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On the Translation of Attributes of Allah in the Holy Quran: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The translation of the Holy Quran is daunting and is primarily based on the scholar's interpretation. This study aims to investigate how the attributes of Allah are translated from Arabic into English. To this end, the study examines five translations of 12 verses that include attributes of Allah to find commonalities and/or differences in rendering the attributes of Allah. This investigation is discussed in light of a number of interpretations of the HQ, namely: *Mafaateeh Alyayb* by Al-Razi and *Jami' Albayan fi Ta'weel AlQuran* by Al-Tabari. The study finds that literal translation, the most frequent strategy, does not largely succeed in delivering the intended meaning of the attributes of Allah. Translators need to understand the purpose beyond the use of the attributes of Allah and 'body parts' from notable exegetic books. Second, they need to find an equivalent that delivers the same message in the target language. The study provides insights into how religious texts should be translated.

Keywords: Quran Translation; Features of Allah; Exegesis; Literal Translation; Interpretation Differences

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 8 October 2024 | Revised: 28 October 2024 | Accepted: 1 November 2024 | Published Online: 21 December 2024
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i1.7393>

CITATION

Al Salem, M.N., Altakhaineh, A.R., Alghazo, S., et al., 2024. On the Translation of Attributes of Allah in the Holy Quran: A Comparative Study. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(1): 232–243. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i1.7393>

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1. Introduction

The Holy Quran (HQ) “is believed to be the word of Allah as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel”^[1]. It is “the main source of the Islamic Shari’ah (legislation) which governs all aspects of Muslims’ lives” (Ibid.). Many verses include references to Allah (the Islamic name of God in other Abrahamic religions), using a number of lexical items. In addition, some verses include attributes of Allah as revealed by Him and in the way that befits Him.

The translation of the HQ has been the concern of many scholars and translators for many decades as they consider it a sensitive, daunting, and challenging task. The source language of the HQ is Arabic, and in fact, “translating sacred texts is a difficult task especially the Holy Quran since Arabic is a rhetorical language”^[2]. Translating the HQ proves to be a highly intricate task, primarily due to the absence of direct equivalents, challenges arising from cultural differences leading to inaccuracies, potential misconceptions of meanings, and the inherent difficulty in conveying the faithful interpretations of its sacred verses, among various other factors^[3]. However, differences exist in the way translators render a verse from Arabic into other languages, and thus care must be taken when translating HQ verses so as not to lose any of Allah’s intended meanings and messages.

The language of the HQ is a separate genre because of its masterful use of words, phrases, and rhythm^[4]. This observation has led some to believe that the HQ is untranslatable^[4], and others to state that it is the meaning of the HQ, rather than the text itself, that may be translated. In other words, it has been argued that translators need to render the intended message only, without considering style and discourse features. Studying the realm of rhetoric within the HQ presents a complex area of exploration. This is due to the intricacies of performative expressions, which demand particular focus from translators in order to effectively communicate their pragmatic significance and intended impact^[5]. This asserts that literal translation does not work for the Quranic language, while free translation depends on translators’ understanding^[6]. Abu Rumman and Al Salem believe that translation is challenging as “the translator encounters several difficulties^[2], such as understanding the source text (ST), the culture of the source language, the culture of the target language, the type of text and readership” Khalaf and Yusoff state that translating the HQ in particular should depend on

explications and commentary^[7]. It is worth mentioning that the language of the HQ is “Classical Arabic, which is a form of Arabic used in Arabia at the time”^[1].

Some scholars believe that the HQ is in practice untranslatable. Consequently, “the existing translations of the Holy Quran may be considered possible interpretations because such rendering may result in a change in the original text’s meaning”^[1]. Those who believe that the HQ is untranslatable rely on what Allah says in Surat Yousef (Josef), Verse 2 (henceforth, verses in Arabic are followed by their translation, based on Sahih International Translation in English by Emily Assami^[8] (p. 35):

إنا أنزلناه قرآناً عربياً لعلكم تعقلون

Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’an that you might understand.

Those who believe that the meaning of the Quran is translatable rely on what Allah says in Surat Saba? (Saba), Verse 28:

وما أرسلناك إلا كافة للناس بشيراً ونذيراً ولكن أكثر الناس لا يعلمون

And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind as a bringer of good tidings and a warner. But most of the people do not know.

