

## Traces of Ideology and the ‘Gender-Neutral’ Controversy in Translating the Qurān: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Three Cases

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### Abstract:

This research article aims to explore and critically examine the controversy of ‘neutral-gender’ language in the context of translating the Qurān into English. It investigates three different cases in which ‘gender-neutral’ translation is explicitly or implicitly involved. The article attempts to answer questions pertinent to the nature of traces of ideology that produce ‘neutral-gender’ translations of the Qurān in English and the effect of this type of translation on shaping the Qurānic message. It employs a critical qualitative framework that allows for the researcher’s subjective interpretations of relevant texts. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used for the analysis of data. In this article, three texts across fourteen versions of the Qurān in English are investigated. A control version is used to check the three cases sampled. The ‘gender-neutral’ language in translating the Qurān reflects complex traces of ideology as it is not motivated by the feminist agenda alone. The case of Helminski, for instance, shows how cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Sufi doctrines, and feminist agendas combine to produce a radical reading of the Qurān in English. Plus, the ‘gender-neutral’ approach may contribute to the unjustified loss of core stylistic and discursal features that are peculiar to the SL text. However, ‘gender-neutral’ translation is not all ‘evil’ as it might in particular few cases broaden understanding of some Qurānic verses in translation.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist agenda, Gender-neutral language, Ideology, Qurān translation

## Introduction

The relationship between translation and ideology is highly significant. In the words of Aichele (2002) "no translation is ever complete. The selection of possible meanings to be excluded or included is always ideological". In an insightful analysis of the process of translation, Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002) maintain that translation is not simply the act of accurate reproduction of a text but rather, "a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication – and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes" (p. xxi). In the case of translating the Qurān, the role of ideology is crucial. The Qurān itself contains its own unique 'weltanschauung' and distinctive set of ideologies. As Rafiabadi (2003) rightly observes, an interesting fact about the Qurān is that scholars from various sects and faiths contest within the domain of translating the Qurān into English. He quotes Griefenhagen's (1992:284) statement that "by the 20th century, the translation of the Qurān into English became the locus of power struggles, not only between Islam and West, but also between orthodox groups within Islam and heterodox offshoots (p. 215).

Ideology, in Lefevere's (2004) designation, is "a conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach texts" (p. 5). Hatim and Mason (1997) define ideology as "a body of assumptions which reflects the beliefs and interests of an individual, a group of individuals, a social institution, etc., and which ultimately finds expression in language" (p. 218). Van Dijk (2006) maintains that "whatever elle ideologies are, they are primarily some kind of 'ideas', that is, *belief systems*" (2006, p. 116).

In this study, ideology takes a much larger scope than usually formulized in some of the sociological approaches. What Van Dijk (2006) calls the '*belief systems*' and Petrescu (2009) calls the "innocent" meaning of the term is preferred in the present paper. In this sense, ideology refers to the totality of the translator's weltanschauung, political agenda, and sectarian or religious views without the value judgment of positive or negative that usually accompanies the term. The term 'traces of ideology' is employed here as ideological perspectives are often hidden or opaque, to be rediscovered and read through the lens of a meticulous, critical, and in-depth analysis of discourse.

One of the recent ideological debates on translating religious texts is the controversy over the use of '*inclusive*' or '*gender-neutral*' language. In the traditions of Bible translation studies, these terms refer to one or both of these mutual designations:

- 1) Generalization of all masculine or feminine terms that do not refer to a specific person and avoidance of generic 'he'.
- 2) Removal or even feminization of anything that could possibly be interpreted as having masculine connotations. A mild form of this type of Bible translations may, for instance, replace 'father' with 'parent', 'son' with 'children', and 'he' with 'they' (Poythress and Grudem, 2000, pp. 20-26).

It should be mentioned here that this article employs the designation 'gender-neutral' which Poythress and Grudem (2000) prefer to label Bible versions that use the type of 'inclusive language' outlined above. The term 'gender-neutral' is more informative and less biased in contrast to the term 'inclusive language' translation which has some misleading connotations (p. 26).

