

THE NONVERBAL MEANING OF THE “EYE” IN QURAN AND ITS TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

الدلالة غير اللفظية للعين في القرآن الكريم وترجمتها إلى الإنجليزية

Ayoub BOUKHATEM *

boukhatem.ayoub@mail.univ-medea.dz
University of Yahia Fares- Médéa, Algeria

Received : 13/08/2020 Accepted : 14/02/2021 Published: 01/03/2021

Abstract:

This paper deals with the translation of the nonverbal language into English. It, specifically, tackles the meanings generated by the “eye” related nonverbal language in Quran. Two translations have been chosen for the purpose of this article. The endeavor is to indicate the verses containing an eye-related nonverbal language; detect the semantics of the expression of the eye contained in the verse, then compare the meaning of the Arabic expressions to the two English translations. The result shows if the translators grasp the meaning of the verse and if they preserve the nonverbal language or chose to explicate it through verbal language.

Keywords: Nonverbal language; Body Language; Quran; Translation; Eye.

ملخص: موضوع هذه الدراسة هو اللغة غير اللفظية في القرآن الكريم وترجمتها إلى الإنجليزية. وعلى وجه الخصوص ترجمة تلك الدلالات التي تولدها لغة الجسد، وبالتحديد العبارات المتعلقة بالعين. تم تحديد ترجمتين لغرض الدراسة التي تهدف أساسا إلى عرض الآيات التي تحتوي الدلالات غير اللفظية للعين ثم مقارنتها مع التريجتين إلى اللغة الانجليزية وتحليل ترجمتها. تظهر لنا نتائج الدراسة إذا ما حرص المترجمون على ترجمة اللغة غير اللفظية بمقابلها غير اللفظي أم أنهم انتهجوا التسهيل والتبسيط باعتماد اللغة اللفظية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة غير اللفظية; لغة الجسد; القرآن; الترجمة; العين.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings communicate in different ways and forms. The most common is the use of the verbal language, i.e. communicating orally or graphically through words carrying a direct meaning that could be checked through dictionaries and understood through a pure linguistic knowledge. However, there is another form of language that transcends the verbal realm, namely the nonverbal language. The latter includes all communicative elements beyond the letter, such as the meaning generated by time, space, forms, colors, clothes, etc. One of the most communicative of these forms is body language. It includes the meaning of the different gestures, postures, facial expressions and body parts, including the eye.

In this paper, the researcher tracks the nonverbal language engendered by eye-related expressions used in Quran, and explores the meaning intended by those expressions from the Arabic cultural point of view, making use of exegeses and other Arabic resources. Two translations into English are used to compare and analyze the English versions with the Arabic sacred text. The first

* Corresponding Author

The nonverbal meaning of the “Eye” in Quran and its Translation into English

Ayoub Boukhatem

translation chosen is made by “Saheeh International”, and the second translation selected is made by “Muhammad Taqi-Ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan”.

The purpose is to check if the translators could discern the meaning of the nonverbal language, and if they could translate it aptly into English. The result will show if translators render the nonverbal language with a nonverbal language or if they translate it to a verbal language, making it much more direct.

2. Body Language and Its Importance in Arabic

Body language is studied through different categories, mainly: kinesics, haptics and proxemics (Korte, 1997). They encompass the position, shape and movement of the body and its parts as well as the distance and encounter it has with another's.

In the Arabic language, many instances express the importance of body language and even its prevalence over the verbal one. The Arabs have known body language and the nonverbal language in general through what they have called *Firassa*. It meant the guessing and prediction of one's personality and character, and the coming to other conclusions through the reading of the nonverbal elements. It includes body elements such as the size, shape and orientation of the different body parts as well as the appearing signs of the person or the object of reading.