The controversy around untranslatability stems from verses affirming the Quran’s intended Arabic audience (e.g., Surat Yusuf 12:2), suggesting that any attempt at translation inherently alters meaning^[1]. Al-Adwan and Al-Abbas contend that interpretative translations could effectively serve a universal audience without compromising sacred intent^[3].

Linking the present study to broader translation theory, we can say that hermeneutic approaches focus on the interpretive act of translation. This supports the stand against literal translation and justifies an interpretive approach. For instance, hermeneutic theory would support contextualizing “Allah’s eyes” and other ‘body parts’ in a way that captures its metaphorical meaning within a theological framework.

The Semiotic Theory examines the signs and symbols within language. For instance, the terms “hand” or “face” carry symbolic significance that transcends literal meaning and informs Islamic theology. A semiotic approach justifies translating these terms with equivalents that preserve their symbolic meaning in the TL.

Nida’s dynamic equivalence is about producing an ef-

fect that is as close as possible to the source text's effect. In translating the Quran, achieving dynamic equivalence could mean using culturally resonant terms that align with the meaning rather than mirroring the Arabic wording exactly. For example, "Allah's hearing" or "Allah's throne" might be rendered in a way that captures the intended theological resonance.

Reader-response theory focuses on the reader's reception and interpretation of a text and highlights how translations shape audience perceptions. Engaging with this theory would underscore the importance of translating in a way that evokes a similar sense of reverence in non-Arabic-speaking Muslims. For example, phrases like "Allah is the Hearing, the Seeing" could be translated in a way that emphasizes their theological implications, helping readers perceive these attributes as metaphysical qualities beyond human limitations.

Additionally, reader-response theory suggests making sacred texts engaging and accessible without compromising their reverence. For divine attributes, footnotes or supplementary explanations could help readers grasp theological subtleties, enhancing their appreciation and understanding. A translation that includes these elements might be more effective in allowing the audience to connect with the Quran's spiritual messages while staying true to the text's sanctity.

Literal translation, being the most common method used in the corpus, does not deliver the embedded meanings of many verses. Although translators try to mirror the style in which the Quranic verses were written, literal translation clouds the meaning^[9]. In addition, scholars' interpretations of the verses are a potential source for translators to draw on when translating the HQ into other languages. This study tackles this issue of how translators render the HQ into English and whether or not they draw on the scholars' interpretations.

In particular, the study investigates the translation of verses that include attributes of Allah, depending particularly on Ali^[10], Ünal^[11], Arberry^[12], Shakir and Al-Hilali and Khan as these translations are the most popular and reliable in the Islamic world^[13, 14], particularly among non-Arabic speakers. It also compares and contrasts the corpus with famous interpretations such as that of Al-Tabari, who wrote his interpretation depending on trustworthy scholars of profound knowledge in the field, like Ibn Abbas, *Turjumaan AlQuran*, i.e., the interpreter of the Quran and others who heard the interpretation from the Prophet Mohammad directly or indirectly by listening to people who heard the interpretation of the Prophet's companions. As such, the study seeks to answer the two questions below:

1. Does literal translation, being the most common strategy, succeed in translating verses that include attributes of Allah to English?
2. How can this type of verses be best translated?

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted to examine the verses that involve the attributes of Allah. However, most of these studies have not yielded appropriate explanations. This resulted in mistranslation and misinterpretation of verses into other languages, particularly English. Many of Allah's attributes may cause confusion when explicating and translating them into other languages. For an interpretation of these verses to be appropriate, it should be in compliance with the Arabic language. Muslim scholars mainly agree on 12 attributes of Allah and agree that these attributes should be compatible with what befits Him, taking into account the meaning of Verse 11 in Surat Al Shuura (the poets) and Verse 65 in Surat Maryam (Mary):

فَاطِرُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا يَذُرُّكُمْ فِيهِ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

[He is] Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you from yourselves, mates, and among the cattle, mates; He multiplies you thereby. There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فَاعْبُدْهُ وَاصْطَبِرْ لِعِبَادَتِهِ هَلْ تَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا

Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them - so worship Him and have patience for His worship. Do you know of any similarity to Him?