In the context of Qurān translation, the extreme position in the ‘neutral-gender’ controversy is summed up by Hassen (2011):

Because they were born in patriarchal societies, ancient religious texts, such as the Qurān have become famous for their predominantly patriarchal tone, which for today’s readers seem to exclude and discriminate against women. In today’s context, where changes in cultural and social norms are directing language to be more inclusive, a growing number of women and men are finding the male-centred language as well as the masculine concept of the divine alienating (p. 213).

Ignoring the nature and ontology of the Qurān, Hassen (2011) unwittingly claims that like the Bible, the Qurān uses primarily masculine nouns and pronouns in the “generic sense”. This raises the speculation about “whether the excessive use of male-centered words in many religious texts is an affirmation of God’s intention for gender relations, or is God “accommodating to a particular societal structure”? Though these questions spark heated debates in the context of Bible translation, Hassen (2011) acknowledges the fact that in the field of Qurān translation, the debate about inclusive or gender neutral language has not yet achieved the same “visibility” as in Bible translation. Nevertheless, “signs of change” in the context of Qurān translation, continues Hassen (2011), could be seen in both Helminski and Bakhtiar consistent rejection and avoidance of “exclusive and male-centered words” (p. 214). Hidayatullah (2014) speaks about the “high stakes” of recent feminist movements in Qurān exegeses and translations, which, she believes, “often takes on a civilizational importance in discourse about Islam” (p. 2).

This research article aims to explore and critically examine this controversy of ‘neutral-gender’ language in the context of translating the Qurān into English. It investigates three cases in which some sort of ‘gender-neutral’ translation is explicitly or implicitly involved. Specifically the article attempts to answer these two broad questions:

- 1) What is the nature of the traces of ideology that produce ‘neutral-gender’ translations of the Qurān in English?
- 2) To what extent do ‘neutral-gender’ translations shape the Qurānic message in English?

### Method

This research article employs a ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’ (henceforth, CDA) approach for the analysis of relevant data. CDA is a “domain of CRITICAL APPLIED LINGUISTICS” where the “relationship between language, power, and ideology is a crucial focal point” (Tavakoli, 2013, p. 129). It is basically interested in the analysis of “opaque” as well as “transparent” structural relationships manifested in language use (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 10). CDA offers a way of critical thinking rather than one single path to carry out a research project as the approach does not “have a unitary theoretical framework” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 353). In this sense, CDA is neither quantitative nor qualitative, for the approach embraces a variety of methods and approaches that work toward a critical interpretation that uncovers the hidden motivations of a text/discourse. However, CDA is used here within the article’s qualitative framework which is convenient for the purpose of the relevant theme because it is “fundamentally interpretive, which means that the research outcome is ultimately the product of the researcher’s subjective interpretations of data” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 39).

Three texts are selected from fourteen versions of the Qurān in English in this article. Versions included are listed below:

- 1) **Abdel Haleem, M. S: The Qurān**
- 2) **Arberry, A.J.: The Koran interpreted**
- 3) **Asad, M.: The message of the Qurān**
- 4) **Bakhtiar, L.: The sublime Qurān**
- 5) **Busool, A.N.: The wise Qurān: a new translation**
- 6) **Cleary, T.: The Qurān: a new translation**
- 7) **Dawood, N. J.: the Koran**
- 8) **Helmski, C. A.: The light of dawn: daily readings from the holy Qurān**
- 9) **Kidwai, A.: What is in the Qurān? Message of the Qurān in simple English**
- 10) **Fakhry, M.: An interpretation of the Qurān**
- 11) **Monotheist Group: The Qurān: a monotheist translation**
- 12) **Nikayin, F.: Qurān: a poetic translation from the original**
- 13) **Starkovsky, N.: The Koran handbook: an annotated translation**
- 14) **Tarazi's A: Allah's words in plain English**

