense of the word, polysemy can never be considered as a subcategory of the literal meaning of any lexical item, but in so far as polysemy is not any one of the figures of speech, and since it draws the attention to a physical aspect of similarity to the original literal sense of the word, it is subcategorised under the literal one. Basically, polysemy is a term having multiple meanings all related by extension (Lyons, 1977: 550). It is worth noting that Stern (1960: 346) sees that the extension is based upon a similarity motivated by either one or any combination of shape, function, or relative position.



3.2 Figurative Meaning

As opposed to the literal meaning, the figurative use revolves round the intentional employment of the conventional forms of language in the description of things other than those usually described by them (Saeed, 1997: 15). Under this rubric, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are sub-categories.

3.2.1 Metaphor

Ullmann (1962:214-6) views metaphor as one type of sense change resulting from the associative similarity between the sense of two or more words. He distinguishes four groups of metaphor: anthropomorphic metaphors, animal metaphors, abstract seen as concrete, and synaesthetic metaphors. The use of the Anth Exs in the Qur'an triggers only the first group, i.e. anthropomorphic metaphors. These make the human body a centre of expansion: we use the name of any part to describe other things with the intention of being precise. In this concern, we speak of the **ribs** of a vault, and the **lungs** of a city.

3.2.2 Metonymy

Gray (1984:s.v. metonymy) defines metonymy as a figure of speech involving "the substitution for the name of a thing, the name of an attribute of it or something closely associated with it." As contingent upon this same issue, Bain (1893: 186-91) gives a very representative categorisation of the classes of metonymy:

- i- Sign or symbol names the thing symbolised
(Crown → reality)



- ii- Instrument replaces the agent (Pen → decision)¹
- iii- Container used for contents (Table → food)
- iv- An effect stands for the cause (Bright death → knife)
- v- The maker replaces his works (Euclid → geometry)
- vi- Passion stands for the object towards which this passion is expressed (Love → person).

To these, Ullmann (1962:18-20) adds three classes of relation which bring about metonymies:

- i- Spatial relations, where two objects are close to each other in place, the name of one of them extends to the other.
- ii- Temporal relations, when an action may be named by the name of another preceding or following it.
- iii- Part-for-whole relations which make a typical representation of synecdoche.

3.2.3 Synecdoche

Synecdoche can be defined as a figure of speech in which a part or individual is used for a whole or class, or the opposite of this (Leech, 1969: 150; Hawkes, 1972: 4). To Bain (1893: 135-6), synecdoche is included under the figures of speech springing from similarity and contiguity. Out of the former, the following instances are identified:

- i- Species names the genus (Bread → necessity of life)
- ii- A feature takes the place of the name of the person representing it (Solomon → wisdom)

1. More plausibly, the instrument should name the action itself not its agent.



- iii- Genus for species (Action → battle)
- iv- The concrete used for the abstract (Fool → folly)
- v- The abstract used for the concrete (Youth → young people)

While the instances resulting from contiguity are:

- i- Part for whole (Sail → ship)
- ii- Whole for part (The Roman Empire → their forces)

In regard to this very issue, al -Utbi's (2001:89-95) scrutiny of the Anth Exs in Arabic showed that the two main classes exploited are part-for-whole and whole-for-part relations, and since we are dealing with the Qur'an these will fall within the scope of this study.

4. Translation Methods

To translate whether literally or freely is the core problem in translation. And favour quivers towards both directions equally well. Along the same line, whether to emphasize the source language (SL) or the target language (TL) makes a further aspect in the problem. Considering these two aspects in combination, the following methods may be grouped as follows (Newmark, 1989:45-8).

4.1 Methods Emphasizing SL

These include:

- i- Word-for-word translation, where the TL is considered immediately below the SL: the SL word order is preserved and the words are translated singly by their most common meanings.



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- ii- Literal translation, where the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents and the words are translated singly out of context.
 - iii- Faithful translation, where the attempt is made to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures.
 - iv- Semantic translation, where the difference from faithful translation is achieved by taking more account of the aesthetic value of the text so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars appear in the finished version.

4.2 Methods Emphasizing TL

These involve:

- i- Adaptation, in which the freest form of translation is achieved: the SL culture is converted to the TL culture and the text is rewritten.
- ii- Free translation, in which the matter is reproduced without the manner.
- iii- Idiomatic translation, in which the message of the original is reproduced, but nuances of meaning are distorted by preferring colloquialisms and idioms.
- iv- Communicative translation, in which the attempt is made to render the exact contextual meaning in a manner that content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.