These verses have clear meanings and deny the existence of physical attributes of Allah. In the first verse, the denial of having attributes that are similar to the humans precedes the part where Allah is attributed with Sight and Hearing. These attributes are different from humans' attributes and are not similar to any creature in any way. All the attributes of Allah are eternal and everlasting. For example, the Hearing of Allah is eternal. He hears all things, without an ear and without means. His Hearing is not subject

to change; it does not become weaker or stronger, as change is non-befitting to Allah.

Throughout the Islamic history, some Muslims thought of the 'image' of Allah and body parts such as hands, eyes, and legs. They claimed that Allah sits on the throne, lives in heavens, or ascends up to the sky and descends down to the earth relaying on the meaning of the Hadith (saying of the Prophet Mohammad) as narrated by Al-Bukhari:

يُنزَلُ رَبُّنَا تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا حِينَ يَبْقَى ثُلُثُ اللَّيْلِ الْأَخْرَى يَقُولُ: مَنْ يَدْعُونِي فَأَسْتَجِيبَ لَهُ مَنْ يَسْأَلُنِي فَأُعْطِيَهُ مَنْ يَسْتَعْفِرُنِي فَأَغْفِرَ لَهُ

In their belief, they rely on the assumption that the attributes of Allah should be understood as they are mentioned in the HQ or Hadith. However, many other scholars who believe otherwise wrote books to teach Muslims that this line of reasoning is not right. In more recent times, many Muslim scholars denied the claim that Allah has physical features or is in a particular place. They agree that Allah exists but does not reside in a certain place; the throne was created to show His power not to settle on; Allah is not a body and cannot be contained in the six directions, i.e., He is neither above nor down and He does not live in heaven as He Himself created heaven. They also agree that Allah existed before creating the world; His existence has no beginning, nor an end. His life is not like our life, without soul or nerve, eternal.

A few studies have examined the translation of the attributes of Allah. For example, Zaki adopted a relevance-theoretic approach to linguistically examine the translation strategies that translators use when rendering verses that include attributes of Allah into English^[15]. Particularly, her study looked at the two physical attributes of *hand* and *face*. The findings showed that literal translation was followed in the majority of the translations examined in the study and that only few translations included more elaboration. This lack of elaboration is attributed to the fact that the HQ is a religious text whose language is not easily adjusted, and that any adjustment should be based on the exegeses of the HQ.

In a similar vein, Shetab and Suzani explored strategies of translation of verses that include Allah's attributes of acts and whether or not translators use similar strategies in doing so^[16]. The researchers used a revised version of Chesterman's taxonomy as found in Branco to examine six

different translations of the Holy Quran into English (those by Asad, Pickthall, Saheeh, Arberry, Hilali & Khan, and Mubarakpuri)^[17]. The findings revealed that each translator used different strategies in translating the selected verses. Of the strategies used in the study are transposition, synonymy, paraphrase, change, and expansion.

Mohamed studied how translators render five attributes of Allah from Arabic into English^[18]. He examined six translations of the HQ with the aim of assigning their appropriateness when compared to an adapted model that combines the Islamic approach and Newmark's model of translation. The findings showed that using the adapted model when translating attributes of Allah renders the meaning appropriately. However, the translations varied in their rendition of the attributes of Allah. Some translate these attributes literally, and others add elaboration in footnotes or capitalization of the word indicting the attribute.

Translating Quranic attributes is recognized due to their theological implications and the lack of equivalent terms in English. Abu Rumman and Al Salem argue Quranic language resists translation due to its intricate rhetorical style and culturally specific references^[2]. They also emphasize that the challenge lies in conveying accurate meanings within the context of sacred language. Moaddab^[6], contend that literal translation often fails to deliver the intended meanings. Consequently, Quranic translations should rely on interpretation, supporting the idea that the message, rather than its exact form, is what should be translated.

Studies on translating attributes, like those of Allah's "hand" and "face," reflect varied translation strategies, often leaning toward literal translation, which risks anthropo-

morphizing the divine. Zaki argues that this method overlooks cultural adjustments necessary to maintain theological integrity^[15]. In contrast, Shetab and Suzani observe that strategies like transposition and paraphrasing better address these nuances^[16], promoting interpretations aligned with the intended meaning. Mohamed further advocates an Islamic-informed model^[18, 19], combining theological insight with Western translation techniques, as a means of preserving divine attributes' intended meanings without veering into anthropomorphic misinterpretation. While literal translation may compromise meaning, more interpretive approaches demand a comprehensive understanding of Islamic exegesis and Quranic hermeneutics to be effective.