The eye has been one of the most important body language elements known and used by the Arabs. Many poets spoke of its meaning, and for many, the eye language prevailed over the verbal expressions. To mention some of those instances where the eye language has been put forth, here are some verses exemplifying it:

العَيْنُ تُبْدِي الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِ صَاحِبِهَا
فَالْعَيْنُ تَنْطِقُ وَالْأَفْوَاهُ صَامِتَةٌ
مِنَ الشَّنَاءَةِ أَوْ حُبِّ إِذَا كَانَا
حَتَّى تَرَى مِنْ صَمِيمِ الْقَلْبِ تَبْيَانَا 1

which means:

The eye reveals what in the heart is
Whether with hatred or love it's filled
The eye speaks while the mouths hush
Until the heart makes it clear

Another poet said:

عَيْنَاكَ قَدْ دَلَّتَا عَيْنِي مِنْكَ عَلَى
تَظَلُّ فِي نَفْسِكَ الْبَغْضَاءُ كَامِنَةٌ
أَشْيَاءَ لَوْلَاهَا مَا كُنْتُ أُدْرِهَا
وَالْقَلْبُ يَغْمُرُهَا وَالْعَيْنُ تَبْدِيهَا
إِنْ كَانَ مِنْ حِزْبِهَا أَوْ مِنْ أَعَادِيهَا 2
وَالْعَيْنُ تَعْلَمُ مِنْ عَيْنِي مُحَدِّثَهَا

Which means:

Your eyes made mine know things in you
I ignored without them leading me through
Hatred would remain in you unspoken
The heart conceals yet the eye reads the token
Every eye knows through the speaker's eyes
friend or foe the truth it finds

The expressiveness of the eye was also captured in the Arabic proverbs; they say in one of them “رَبِّ طَرَفٍ أَفْصَحُ مِنْ لِسَانٍ”³ which means: “the Eye might be much more expressive than the tongue”. That is mainly because the eye movements and aspects are not easily faked like it is the

case with twisting the words to mean other than what is in the heart.

This importance of body language, mainly the eye is also found in Quran, since it came in the language of the Arabs. In the following paragraphs, some examples of expressions holding meaning through the eye are stated and their meaning discussed then compared with the translations into English.

3. The Meaning of The Eye in Quran and Its Translation

The eye and vision have been mentioned extensively in Quran. Various meanings can be expressed through the eyes: distress, compassion, fear, grief and other emotional states are accessible through them. Here are some examples with a comparison and analysis to their corresponding translations into English.

3.1 The White Eyes

In Surat Yusuf the eye is mentioned when describing the state of Jakob when he lost his son:

﴿وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَمَّهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ﴾ [يوسف:84]

The expression that makes use of an eye-related meaning in the verse is translated literally as “his eyes turned white”. That meant for the Arabs that he lost sight rather than a simple change in the color of the eye.

In the translation of Saheeh International the explicit meaning was not expressed but rather a literal translation was chosen saying that “his eyes became white” (International, 1997, p. 321). Many other translations⁴ kept the same literal rendering without explicating its meaning. However, Muhammad Taqi-Ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan translated the meaning of the expression as “he lost his sight” (Khan & Al-Hilali, 1997, p. 315), which is the verbal translation of the nonverbal expression.

The expression « white eyes » does not mean a sight loss or being destitute of vision for an English native, mainly to someone from North America. It is even used by American aboriginals to designate the Europeans who came to America. So, this means that translating the nonverbal expression as it is literally makes it confusing, unintelligible, if not completely erroneous as a translation.

3.2 The Stretched Eyes

Another different expression using the eyes is found in verse 88 of Surat Alhijr, saying:

﴿لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَاخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ [الحجر:88]

In this verse, the literal expression of ‘stretching the eyes’ is mentioned. The meaning is to look for what the others have and yearn for their possessions.

This expression was translated by Saheeh International to “Do not extend your eyes” (International, 1997, p. 351), keeping the literal expression rather than clarifying it. A strategy that was different from the one used by Al-Hilali and Khan. The latter have explicated the expression and rendered the meaning, rather than the expression, by translating it to “Look not with your eyes ambitiously” (Khan & Al-Hilali, 1997, p. 345). The use of the adverb ‘ambitiously’ made it more accessible to the English reader.

It is interesting to mention that both translations kept the use of the eye, yet one chose to preserve the nonverbal language used in Arabic and the other chose to use a rather verbal translation of it.

3.3 The Striking Eyes

The eyes or rather the eyesight is subject to an interesting nonverbal language in Surat Al Qalam verse 51:

﴿وَإِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ﴾ [القلم:51]

In this verse the literal expression is ‘to make you stumble or slip with their eyesight’.