5. Procedures

The study will consider a number of Anth Exs in relevance to the way they have been rendered by the following translators:

- 1- Marmaduke Pickthall (1996), henceforth M.P.
- 2- Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (1417 a.h.), henceforth M. & M.
- 3- G.Margoliouth (1909), henceforth G.M.
- 4- N. J. Dawood (1978), henceforth N. D.
- 5- A. Yusuf Ali (1968), henceforth A.Y.A.

The consideration falls within the confines of the sense categories classified above in section 3. As for the choice of instances of these expressions, it sticks to no one strategy, i.e. the choice is randomly based. This is followed by a translation assessment where judgment is made, when necessary in dependence upon authoritative interpretations of the Qur'an and dictionaries of English and Arabic. Finally, a number of conclusions will be put forward.

6. Translation Assessment

6.1 Literal Categories

Literal senses of Anth Exs seem to pose no problem to the translators in that each one name has its own counterpart term which is used for it restrictedly as is manifested in the renditions of كعب , مرفق , وجه , جيد ; ظهر and جبهة , respectively in,

فَنُكْوِي بِهَا جِبَاهَهُمْ وَجُنُوبَهُمْ وَظُهُورَهُمْ - (التوبة: ٣٥)
في جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ - (المسد: ٥)

فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرِءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى

الكَعْبَيْنِ (المائدة: ٦)

to **forehead** and **back**; **neck**; **face**, **elbow**, and **ankle**. However, names relevant to parts controversial in biological-area coverage in the human body pose some kind of problem. Such a case appears in the translation of **جَنْب** in the first Qur'anic verse stated above which is rendered into **flank** (by M.P., M. & M. and A.Y.A.), but into **side** (by G.M. and N.D). **جَنْب** should be translated into **side**, because **جَنْب** is simply equal to **side** in its biological coverage, i.e. both mean "the part limited between the arm-pit and the hip". While **flank** is a counterpart to **كَنْح** where both cover "an area between the lower rib and the hip" (الربيعي: ج ن ب s.v. ١٩٨٣/ت. ٦٦٦هـ، الرازي) (1997: s.v. flank and side; OALD, 2004: s.v. side).

6.1.1 Polysemy

Consider the translation of **عَجَز** in,

(القمر: ٢٠) كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ مُنْقَعِرٍ -

into **trunk** (by M.P. and N.D.), **stem** (by M. & M.), **root** (by A.Y.A.), and **stump** (by G.M.). In taking into consideration the meaning stated by (عجز s.v. :بلا تاريخ /ت. ٧١١هـ) ابن منظور as "the rear of anything", and relying on the context of the sense, **stump** seems to be the most suitable rendition to **عَجَز**. The other expressions of **trunk**, **stem**, and **root** all have connotations far away those intended by the SL expression.

On another occasion, the translators make a move from the use of the literal counterparts to terms suiting the contextual meaning, no one used **eye**, for instance, to render عَيْن in:

(الغاشية: ١٢) فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ -

but all used **spring** or **fountain**. **Spring** fits the context perfectly for it has the connotation of being natural, a distinctive feature of heaven-gardens, while **fountain** has, on one occasion or another, the intrusion of man (for checking this sense of عين, see ابن منظور, ibid: s.v. عين; الزبيدي; ١٢٠٥هـ., بلا / ت. ١٢٠٥هـ., الزبيدي; عين; s.v. ابن منظور, ع ي ن s.v. تاريخ).

A further instance of polysemy motivated by a similarity in shape and position is مَنكَبٌ, "known to be the broad bone making the shoulder", which can be used to indicate the broad projecting sides of a thing (ن ك ب, ibid: s.v. الزبيدي) as in:

- فَامَشُوا فِي مَنَاجِبِهَا (المَلِك: ١٥)

In such a case, مَنكَبٌ has the indication to broad projecting parts of land, and therefore, not all the translators have succeeded in pointing to this outstanding sense. **Path** (by M. P. and M. & M.) as though makes a reference to a very specific area or region, and thus the meaning of earth is missed, and so, somehow exactly, is the case with **tract** (of A. Y. A.) and **region** (of N.D). While **broad side** is judged to be referring to what مَنكَبٌ in the verse indicates. For this, it agrees with the aim targeted herein.