Obviously, not enough studies have examined the translation of Allah's attributes in the HQ. More specifically, no study has investigated the common grounds of the translations of this feature and the strategies used to do so. So, this study examines and compares five translations of 12 verses that include 12 attributes of Allah. It also gives insights of how religious texts, specifically the HQ, may be translated.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach to analyse a corpus of 12 verses that have attributes of Allah. Each verse is accompanied with the translations of Ali^[10], Ünal^[11], Arberry^[12], Shakir^[13], and Al-Hilali and Khan^[14]. Their translations are compared to existing interpretations of the Holy Quran such as that of Al-Tabari and Al-Razi, among others. This is followed by a critique with regard to the translations given. For each verse the authors listed the interpretations

from many aspects along with the Muslim scholars' and linguists' perspectives. A linguistic analysis and descriptions attributed to Allah through translation is also provided. This analysis shows whether these translations followed a scientific approach in rendering these verses, or produced a literal translation. Moreover, the figurative use of language is taken into account so as to signify the accuracy of the interpretation; otherwise, a discrepancy will be shown as a result of the distortion in the meaning as mistranslating the attributes of Allah may lead to attributing body parts and other features to Allah.

4. Analysis and Discussion

In the Islamic tradition, the study of *ta'weel* refers to the interpretation of the Quran in the light of historical events. It examines the meanings of the HQ text by relating it to historical events and/or whatever was mentioned about it by trusted people who had heard the meaning from the Prophet Mohammad himself in the 3 decades following *Hijra* (travelling from Mecca to Madina). The word *ta'weel* is defined in the *Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* as "The allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an or the quest for its hidden, inner meanings. It was a synonym of tafsir (exegesis) in its earliest use but came to mean a process of getting to the most fundamental understandings of the HQ"^[20] (p. 203). The interpretation of the HQ is not easy, and a few verses may not be interpreted or translated without having prior knowledge of the inner meaning, particularly because these verses have attributes of Allah. For example, verse 35 in Surat Al Nour (the light) reads:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things.

This verse is translated as "Allah is the Light of heavens and earth" in^[10] (p. 207). This is far from Al-Tabari's interpretation, who interprets it as: "Allah is the One who guides the residents in heaven of angels and the residents of earth to Islam." Moreover, Ali has elaborated on and explained the physical light in four pages. For instance, he states that "In the physical world, Light itself is visible and makes other things visible. It lies behind all colours, and is

apprehended by colour”^[10] (p. 921). This description does not reflect the embedded meaning rejected by most Muslim scholars. Abu-Hanifa, for example, wrote five books to confirm that Allah is not a body, does not have a shape or image, and is not contained by place. Al-Hanafi asserts that “Whoever attributes to Allah a human characteristic commits blasphemy” (n.d.: 13).

Following is a comparison of the five selected translations to test their accuracy in rendering the attributes of Allah into English.

The first attribute is *Istiwa*’ and it appears in Surat Taha (Taha) verse 5:

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established.

- (1) Ali: (God) the Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority).

- (2) Arberry: The All-compassionate sat Himself upon the throne, to Him he belongs.
- (3) Ünal: The All-Merciful has established Himself on the Throne. Ünal added as a footnote: it emphasizes God’s absolute dominion and Oneness as the Lord of creation.
- (4) Shakir: (Allāh) the Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority).
- (5) Khan: The Most Beneficent (Allah) Istawa (rose over) the (Mighty) throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty.)

Al-Tabari writes that the most convenient opinion of scholars about *Istiwa*’ is that which is used in the Arabic language: the subjugation of the throne to His creator, [as the throne is the greatest creature^[20] (p. 457). Ali bin Abi Taleb, a cousin and companion of the Prophet Mohammad, says: “Allah created the throne to show His power and did not consider it as a place for Him” (Al-Baqdadi, n.d., p. 333). Allah is not a body to sit on a throne, nor he gets tired and needs to rest. Allah says about Himself in Surat Qaf (Qaf) verse 38.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَمَا مَسَّنَا مِنْ لُغُوبٍ

And We did certainly create the heavens and earth and what is between them in six days, and there touched Us no weariness.