Saheeh International is used as a Control Version. The notion of control in the context of this study is different from the use of this term in experimental research design. Nevertheless, the function in both cases is analogous. It should be noted that the use of a '*control version*' is a common practice in comparing translations of both the Scripture and the Qurān. For instance, Strauss (2008) uses it in comparing a dozen of Bible translations. As well, Robinson (2007) uses Pickthall's translation as the Control Version against which ideological and sectarian bias is analyzed in several translations of the Qurān. Similarly, Sideeg (2014) uses Saheeh International and three other translations as control versions for both qualitative and quantitative analyses in investigating sources of linguistic variations in translating the Qurān into English. The selection of Saheeh International here is based on some of the version's characteristic features. Saheeh International (2010) conforms to mainstream Muslim views, tends to be free from sectarian bias, and follows "English word order ... [that] conform[s] more closely to ... the Arabic text ... and the reader is brought somewhat closer to the feel of the original expression" (p. ii).

## Results: Presentation and Analysis

### Case (1)

The first case discussed in this article shows how complex traces of ideologies may combine to produce an alien reading of some Qurānic texts. The case discussed below is about one of the most recited verses in the Qurān. Analysis here basically focuses on how traces of ideology contribute to the 'gender-neutral' readings in translating the Qurān.

(اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ 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) (2:255)

**Control Version** 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.**

Though most of the translations of this verse investigated in this article abound in stylistic and discursual variations of every type and betray some sort of ideological readings, Helminski's version goes too far in **ideology-translation mapping** to produce 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.'

#### Control Version

**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

#### Helminski's Version

**God**- there is no deity but **Hu**, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting Source of all Being. No slumber can seize **Him/Her** nor sleep. All things in heaven and on earth belong to **Hu**. Who could intercede in **His/Her** Presence without **His/Her** permission? **He/She** knows what is what appears in front of and behind **His/Her** creatures. Nor can they encompass any knowledge of **Him/Her** except what **He/She** wills. **His/Her** throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and **He/She** feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them, for **He/She** is the Highest and Most Exalted.

Helminski (2000), commenting on her peculiar use of the pronoun '*Hu*' and the '*He/She*' combination in reference to Allah (SWT), maintains that

*Hu*: the pronoun of Divine Presence. All words in Arabic have a gender grammatically ascribed to them as they do in French and Spanish, etc. Although *Allah* is referred to with the third person masculine pronoun *Hu* (*Huwa*), it is universally understood that *Allah's* Essence is beyond gender or indeed any qualification. In this translation occasionally *Hu* will be used and sometimes "He/She" in an attempt to avoid the mistake of attributing human gender to that which is beyond all our attempt at definition, limitless in subtle glory (p. 5).

Helminski is very clear on her ideological stance regarding '**gender-issues**' and '**gender-neutral**' language in translating the Qurān. In the preface to her translation she explains that

Regarding the use of pronouns [...] in some cases I have used the feminine pronoun rather than the masculine for both the human being and occasionally in reference to God so that

those reading these selections may have a reminder that within the Universe and understanding of the Qurān, God is without gender... In God's sight men and women are equal. (Helminski, 2000, p. xiv)

Hence, Hassan's (2011) comment on Helminski's ideological reading is valid and significant:

Even though Helminski did not address the problem of transferring feminine imagery and nuances from Arabic into English, she consistently sought to adjust and soften the patriarchal tone in the target text by using inclusive nouns and pronouns to refer to human beings and to the Supreme Deity (p. 224).

Though Helminski's argument for using the combination *He/She* has the feminist agenda as a frame of reference, it is quite evident that her peculiar use of the pronoun '*Hu*' is essentially a Sufi choice reflecting her ideological and cultural background. The pronoun '*Hu*' is widely used among the Sufis as the *Greatest Name* of Allah (SWT). In using the peculiar pronoun '*Hu*', it is obvious that Helminski's version is deeply rooted in the Sufi gnostic traditions. As well, Helminski's use of the combination *He/She* in reference to the Divine echoes an extreme esoteric reading that several Sufi philosophers and poets adopt to address the Divine as a '**female deity**'. Many a scholar observes that in the Sufi literature, addressing a '*feminine God*' is a common tradition. Galian (2004) notes that "it has been gathered that Allah is, as defined by numerous Sûfis, the feminine form of the ultimate reality." Rumi, one of the most famous Sufi philosopher poets and Helminski's spiritual guide, is one of the numerous key figures who embrace this notion. "Keshavarz, talks most poetically of the gendered nature of the images and metaphors through which Rumi portrayed the sacred. He chose womanhood, the ability to nurture, and the privilege of childbearing as metaphors for the sacred," (Jaffer, 2007). Rumi's philosophy postulates that woman is the most sublime example of Allah's creative power on earth. In '*Spiritual Couplets*', his monumental literary work, Rumi writes:

**Woman is the radiance of God, she is not your beloved.**

**She is the Creator—you could say that she is not created.**

Nicholson (2002, I:2437).

Rumi's lines represent one of the clearest statements about the *Divine* or *Scared Feminine* in the Sufi literature that elevate woman to a state of a divine being, making her an equal entity to the Divine Essence. Still, this Sufi doctrine finds its clearest expression in Ibn 'Arabi's writings.

In Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy, the male and female elements are coupled in a symbolic gnostic unity, paving the way for his theory of Sufi Pantheism or Unity of Being. Commenting on Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of the sacred feminine, Ahmed (2014), a Sufi blogger, writes

The *Tarjumân al-ashwâq*, Ibn al-'Arabî's collection of love poems composed after meeting the learned and beautiful Persian woman Nizam in Mecca, is filled with images pointing to the Divine Feminine. The last chapter in his book *Fusûs al-hikam* relates that man's supreme witnessing of Allah is in the form of the woman during the act of sexual union. The contemplation of Allah in woman is the highest form of contemplation possible:

**As the Divine Reality is inaccessible in respect of the Essence, and there is contemplation only in a substance, the contemplation of God in women is the most intense and the most perfect; and the union which is the most intense (in the sensible order, which serves as support for this contemplation) is the conjugal act.**

The centrality of the *Divine* or *Sacred Feminine* in the Sufi schema then pinpoints a significant possible source of Helminski's rather unusual and alien version which uses the *masculine/feminine pronouns* in translating one of the most awesome verses that describe Allah's (SWT) attributes in the Qurān. This choice, which Helminski repeatedly and consistently employs in her translation, demonstrates the strong and significant effect of her Sufi background and ideology in shaping the linguistic content in translating the Qurān in a way that no other factor could do. Galian (2004) argues that in Ibn 'Arabi's schemata Allah (SWT) is both *masculine* and *feminine divine entity* as he once stated "I sometimes employ the feminine pronoun in addressing Allah, keeping in view the Essence". Galian notices that in his writings, Ibn Arabi repeatedly talks about the "abysmal Darkness" and "The ultimate ground of everything is the Mother (umm)". Ibn Arabi believes that Allah (SWT) can be referred to as both "هو" (He) and "هي" (She). This is exactly what Helminski adopts in her version of the Qurān in English. On this aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy, Madigan (1998) observes that

Woman reveals for Ibn 'Arabi the secret of the compassionate God. The word for essence, dhat, being feminine in Arabic offered Ibn 'Arabi different methods to discover this feminine element in God and meant that he could speak of the "woman creator". His contemporary, the Egyptian poet Ibn al-Farid used the feminine gender in his mystical odes when talking of the divine beloved.

The instance cited above further reveals how the notion of the **Divine/Scared Feminine** strongly shapes many Sufi philosopher-poets, inspiring them to address a *feminine God*. This significantly enhances the explanation of Helminski's reading which produces a version unsurpassed except by very few versions in the tradition of Bible translation, versions which Poythress and Grudem (2000) exclude in their thesis on '*The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*' on the basis that these handful of "radical feminist versions that even undertake to call God the Father "Father and Mother" or to eliminate "Father" language altogether. ... clearly reject the authority of the Bible and its claim to be the Word of God..." (p. 25). Even deWaard and Nida (1986), two of the prominent figures advocating the dynamic equivalence approach in Bible translation, aptly call the works of extreme feminist Bible translators who introduce radically inclusive language in translating the Scripture "an almost incredible distortion" (pp. 24-25). Nevertheless, Helminski's case is dual: fueled by the Sufi traditions of Rumi, Ibn 'Arabi, and an avowed and sincere exponent of gender equality, her version remains the most radical one regarding 'gender-neutral' language in reference to the Divine among all the translations of the Qurān in English.