In a summing up statement, it could be said that despite the fact that the translators have recognized that terms such as

عَجَز , عَيْن , and مِنْكَب are polysemous and thus used no literal counterparts, they, somehow, have not discerned the exact points of similarity (whether in shape, or position, or in both) expressed in the SL original terms. Consequently, they have used what seems to be a type of approximating TL words. Accordingly, it is important to be sure of what aspects of similarity are at work.

6.2 Figurative Categories

6.2.1 Metaphor

To translate a metaphorical expression, resorting to literal devices in rendition undoubtedly fails to give the meaning intended as can be seen in the translation of جناح , which is attributed to things having none as in:

و أخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذَّلِيلِ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ (الأسراء: ٢٤)

Here, resorting to **wing** (by M. P., M. & M. and A. Y. A.) as a counterpart makes an unsuccessful attempt, in that جناح is attributed only metaphorically to entities in Arabic, but the same application in English sounds unusual. Therefore, N. D's **treat them with humility**, and G. M's **defer humbly to them** are better expressive since both disregard the use of **wing** at all and refer to the core action as such.

The same sort of argument can be related in relevance to the rendition of وَجْه in:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ ُ (القصص: ٨٨)

to Allah is but to name **Allah Himself**, in وجهThe attribute of is used with things having none to indicate the thing وجهthat (in reference to Allah) وجهitself no more. The translation of

into **His Face** (by M. & M. and A. Y. A.) or **His Countenance** (by M. P.) is going on the wrong course. While N. D's and G. M's use of **Himself** is a happy translation, and consequently , الطباطبائي they have got the gist of the idea (for evidence, see ١٩٩٧, ج١٦ ٩٢-٩٣; أبو حيان, ت. ٧٤٥هـ / بلا تاريخ: ١٣٧).

In the next instance, a complex image makes the basis of a metaphor in which قَدَم is employed in association with صِدْق as in:

-أَنَّ لَهُمْ قَدَمَ صِدْقٍ (يونس: ٢)

Here, قَدَم has the meaning of "an advantage of good deeds" (أبن (قَدَم s.v. بلا تاريخ , منظور), as though the advantage was made by the foot. This explains that in a metaphor, there should be an image mainly initiated by similarity. A translation is judged to be happy once it punctually hits its exact image. By the use of expressions taking far the image away from the point meant, as in rendering قَدَمَ صِدْق into **sure footing** (whereby is indicated a materialistic meaning), the translator, M. P., fails to indicate the original meaning. However, G. M's rendition of **precedence merited by their sincerity** sharply points to the meaning where قَدَم means **precedence** which is, as it were, deserved by the **foot** of sincerity. The others: M. & M's **the reward of their good deeds**, N. D's **their endeavours shall be rewarded**, and A. Y. A's **the lofty rank of truth** indicate similar meanings but rather in a round about way.

A full understanding of the metaphorical power exists in the renditions of عَيْن اليقين (where عَيْن is attributed to الحكمة or وجه النهار (in عَيْن اليقين for the purpose of mere emphasis), and of



which *وجه* means the first part of a thing), as is shown respectively in:

- ثُمَّ لَتَرَوْهَا *عَيْنَ* الْيَقِينِ (التكاثر: ٧)
- آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا *وَجْهَ* النَّهَارِ وَ أَكْفَرُوا آخِرَهُ
(آل عمران: ٧٢)

Regarding the former, the recognition of the metaphor resulted in renditions having as basis the attribution of *عَيْنَ* to things for the emphasis of the thing itself, where only one (G. M's **the eye of certainty**) lacked this aspect of use. For the latter, the recognition of the metaphor seems to have been at the close disposal of the translators all: no one literal rendition has been spotted. However, instances of rendition ranged from those having meanings like **opening of the day** (by M. P.), and **in the morning** (of M. & M., N. D. and A. Y. A.) to the one which seems to have brought together the approximation to the literal sense of *وجه النهار* and the reference of its exact meaning which is (G. M's) **at day break**.

All in all, renditions of metaphor rest on perceiving its existence. Not only so, but being a metaphor takes as a basis an intellect working to analyse its power. In other words, a translator should be aware of the main idea, and how it is explicated within the realm of common basis, i.e. he should be aware of what Richards calls tenor and vehicle and the ground comprising both (1936: 97-100). Otherwise, even if recognition of the whole (metaphor) took place in the absence of the individual basis (image), renditions will hit part, if any, of the truth.