The five translators above translate *Istiwa*’ as ‘establishment’, ‘sitting’, and ‘rising over’. These terms embody the concept that Allah may be concrete, have a shape, and be contained by place. Such translations, in fact, contradict Muslims’ typical idea about *Istiwa*’, which is that people cannot and should not imagine the way of *Istiwa*’ as it is exclusive to Allah.

The second attribute is *maji*’ (coming) of Allah and it appears in Surat Alfajr (verse 22):

وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا

And your Lord has come and the angels, rank upon rank.

- (1) Ali: And thy Lord cameth, And His angels, rank upon rank.
- (2) Arberry: and thy Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank.
- (3) Ünal: And your Lord comes (unveils His Power and Majesty), and the angels in row upon row.

- (4) Shakir: And your Lord comes and His angels, rank upon rank.
- (5) Khan: And your lord comes with the angels in row.

Al-qurtubi says that it has been proved that movement is impossible for Allah^[21] (p. 66), as if something moves then it is a body, and it is impossible for the body to be eternal. One interpretation is that the genitive is absent in the sentence. [As we need compensation for the meaning] many facets of meanings are possible to stand for the genitive; one of them is that *maji*’ refers to the evidence of Allah’s power to the order of Allah for judgment and rewarding. A second opinion states that *maji*’ is the subjugation over people.

The translators above use ‘come’ for *maji*’. As long as ‘coming’ implies the movement from one place to another, it does not befit Allah. His *maji*’ needs to be translated according to its context, not as literally as done above. It is unacceptable to imagine Allah as a moving body.

The third attribute is *saq* (leg) and it appears in Surat Al Qalam (the pen) Verse 42:

يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ

The Day the shin will be uncovered, and they are invited to prostration, but the disbelievers will not be able.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>(1) Ali: The Day that the shin shall be laid bare, and they shall be summoned to bow in adoration, but they shall not be able.</p> <p>(2) Arberry: Upon the day when the leg shall be bared, and they shall be summoned to bow themselves, but they cannot.</p> <p>(3) Ünal: On the Day when the truth will manifest, and they are in trouble.</p> <p>(4) Shakir: On the day when there shall be a severe affliction, and they shall be called upon to make obeisance, but they shall not be able.</p> <p>(5) Khan and Al-Hilali: *(Remember) the Day when the Shin shall be laid bare (i.e., the Day of Resurrection)</p> | <p>and they shall be called to prostrate (to Allah), but they (hypocrites) shall not be able to do so.</p> <p>Al-Tabari says that a group of the Prophet's companions and their followers who have knowledge in exegesis interpreted it as: "to unveil a severity" (XL: 197).</p> <p>Literal interpretations done by Ali, Arberry, and Khan and Al-Hilali fail to deliver the meaning of trouble and severity. Actually, loyalty to the Source Text is retained at the expense of meaning. Allah is not a body and does not need a leg. Ünal and Shakir interpretation matches Al-Tabari's.</p> <p>The fourth attribute is <i>hidayah</i> (guidance) and it appears in Surat Al Nour (the light) Verse 35:</p> |
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اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star.

Al-Tabari: "the one Who guides, who is in the heavens and earth, through this they are guided to the truthfulness, and they are protected from depravity"^[20] (p. 295).

- (1) Ali: Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
- (2) Arberry: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
- (3) Ünal: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
- (4) Shakir: Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: Allah is the Light of the heavens

and the earth.

One of the Names of Allah is An-Nour (Light); it is similar in meaning to Al-Hadi (the Guide). It means that Allah is the one who guides people to the truthfulness of Islam. As it is obvious, all translations fail to convey this meaning and insist that Allah is a real 'light'.

The fifth attribute is *yad* (hand) and it appears in Surat Al Fath (the conquering) Verse 10:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands.

Al-Tabari presents two interpretations: the first refers to the people who stood for Baiá [pledge] and put hands over hands with the Prophet Mohammad; through their vow to the Prophet, they vowed to Allah. The second interpretation refers to the superiority of Allah's power over their power and His ability to protect the Prophet, as they pledged to support him to conquer the enemy^[20] (p. 255).