### Case (2)

If Helminski's version changes the system of pronouns in this Qurānic text on the basis of feminist and Sufi perspectives, Tarazi's version, which lies at the extreme end of dynamic equivalence pole, (Sideeg, 2014), changes the pronoun system on the basis of hermeneutical perspectives in disguise. Its author claims that he translates "Allah's word in plain English". He explains his approach as follows:

This style of translation is called dynamic equivalence translation. To the extent possible, this approach seeks to create an experience in plain English which communicates both the ideas and the emotions the Qurān communicated to the original audience in classical

Arabic. All translations necessarily involve many compromises between ideas and emotions, sophisticated layered meaning, and simplicity. It is our hope that this translation will provide the average English speaking audience at least a balanced taste of the beauty and power of the Qurān in plain English Tarazi (2012, p. xii).

Nonetheless, it seems here that 'dynamic equivalence' is only used as a disguise for ideological perspectives. The changes done in translating the case discussed below are more than stylistic or purely linguistic issues. A comparison between Tarazi's version and Kidwai's version [another translation that uses simple English] reveals this fact.

#### Kidwai's Version

**God is the Ever Living, the Self Subsisting. There is no god beside Him. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. He is all that in heaven and all that on earth. Who can recommend (anyone's case) to Him, except with His permission? He knows what lies before and behind His creatures. They cannot encompass anything of His knowledge except what he wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth. He is All High, Most Glorious.**

The most notable change in Tarazi's version is the drastic alteration of the third person pronoun system and the shift to first person pronouns. Thomas (2002) admits the fact that there is a considerable amount of hermeneutics in a dynamic-equivalence translation. Undoubtedly, this makes a translation based on this approach an ideal haven for injecting traces of ideology. This is exactly the case of Tarazi's version. Avoiding what he thinks a sexist language that uses the masculine pronouns 'he, him, his, etc.' in reference to Allah (SWT), Tarazi, as shown in the sample above, replaces third person pronouns in reference to Allah (SWT) with first person pronouns, and thus destroys both the texture and structure that significantly contribute to the meaning in the Qurānic discourse.

#### Tarazi's Version

**I am your true God the one and only. I live eternally. I oversee and take care of everything. I never tire, and I am never sleeping. Who can intercede in front of Me without my authorization? I know the future and the past, and you don't acquire any of my knowledge without my permission. My knowledge encompasses the earth and the heavens. It is not difficult for Me to take care of everything in both of them. I am high in power and greatness over everyone and everything.**

#### Case (3)

Case (3) involves a text in which subtle traces of ideology combine to produce two readings of the Qurānic verse below in which 'pragmatics' has its own legacy.

64:14 (يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ)

**Control Version O you who have believed, indeed, among your wives and your children are enemies to you, so beware of them.**

In this case, the controversy is over the translation of the lexical item (أَزْوَاجِكُمْ). There are two readings here which are both supported by the linguistic facts of the text:

#### The Wives-Version:

This is the traditional and conservative version based on the instance of occurrence of this particular revelation:

Arberry, J. A. O believers, among your **wives** and children there is an enemy to you; so

	beware of them.
Busool, A. N.	O you who believed! Indeed, from among your <b>wives</b> and your children there is an enemy to you;
Fakhry, M	O believers, in the midst of your <b>wives</b> and children, there is an enemy of yours, so beware of them..
Nikayin, F.	O You believers, in your <b>wives</b> ,/And children, you may have an enemy,/Therefore, of them beware;
Picktall, M.	O ye who believe! Lo! among your <b>wives</b> and your children there are enemies for you,
Starkovsky, N.	O, you who believed! Verily, among your <b>wives</b> and children there are hostile to you, so beware of them!