6.2.2 Metonymy

Unlike metaphor, metonymical names show no reliance on analogy, rather on a set of relations between the names themselves and the named entities. Conclusively, failing to perceive what type of relation is holding yields misunderstanding as well as inaccuracy in translation. Consider the name قَبْضَةٌ in the two verses below:

وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ (الزمر: ٦٧)
فَقَبْضَتْ قَبْضَةً مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ (طه: ٩٦)

قَبْضَةٌ is given as one name for two distinct things because of the sort of relation: in the former, it expresses the relation of instrument for action in the sense of "full control over", but in the latter, where a spatial relation is functioning, it denotes "the amount of something that could be carried with قَبْضَةٌ" (أبن (قبض s.v. بلا تاريخ, منظور). As such, the renditions of the translators of the former are unhappy for sticking to the use of **hand** (by M. & M.), **handful** (by M. P., G. M., and A. Y. A) and **grasp** (by N. D.) which is only possible with the latter. This second type of relation, i.e. spatial relation, is also working with رأس in,

مُحَلِّقِينَ رُءُوسَكُمْ وَمَقْصِّرِينَ (الفتح: ٢٧)

where رأس exactly names شعر, but only two translators, viz. M. P. and N. D., have noticed this by using **hair** for it, while the other three have used the literal **head**. However, this literal rendition might be excused on the ground that in English, **head** may be used in reference to **hair**, and thus the metonymical

name will work exactly well in both languages. But it is not always so.

Now, take a close look at the use of يَد in the following two verses:

- يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ (الفتح: ١٠)
- قُلْ إِنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ (آل عمران: ٧٣)

In translating both, the translators have showed the inability to discern the metonymical relation of instrument for action holding between يَد on one hand, and the sense of "ability and strength" (ي د ي: s.v. بلا تاريخ, الزبيدي) in the former, and that of "charge and power" in the latter, on the other. This was done by resorting to the literal rendition of **hand**.

In a metonymical sense, قَلْب may be used to denote, on the basis of the relation of container for contents, "the seat of thoughts and understanding", i.e. mind (أبن منظور) s.v. بلا تاريخ. This denotation is manifested in the following verse:

(ق: ٣٧) إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرٍ لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ -

In both languages, the name قَلْب / **heart** has an identical metonymical sense which is that of **mind**, a situation which resulted in an acceptable literal rendition. As a result, whether read in English or in Arabic, similarity of denotation in senses comes forth naturally. But it remains doubtful whether the translators have recognised it as metonymy or not. This doubt is clearly explained in examining the following verse:

(ابراهيم: ٤) و ما أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِ -

Now, the doubt is that why all renditions have given **language (speech)**, in depending upon the relation of instrument for action, for لِسَان . Is that because they have known that it is

metonymy? If here, why not in the former and in the following?

لُعِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَلَى لِسَانِ دَاوُدَ وَعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ -
(المائدة: ٧٨)

Because of the same relation, لِسَان means **explicate words**; yet, all have used **tongue** as a counterpart. In this, the recognition comes to be a too-far held negative aspect, in that productions involved purely literal terms sticking to word-for-word renditions having as such weak counterpart versions, except for N. D. who has given, neglecting the reference to the **tongue** at all, by **David and Jesus**.

This goes extremely on the opposite end when we consider رَجَم in a verse like:

(الأنفال: ٧٥) و أولوا الأرحام بعضهم أولى ببعض -
رَجَم may be used on the basis of the relation symbol for the thing symbolised to refer to a blood-relation (الزمخشري, ١٩٢٣:s.v. ر ح م). In this verse, it seems obvious that metonymy presented itself firmly in the eyes of the translators, a situation giving a realisation to renditions referring specifically to **relations** indicated by رَجَم and resting upon the initiator, which is **blood**, in such relations.

In no specific regard to the instances surveyed so far, it has to be made clear that the metonymical relations that work in the Qur'an are only those from Bain's (1893) classification:

- i- sign or symbol for the thing symbolised
- ii- instrument for the action
- iii- container for contents

while the rest of his classification are out of effect. This is because of the fact that an anthropomorphic expression can



never be: an effect for a cause, a maker for his works, or a passion for the person. From Ullmann's (1962) taxonomy, metonyms contingent upon spatial relation work solely. Neither temporal nor part-for-whole relations exist since for the former there is no action associated with the human body, while the latter is typical for synecdoche as is going to be shown below.