Saheeh International translates it as “would almost make you slip with their eyes” (International, 1997, p. 820). Nearly, the same translation was given by Al-Hilali and Khan who translated it to “would almost make you slip with their eyes through hatredness” (Khan & Al-Hilali,

1997, p. 779). The nonverbal meaning of the expression is to harm you.

In the two translations, the nonverbal image was kept in its literal wording, which does not make it clear for an English speaker, even though Al-Hilali and Khan added ‘through hatredness’⁵, which may guide the reader more to understand the meaning of the expression. The translators could use an equivalent in English for the Arabic expression. There is the expression “casting the evil eye” that can it easier for an English speaker to understand the meaning. The translators could use more plain words and explain the nonverbal image by saying what it means which is causing some sort of harm.

3.4 The Staring Eyes

The sight is also a matter of a nonverbal expression in the verse 42 from the Surat of Ibrahim in the following verse:

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ اللَّهَ غَافِلًا عَمَّا يَعْمَلُ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنَّمَا يُؤَخَّرُهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ تَشْخَصُ فِيهِ الْأَبْصَارُ﴾ [ابراهيم: 42]

The literal expression is ‘the eyes will stare’, and the meaning is to have open eyes without blinking from fear and horror of the Day of Judgement.

In Saheeh International the translation is “eyes will stare [in horror]” (International, 1997, p. 342). The same expression is found in the translation of Al-Hilali and Khan, without the use of the square brackets “the eyes will stare in horror” (Khan & Al-Hilali, 1997, p. 336). The word horror does not exist in the original verse as a verbal language but both translations used it to make the meaning of the nonverbal expression clearer for the English reader.

The word ‘stare’, on its own, does not render the meaning of the verse. Cambridge dictionary defines ‘Stare’ as “to look for a long time with the eyes wide open, especially when surprised, frightened, or thinking” (Anon., 2020). So, the addition of “in horror” made it more specific to express the meaning found in the verse. So the translators used here an addition to the original literal word because the word in English does not express the same meaning captured by the nonverbal image.

3.5 The Flowing Eyes

In verse 83 from Surat Al- Maidah another nonverbal eye-related expression is used:

﴿وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰ أَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا مِنَ الْحَقِّ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ﴾ [المائدة: 83]

The literal meaning of the expression is the eyes flowing in tears. This expresses the genuineness of feelings, for one can make a tear drop to fake a feeling but cannot make it overflow continuously. Only a genuine feeling and a sensitive heart can make the eyes flow with tears.

The translators in Saheeh International translated the expression as “their eyes overflowing with tears” (International, 1997, p. 153), exactly the same as in Al-Hilali and Khan’s translation (Khan & Al-Hilali, 1997, p. 161). The reason is that the verse is self-explanatory and the nonverbal expression is itself a metaphor that can be used in different languages. The nonverbal language here is much more powerful than the use of any verbal one.

Another verse contains the overflowing tears in Surat Toubah, verse 92:

﴿وَلَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ إِذَا مَا أَتَوْكَ لِتَحْمِلَهُمْ قُلْتَ لَا أَجِدُ مَا أَحْمِلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ تَوَلَّوْا وَأَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ حَزَنًا أَلَّا يَجِدُوا مَا يُنْفِقُونَ﴾ [التوبة: 92]

In this verse the flow of tears has the same meaning like the previous example in the abovementioned verse. It means genuine and authentic emotions. However, in this verse there is a word that follows the overflowing tears which leads to a more specific meaning which is of sorrow and grief.

Both translators kept the same translation of the expression as “their eyes overflowed with tears” (International, 1997, p. 261) and “their eyes overflowing with tears” (Khan & Al-Hilali, 1997, p. 260).

In the two previous examples, the translators rendered the nonverbal language with another nonverbal language. In such a case, the meaning is easily grasped by the reader in English because the body language here is universal in addition to the rest of the verse that illustrates the meaning even more.