### The Spouses-Version:

This second reading of this particular verse tries to be more inclusive and, like the first reading, betrays some sort of ideological perspectives:

Abdel Haleem, M	Believers, even among your <b>spouses</b> and your children you have some enemies- beware of them-
Asad, M	O YOU who have attained to faith! Behold, some of your <b>spouses</b> and your children are enemies unto you: so beware of them!
Bakhtair, L	O those who believed! Truly, <i>there are</i> among your <b>spouses</b> and your children enemies for you, so beware of them.
Cleary, T.	Believers, among your <b>mates</b> and your children are some inimical to you, so beware of them.
Dawood, N.J.	Believers, you have an enemy in your <b>spouses</b> and in your children: beware of them.
Monotheist Trans.	O you who believe, from among your <b>spouses</b> and your children are enemies to you; so beware of them.

Here pragmatics plays a significant role in the basic variation in the verse above. Whereas the first group chooses the incidental case for the occurrence of this verse as the basis of interpretation, the second group works on an all-embracing interpretation that downplays the possible 'gender-exclusive' gender-biased tone in the Qurānic text in English translation.

### Discussion: A Critique of the Three Cases

#### Case (1)

Analysis of case (1) exposes the traces of ideology involved in Helminski's 'unorthodox' reading with regard to the use of what she thinks a 'gender-neutral' language in reference to Allah (SWT). However, there is a serious flaw in Helminski's logic and arguments. In using the feminine and masculine pronouns in reference to Allah (SWT), Helminski fails to appreciate the wide distinction between grammatical and natural gender, a distinction that undermines all arguments about gender-issues in translating the Qurān. In fact, the question of natural vs. grammatical gender is subtle and intricate. Grammatical genders are a special type of noun classes where gender is reflected in the structure of the word. Yet, this distinction between natural and grammatical gender does not exist in Modern English because words are only grammatically masculine or feminine if they are correspondingly naturally masculine or

feminine. When a word does not have a natural gender—like the word 'door', for example—it is grammatically neuter and one refers to it with the neuter pronoun, 'it', not the masculine pronoun "he", or the feminine pronoun "she". But generally, in languages that have grammatical genders (Arabic is one of them), the most significant fact is that these grammatical genders are arbitrary. Here it should be remembered that the etymology of the word 'gender' has nothing to do with biological 'sex' as the term is etymologically related to the term 'genre'. Oxford Shorter Dictionary (6<sup>th</sup> edition), tells us that the origin of the word is *Old French genre (mod. genre) from Proto-Romance from Latin genus, gener.* (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2007, p. 1088).

A basic linguistic fact is that when feminine and masculine noun classes exist in language, they mean virtually nothing from a *non-linguistic point* of view, as a word's grammatical gender is arbitrary and does not logically correlate with its meaning. So there may not be a correspondence or association between a given word's natural and grammatical genders (Lyons, 1995, pp., 283-285). This is reflected by the fact that gender does not transfer well from one language to another. For instance, the word for 'sun' is masculine in Spanish (*el sol*) but feminine in German (*die Sonne*). A German moon is masculine (*der Mond*), while a Spanish moon is feminine (*la luna*). By the same token, the word 'porte' (French for 'door') is grammatically feminine and one refers to it with the same pronoun used for "Mary" or "Fatima", i.e., *elle* (French for "she"). The Arabic word (باب) (Arabic for "door"), however, is grammatically masculine, so one refers to it with the same pronoun that one uses for "Ali" or "John", i.e., هو (Arabic for "he"). And while many of the world languages have nouns that are either masculine or feminine, German, for example, adds a third gender: **neuter**. Moreover, German is a good example of the fact that gender is not linked to a specific meaning or concept. Although nouns denoting human beings are expected to follow natural gender, in German there are exceptions such as *das Mädchen*, (girl). Plus, there are three different German words for "ocean" or "sea"—all a different gender: *der Ozean* (Masculine), *das Meer* (Neuter), and *die See* (Feminine).