- (1) Ali: The Hand of Allah is over their hands.
- (2) Arberry: God's hand is over their hands.
- (3) Ünal: God's "Hand" is over their hands. He added as a footnote: The Messenger's hand being over the hand which he grasps in allegiance represents God's Hand. (For God's 'hand' or any other such a term is metaphorical.) The other meaning is that God helps those who swear allegiance to the Messenger. So, here

‘hand’ signifies Power.

- (4) Shakir: the hand of Allah is above their hands.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: The Hand of Allah is over their hands.

The translators above missed the main part through literally translating this verse without referring to the main story; the word (hand) was translated in isolation of its context, so the translations were mainly misinterpreted. Only Ünal gave another possible meaning in translation.

The sixth attribute is *ayn* (eye) and it appears in Surat Al Qamar (the moon) Verse 14:

تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءَ لِمَنْ كَانَ كُفِرَ

Sailing under Our observation as reward for he who had been denied.

Al-Razi states that it refers to the preservation [of

Noah’s ark] (n. d., XXIX: 40).

- (1) Ali: She floats under our eyes (and care).
- (2) Arberry: running before Our eyes.
- (3) Ünal: Running (through the water) under Our Eyes.
- (4) Shakir: Sailing, before Our eyes.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: Floating under Our Eyes.

The translators above use the literal method, and this leads to misunderstanding. ‘Under the eye of somebody’ means ‘being watched carefully by him/her’; consequently, three translations seem acceptable. ‘Before someone’s eyes’, however, means ‘in his/her physical presence’; this rendition seems unacceptable.

The seventh attributes are *sami’* (hearing) and *basar* (seeing) taken together, and they appear in Surat AlShuura’ (the poets) Verse 11:

فَاطِرُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا يَذُرُّكُمْ فِيهِ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

[He is] Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you from yourselves, mates, and among the cattle, mates; He multiplies you thereby. There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

Al-Tabari says that He [Allah] describes Himself as who hears what His creatures uttered of speech, the One who sees the deeds of them, nothing can be hidden from Him; His knowledge includes everything whether being small or big^[20] (p. 478).

- (1) Ali: There is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things).
- (2) Arberry: Like Him there is naught; He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.
- (3) Ünal: There is nothing whatever like Him. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing. Adding as a footnote: This short statement emphasizes that God is not of the same kind as those who have been created and, therefore, He is beyond all human concepts. He has no mates, and nothing is like Him. His Attributes – His Hearing, See-

ing, Knowledge, Will, Power, Creating, and so on – are also beyond anything we can conceive.

- (4) Shakir: Nothing like a likeness of Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.

Allah sees us without eyes, hears us without ears, His attributes are eternal, everlasting, and unchangeable. An elaboration on this verse is given by Ünal, emphasizing that Allah is not like any of His creatures. This verse confirms the denial of physical features of Allah the Almighty, particularly because it starts with *ليسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ* (there is nothing like unto Him).

The eighth attribute is *kursi* (chair) and it appears in Surat Al Baqarah (the cow) Verse 255:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great.

Al-Tabari says that Ibn Abbas mentioned that it [the throne] refers to the knowledge of Allah; others states that Kursi is Al-arsh [throne of God] itself.

- (1) Ali: His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth.
- (2) Arberry: His Throne comprises the heavens and earth.
- (3) Ünal: His Seat (of dominion) embraces the heavens and the earth.
- (4) Shakir: His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth.

It is evident that the ‘Kursi’ has many mental concepts; some interpreters interpret it as Al-arsh (throne of God). Others believe that it refers to the knowledge of Allah that includes everything in the earth and heavens. Whether the ‘throne’ is interpreted as a physical chair or the position (of being a king) as done by Ali, Arberry, and Ünal, the readers may grasp a certain physical image. Khan and Al-Hilali use ‘kursi’, an Arabic word that means a ‘physical chair’ but does not exist English. Shakir uses ‘knowledge’ and this agrees with views of recent interpreters like Al-Tabari.

The ninth attribute is Allah’s *wajh* (face) and it appears in Surat Al Qasas (the narration) Verse 88:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

Everything will be destroyed except His Face.