6.2.3 Synecdoche

Considering the relations functioning in synecdoche reveals that part-for-whole relation is more domineering in the area of application than that of whole-for-part where rarity prevails. Any how, in regard to the former, let us have a look at the following verses:

- (النساء: ٩٢) فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مُؤْمِنَةٌ -
- (التوبة: ٦١) وَ يَقُولُونَ هُوَ أَدْنُ قُلِّ أَدْنُ خَيْرٍ لَكُمْ -
- (الغاشية: ٢) وَجْوهٌ يَمِينٌ خَاشِعَةٌ -

In these three verses, the translators are likely to have been hesitant whether to accept them as explicating the figure of synecdoche, or to reject the idea in whole. In this way, acceptance has produced, in association with رَقَبَةٌ which is here "a captive or a prisoner of war" , **a believer from slavery** (by G. M.) and **a slave** (by the others).

As a middle way, i.e. in the case of أَدْنُ , in the verse related above, which is "a person who believes whatever hears", more than one phase of translation exist: (P. M's) **a hearer** and (N. D's) **believes everything he hears** have made very clear the synecdochical figure. A further phase is presented in (G. M's and A. Y. A's) renditions which involve the use of the English expression **all ear**. But on the opposite

of these comes the rendition (of M. & M.) which is **ear** as such where failure is so glaring.

The other extreme is that of the literal rendition showed by the third example above, i.e. that of **وجه**. Here, **وَجْه**, being expressing "the general status or condition of a person, is the individual him- (her-)self". But unfortunately, the literal counterpart **face** (by all) have made weak productions.

The manifestation of the second type of relation, viz. whole-for-part, is represented by **أصبع** and **رجل** in the following two verses respectively:

- (البقرة: ١٩) **يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ** -
(المائدة: ٦) **وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلِكُمْ** -

In the former, because of the absence of keen observation in determining which means what, the result has been a logically awkward rendition: **أصبع** here specifically refers to the **finger-tip**, not to the whole **finger**. All the translators have given **finger**, but the question is: "How is it possible to thrust one's whole finger into his (her) ears?" Is it logical?

As for the latter, the case of **رجل**, the keen observation is present: the translators have been able to know that the verse talks of **الوضوء** (ablution), and consequently, all renditions appear to use **feet** not **legs**, which is the exact contextual intended message. Such instances show the importance of two criteria to be taken into account: the one is the context of situation, and the second common sense reasoning, i.e. logic.

7. Conclusions

In a retrospective course, it could be said that the following points are important to keep in mind in tackling as a task the translation of texts so illuminating in coverage of



miscellaneous aspects of life as the Qur'an in general, and the Anth Exs, which make the concern herein, in specific:

1- The use of these expressions, or any other expression, can be on many occasions of both literal and figurative senses.

2- Of these, the literal sense, mostly, is not problematic. However, the names of parts controversial in biological coverage pose some kind of problem.

3- As for polysemy, which was subcategorised under the literal, it is truly important to recognize that it relies on physical analogy, but of more importance is to discern and refer to the exact points of the similitude indicated. Otherwise, mere approximation to similitude will not suffice.

4- Regarding metaphor, which is a manifestation of the figurative use of language, one should say that a literal rendition of any instance of it is not worth considering. Further, a translator should be conscious of the existence of metaphor on one hand, and on the other of its driving power, i.e. the basis on which it is built. Upon discerning either of the two facets in a metaphor, the rendition hits part, if any, of the truth.

5- Metonymy, the second phase of the figurative level described here, displays a reliance on a basic relation. Only four relations appear to work in the Qur'an:

- i- symbol for the symbolised.
- ii- instrument for action.
- iii- container for contents.
- iv- spatial relations.



6- Further, in translating metonymy, a translator should be aware of what relation is holding, and thus the absence of such awareness yields unhappy translation.

7- As well, specification of the type of relation in metonymy is not the only decisive matter, that is, within the same type of relation, senses may vary, and awareness of this variation is substantial.

8- Under the rubric of synecdoche, the last of the surveyed figures, two prominent relations avail:

i- part-for-whole

ii- whole-for-part

9- To arrive at happy translation of synecdoche, the recognition of what relation holds is sufficient, in so far as other helpful aids, to be obtained from the knowledge of jurisprudence and common logic, are present.



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