All this discussion points to the fact that the presence of a neuter gender for all nouns which are neither masculine nor feminine in English and its absence in Arabic (and many languages), causes significant linguistic mismatch. A consequence of this mismatch is that in English, if one uses the masculine or feminine pronouns to refer to something that has no natural gender, one is representing the thing as a person, usually for powerful rhetorical effect. This is called '*personification*', a rhetorical device often used in poetry. In languages like Arabic or French, masculine or feminine pronominal references carry no such connotations. Grammatical gender, as already stated, is entirely based on language conventions.

Badran, cited in Hidayatullah (2014), observes that "English is a common language of Islamic feminism" (p. 6). It is a fact that feminist ideological readings, particularly Helmski's use of **He/She** combination, is born in predominantly Christian and English language speaking cultures, where the use of the pronoun "**He**" confirms the male God of the Trinity, '**God the Father**' in the Christian schema. Modern feminist arguments for gender-neutral references to God are essentially reactions to the masculine portrayal of God in Christianity. Using this kind of discourse in the Qurānic context and raising gender-issues in reference to Allah (SWT) in the way feminists have done in the tradition of Bible translation would miss several linguistic and cultural facts and contradicts the clear Qurānic statement with reference to Allah (SWT), لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ "**There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him**" (Qurān, 42:11). In the Qurān and in Arabic language, Allah (SWT) is referred to by the masculine pronoun 'هو' without any explicit or implicit sense of personification or *anthropomorphism*. It is only a linguistic fact that the

word "Allah" is grammatically masculine in Arabic, with no hint or connotation of natural gender or any other human attributes. The basic pillar of the Islamic belief is that Allah (SWT) cannot be understood in human terms of natural genders (masculine and feminine). It is the anthropomorphic conception of Allah (SWT) that makes anybody think of *He/She* distinction in reference to the Divine. Whereas many religious texts suffer the curse of 'personification' or '**anthropomorphism**', where the use of a masculine pronoun reference denotes or connotes masculinity of the Divine, the transcendent concept *tawheed* in Islam does not allow any kind of 'anthropomorphism' or personification that ascribes any human qualities or attributes to Allah (SWT). Ibn Arabi, Rumi, and Helminski's use of feminine terms with reference to Allah (SWT) is entirely alien to the Islamic belief in which Allah (SWT) is transcendent, beyond human concepts, terms, and distinctions.

### Case (2)

Tarazi's argument for simplification of the Qurānic text through using the first person pronoun 'I' instead of the third person pronoun 'he' is not valid. This type of 'simplification' seems to be ideologically motivated as the author attempts to abolish the SL pronoun system which is seen as 'patriarchal' or 'sexist'. However, when we mess with the SL original system of pronouns, we obscure the content of the Qurānic message and make it more difficult to appreciate and understand significant stylistic and discorsal aspects which are part and parcel of the Qurānic text. The purposeful variation in the stylistic and discorsal features of the Qurān is observed by Az-Rakashi who states that one mechanism of the Qurānic stylistics is '*Illifāt*' which is:

"الانتقال من أسلوب إلى آخر لما في ذلك من تنشيط السامع واستجلاب صفاته واتساع مجاري الكلام وتسهيل الوزن والقافية. وقال البيانيون: إن الكلام إذا جاء على أسلوب واحد وطال حسن تغيير الطريقة" (الزركشي، 1984، ص 325-326).

Transition from one mode to another as it serves to help the listener focus on the message and avoid boredom, renew their interest, make speech flow more smoothly, and refine rhyme, rhythm and cadence in the speech. Rhetoricians recommend variations of style and discourse in lengthy and uniform texts.

Drawing on this, Abdel Haleem (1992) aptly observes that

The Qur'an, it should be remembered, is not an autobiography of Allāh which thus has to be cast wholly in the form of 'I' and 'me'; ... It should also be noted that in some verses God is mentioned more than once, and is depicted from different perspectives so that we have a multiplicity of viewpoints (p. 417).