Al-Tabari mentioned that it means but He. Ibn Hajar in his explanation of Sahih Al-Bukhari says that Sofian Al-Thawry (a scholar of Hadith) believes that it means: “except what is done of good deeds for Allah”^[22] (p. 505).

- (1) Ali: Everything (that exists) will perish except His own Face.

- (2) Arberry: All things perish, except His Face. It is mentioned at Sahih A-Bukhari that it means: His dominion, i.e., Mulk (XIV: 473).
- (3) Ünal: Everything is perishable (and so perishing) except His “Face” (His eternal Self).
- (4) Shakir: Everything is perishable but He.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: Everything will perish save His Face.

This verse confirms that Allah is eternal and everlasting. Shakir and Ünal’s translations agree with Al-Tabari’s interpretation. All of them suggest that Allah does not have a physical face, and what is meant by ‘wajh’ is Allah himself. Translating ‘wajh’ literally as ‘face’ as done by Ali, Arberry, and Khan and Al-Hilali means depicting a specific image in the reader’s mind, which does not befit Allah, the Almighty.

The tenth attribute is again *wajih* ‘face’ and it appears in Surat AlBaqarah (verse 115).

فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَتَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ

- (1) Ali: Whithersoever ye turn, there is the presence of Allah.
- (2) Arberry: whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God.
- (3) Ünal: They attempt to exploit the issue of qiblah... whatever direction you turn, there is the “Face” of God.
- (4) Shakir: whither you turn, thither is Allah’s purpose.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: So, wherever you turn yourselves or your faces there is the Face of Allah.

This attribute was discussed in example nine above, but ‘wajh’ here has another function. Al-Razi says that “it [face of God] refers to the Qibla, i.e., the direction of the prayer. This happened when the direction of Qibla has changed from Jerusalem to Makkah. Allah says that the east and west are created by Him. So, wherever the Qibla is, you should pray. The Qibla is not a direction by itself, but Allah made it Qibla and direction for prayer”.^[23] (p. 20).

Ünal, Arberry, and Khan and Al-Hilali were literal and the meaning was lost. Ali, in particular, replaced ‘the face of God’ with ‘the presence of God’. Still, this endeavour does not denote the Qibla. Shakir uses ‘Allah’s purpose’, but his attempt fails to convey the meaning of the Qibla.

The eleventh attribute is *nafs* ‘self’ and it appears in Surat Taha (verse 41).

وَاصْطَلَّعْتُكَ لِنَفْسِي

- (1) Ali: “And I have prepared thee for Myself (for service)”
- (2) Arberry: I have chosen thee for My service.
- (3) Ünal: “And I have attached you to Myself (and so trained you to My service).
- (4) Shakir: And I have chosen you for Myself.
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: “And I have Istana’tuka, for Myself.

Al-Tabari says that Allah says: “I have blessed you (Moses) with many things as I have chosen you (over the people) for my message, to deliver it to people and obey Me in avoiding prohibitions and fulfilling the duties.”^[20] (p. 72).

Al-Tamimi states that Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal argues that “the Self of Allah is not like the self of people that is moving, that occupies the body, but it is the attribute of Allah that is different from the created selves and varies from the deaths”^[24] (p. 45).

Translators use ‘Self’ to refer to Allah, but further explanation is needed as ‘self of Allah’ does not reflect the type of His character. Arberry uses ‘my service’ instead. Al-Tabari, on the other hand, uses ‘my message’, i.e., Allah’s message to people. None of the translators adopts Al-Tabari’s interpretation.

The twelfth attribute is *kalam* (speech) and it appears in Surat Al Nisa’ (the women) Verse 164:

وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا

- (1) Ali: And to Moses Allah spoke direct.
- (2) Arberry: and unto Moses God spoke directly.
- (3) Ünal: “and God spoke to Moses in a particular way; God puts the meaning in the Prophet’s heart in a way that the Prophet knows with certainty that it is from God. God speaks to the Prophet without mediation, but without being seen and from behind a veil, as God spoke to Moses from a tree. God sends an angel who communicates God’s message to the Prophet. He always sent Gabriel to communicate His messages contained in His Books.
- (4) Shakir: And to Musa, Allah addressed His Word, speaking (to him).
- (5) Khan and Al-Hilali: And to Musa (Moses) Allah spoke directly.