3.6 The Rolling Eyes

A last example used to illustrate the nonverbal use of the eyes in Quran is in the verse 19 of Surat Al Ahzab:

﴿فَإِذَا جَاءَ الْخَوْفُ رَأَيْتَهُمْ رَائِيَةً يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ تَدُورُ أَعْيُنُهُمْ كَالَّذِي يُغَسِّقُ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ فَإِذَا ذَهَبَ الْخَوْفُ سَلَقُوكُمْ بِالسِّنَةِ حِدَادٍ أَشْحَةً عَلَى الْخَيْرِ﴾ [الأحزاب:19]

The literal expression here is ‘the eyes turning or revolving’. The expression means their eyes were revolving and rolling from fear, since the body freezes when afraid and the only expression that remains to express the emotion of the moment is through the eyes. This nonverbal expression was translated by Saheeh International as “their eyes revolving” (International, 1997, p. 581). The exact same translation used by Al-Hilali and Khan. Which are both literal translations where the same nonverbal expression is translated to English.

The translators did not clarify the meaning more and reserved the expression because the verse is self-explicating. The nonverbal expression of the revolving eyes is further clarified by the continuity of the verse, adding the state of the person “when overcome by death”. So, in this case, the translators made use of the context to make the reader understand without explicating the nonverbal language.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to present and study the nonverbal language in Quran and its translation into English. For that, expressions of eye-related meanings in Quran have been considered. Two translations were used to compare and analyze the rendering of the nonverbal expression into English. The question was whether the translators would use another nonverbal equivalent to translate the nonverbal language, or make use of a simplified verbal language. We explored if it could be a good option to translate the nonverbal expression literally to keep meaning as well as style.

The study found that translators differ in the way they translated body language. Some would prefer to keep the nonverbal image, whereas others tend to explicate the meaning. It is noticed that translating the nonverbal language literally does not always render the meaning. It may even twist the meaning of the original expression and makes it understood erroneously by the English reader.

However, it is to be mentioned that whenever the expression is universal, self-explanatory or when the context helps in understanding the meaning of the nonverbal language, translators tend to use the nonverbal equivalent rather than the use of the literal verbal language.

Another aspect we noticed is the absence of equivalents which makes the translator obliged to go for a verbal and simplified version. Such a practice makes the translated text lose the beauty of the expression in the original text.

Other studies should be carried out using other translations and other expressions related to body language and nonverbal language in general to determine the frequency and the consistency of the findings.

5. Bibliography List:

- Andersen, Peter A. (1999), *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions*, Mayfield Publishing Company, California, USA.
- International, S., (1997). *The Quran: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings*. Abulqasim Publishing House, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Khan, M. M. & Al-Hilali, M. T.-U.-D., (1997). *The Noble Qur'an: The English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, King Fahd Complex, Medina. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Korte, B., (1997). *Body Language In Literature*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto; Canada.
- Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stare> (consulted 20/02/2020)
- أحمد بن يحيى بن جابر البلاذري (1996) : *جمل من أنساب الأشراف*، تحقيق سهيل زكار ورياض الزركلي، دار الفكر، بيروت، ج2
- الماوردي علي بن محمد بن حبيب (1914): *أدب الدنيا والدين*، ط2، المطبعة الأميرية، القاهرة
- الميداني، أبو الفضل أحمد ابن محمد (1959)، *مجمع الأمثال*، تحقيق محمد محي الدين عبد الحميد، دار السعادة، القاهرة.

¹ أبيات لعبد الله بن معاوية بن عبد الله بن جعفر بن أبي طالب. انظر: البلاذري (1996) ، أحمد بن يحيى بن جابر البلاذري: *جمل من أنساب الأشراف*، تحقيق سهيل زكار ورياض الزركلي، دار الفكر، بيروت، ج2، ص62

² الأبيات منسوبة لعلي بن أبي طالب، انظر: الماوردي (1914) ، علي بن محمد بن حبيب: *أدب الدنيا والدين*، ط2، المطبعة الأميرية، القاهرة

³ الميداني، أبو الفضل أحمد ابن محمد (1959)، *مجمع الأمثال*، تحقيق محمد محي الدين عبد الحميد، دار السعادة، القاهرة.

⁴ like Marmaduke Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Mohammad Shakir, Dr. Ghali, Arthur Arberry and others

⁵ 'Hatredness' is not the standard noun. The more standard word in English is 'hatred'.