The Qurān is a literary masterpiece with its own unique stylistic and discorsal legacy. The use of pronouns (*We, I, He*) for Allah (SWT) in the Qurān is a source of distinctive and rich discorsal/stylistic dimensions and meanings. Use of 'I' for Allah (SWT) in the Qurānic discourse normally occurs on occasions when His oneness or closeness to the addressee is targeted or focused. When the pronoun 'We' is used in reference to Allah (SWT), it is meant to emphasize the grandeur, power, strength, and the infiniteness of His attributes. 'He' is used in the Qurān to refer to Allah (SWT) from the perspective of the addressee. This is why Traza fails to consistently and thoroughly alter the use of 'He' in reference to Allah (SWT) in the context cited below:

1. قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

2. اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

3. لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

4. وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

(112:1) If they ask you about Me, say: He is the one and only.

(112:2) Allah, the only one to turn to for help.

(112:3) He has no child, nor was born from a parent,

(112:4) and He is not like anything else.

### Case (3)

Case (3), though underpinned by ideological readings, seems to be produced by a 'pragmatics' factor which is crucial in understanding and interpreting the relevant Qurānic text. The Qurānic text accommodates both interpretations of the relevant verse across the fourteen translations sampled in this article. With reference to the context of revelation, the 'wives-interpretation' group would find the strongest support in the context of revelation or instance of occurrence narrated by several exegetes and reported and authenticated in some of the Hadith books:

وقال ابن أبي حاتم ، حدثنا أبي ، حدثنا محمد بن خلف العسقلاني <sup>(١)</sup> ، حدثنا الفريابي ، حدثنا إسرائيل ، حدثنا سماك بن حرب ، عن عكرمة ، عن ابن عباس – وسأله رجل عن هذه الآية : ﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ ﴾ – قال : فهؤلاء رجال أسلموا من مكة ، فأرادوا أن يأتوا رسول الله ﷺ ، فأبى أزواجهم وأولادهم أن يدعوهم ، فلما أتوا رسول الله ﷺ رأوا الناس قد فقهاوا في الدين ، فهموا أن يعاقبهم ، فأنزل الله هذه الآية : ﴿ وَإِنْ تَعَفَّوْا وَتَصَفَّحُوا وَتَغْفِرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴾ .

(ابن كثير، 1999، جزء 8، ص 139)

When a man asked him about this relevant verse, Ibn 'Abbas was reported to say: those are some men in Makkah who converted to Islam and wanted to join Allah's Messenger (PBUH), but their wives and children prevented them. Then when they ultimately joined the Prophet (PBUH), they realized that those who had already migrated had acquired the required insights in religion. Hence, they thought of punishing their wives and children. Then Allah revealed this verse: 'If you overlook their faults, pardon and forgive, Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.'

However, the 'explicature-implicature' of the verse allows extension of the meaning to include both wives and husbands (spouses, mates). This is in conformity with the basic tenet in the *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* that rulings are extended beyond the particular instance of occurrence.

(العبرة بعموم اللفظ لا بخصوص السبب)

In this sense, the 'gender-neutral' approach will draw on both the linguistic and religious facts of the relevant verse.

### Major Findings and Implications

- 1) The 'gender-neutral' language in translating the Qurān reflects complex traces of ideology as it is not motivated by the feminist movement alone. The case of Helminski, for instance, shows how the cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Sufi doctrines, and

feminist agenda combine to produce an extremely radical reading of the Qurān in English with regard to 'gender-neutral' issues.

- 2) The 'gender-neutral' approach contributes to the unjustified loss of core stylistic and discursal features that are peculiar to the SL text. In Tarazi's version, for example, changing the system of pronouns in the Qurān would alter the essence of the Qurānic message.
- 3) The 'gender-neutral' approach in translating the Qurān is not all 'evil'. In particular cases, this approach to Qurānic texts might yield broader and more insightful readings that enrich understanding the Qurānic message in English. This occurs when 'gender-neutral' readings are in conformity with the linguistic facts of the SL text.
- 4) A critical and meticulous analysis of 'gender-neutral' interpretations in some recent 'feminist' Qurānic versions in English would expose some of the non-transparent and false claims of the feminist agendas in translating the Qurān.

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