Al-Razi states that “if the sequent letters and sounds

are speech of Allah, this means that these utterances denote the eternal attribute of Allah, whereby it was called speech figuratively”^[23] (p. 39). Al-Razi believes the “speech of God” can be letters and sounds that are God-specific.

The translators above, except for Ünal, use ‘speak directly’ to depict the style through which God “spoke” to Moses. These translations imply a direct conversation between two entities and depict a certain image in the reader’s mind. Ünal presents three possibilities for God’s “speech”: putting it in Moses’ heart, from behind a veil, and through Gabriel. Still, the “speech” of God cannot be a sound that emerges from a tree.

For non-Arabic-speaking Muslims, translation is often the primary means of understanding the Quran. The way translators handle divine attributes affects how these Muslims conceptualize key theological concepts. For instance, translating “Allah’s hand” literally can create an anthropomorphic image, which may lead to a clash with Islamic teachings about Allah’s transcendence. By clarifying and accurately conveying such concepts, translations can foster a deeper, more accurate understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices.

Translation shapes theological understanding, and inaccurate translations may, therefore, introduce distortions in the TT. A translation that emphasizes interpretive clarity—especially regarding divine attributes—can preserve the intended reverence and theological nuance. This is essential for maintaining theological integrity across diverse cultural contexts, helping non-Arabic speaking Muslims engage with the Quran in ways that align with traditional Islamic exegesis.

Translation also helps bridge cultural gaps, supporting Muslims in diverse regions as they reconcile Islamic teachings with local languages. A thoughtfully rendered translation promotes unity and helps strengthen Muslim identity by presenting divine attributes in ways that are linguistically accessible without compromising sacred meanings. Quran translations could be unified within the global Muslim community^[25, 26].

5. Conclusions

Allah has a number of attributes that Muslims should believe in. Allah’s existence (Wujud) is different from ours;

His existence is without a beginning and without an end. His existence cannot be contained in a place. Allah's Eternity (Azaliyyah) means that Allah's existence is not limited by time, and that He did not exist after being non-existent. Everlastingness (al-Baqa'): means Allah' existence lasts for ever and has no end.

Non-neediness of others (Qa'em be-nafseh) implies that Allah does not need anyone or anything, but all need Him. Allah has power over the creation, and His ability is unlimited, has no beginning and never ends. Allah's life is not like ours. We have a soul that occupies the body by the Will of Allah. He was described as *Hayy and Qaiuom*, i.e., His life is without a beginning or an end.

Allah's Knowledge (*Elm*) means that He knows everything; His knowledge is unlimited; He knows what is hidden in one's soul and mind. Allah hears without ears; He hears all the creation at the same time clearly; His hearing is eternal, does not weaken over time. Allah sees everything - hidden or evident. Allah also spoke to Moses with his eternal speech, which is not a sound, not like our speech as our speech is created. Allah is by no means like His creation.

The translations of the HQ verses covered in the study indicate a discrepancy in the methodologies followed in translating the chosen corpus. Comparing between five interpretations that are provided by different scholars asserts that literal translation does not work well in translating Quranic verses and does not deliver the intended message successfully. This goes in line with Moaddab that literal translation cannot be used to translate the HQ and that free translation depends majorly on the translators' understanding^[6], where mistranslation leads to misunderstanding, and it is crucial that this does not happen as Quranic verses shall be understood clearly and perfectly because they are the direct words of Allah.

It is crucial for translators to thoroughly understand the interpretation and function of verses involving attributes and 'body parts' of Allah in their source language in the first place and then find an equivalent in the target language that may deliver the same message and have the same influence as that embedded in Arabic. The findings can contribute to the development of best practices for translating religious texts. Insights gained from this investigation can offer guidance on how to convey theological concepts in a linguistically accurate and culturally sensitive manner.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.N.A.S. and S.A.; methodology, M.N.A.S.; software, A.R.A.; validation, M.R., A.R.A. and S.A.; formal analysis, M.N.A.S.; investigation, S.A.; resources, M.R.; data curation, A.R.A.; writing—original draft preparation, M.N.A.S.; writing—review and editing, S.A.; visualization, S.A.; supervision, A.R.A.; project administration, M.R.; funding acquisition, No funding aquired. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

We agree to share research data.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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