

**Shift of Tenses in Some Translated Verses of the Qur'an  
Into English and Hebrew –  
A Functional Study**

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**Abstract**

This study explores shift of tenses in some Qur'anic verses. A discussion of the rhetorical functions of tense-shifts is conducted. It, also, discusses the translations of these shifts into English and Hebrew. The study uses the applied approach, and the discussion follows interpretations and commentaries of the Glorious Qur'an. A contrast between the Arabic text and its translations is conducted. A contrast between English and Hebrew translations is conducted too. Data are categorized according to the type of shift following the Arabic text. Then, analysis and discussion follow. Findings show that Tense-shifts occur in the Qur'anic text frequently and have prominent functional purposes that require further research. The use of tense-shift and the interpreting of the related functions are determined by the context. Changes -to the present tense instead of the past tense, to the present tense instead of the future tense, to the past tense instead of the present tense, and to the imperative tense instead of the present tense- are used in rendering the verses under this study into Hebrew more than into English. A major cause for this is the similarity of Arabic and Hebrew. Another reason is the incompetence on the part of the translator himself; incomplete understanding of the context, and purposes, and incomprehensive knowledge of interpretation lead to fail in translating the right tense that achieves the required function. Khattab's and Al-Adawy's translations, in general, maintain tense-shift. Yet, there are some shortcomings, especially Khattab's translation.

**Keywords:** Tense-shift, Qur'anic studies, English, Hebrew, pragmatic function

الالتفات في صيغ الأفعال في بعض آيات القرآن المترجمة إلى الإنجليزية والعبرية -  
دراسة وظيفية

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**المستخلص**

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الالتفات في صيغ الأفعال في بعض آيات القرآن الكريم المترجمة إلى الإنجليزية والعبرية: دراسة وظيفية. وتهدف إلى تناول الوظائف البلاغية للالتفاتات في صيغ الأفعال. تناقش الدراسة أيضاً ترجمات هذا الالتفاتات في صيغ الأفعال إلى الإنجليزية والعبرية. الطريقة المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة هي المنهج التطبيقي، والذي يتكون من مناقشة تفسير معاني وأغراض القرآن الكريم، ومن ثم إجراء مقارنة بين النص العربي وترجماته، وإجراء مقارنة أيضاً بين النصوص المترجمة إلى الإنجليزية والعبرية. تم تصنيف البيانات طبقاً لنوع الالتفاتات في النص العربي. واتبع ذلك التحليل والمناقشة. أظهرت الدراسة بعض النتائج منها أن الالتفاتات في صيغ الأفعال جاءت في النص القرآني بشكل متكرر ولها أغراض وظيفية بارزة تتطلب مزيداً من البحث. ومنها ان السياق له الدور الأساسي في استخدام الالتفاتات في صيغ الأفعال وأيضاً في تفسير الوظائف والأغراض البلاغية ذات الصلة. واظهرت الدراسة أيضاً أن الالتفاتات يحدث في النص المترجم إلى العبرية أكثر منه إلى الإنجليزية. وطبقاً لهذه الدراسة، فإن السبب الرئيسي لهذا هو التشابه بين العربية والعبرية. سبب آخر هو عدم الكفاءة من جانب المترجم نفسه أو عدم الدرية الكافية بالوظائف والأغراض البلاغية للنص الأصلي. فيؤدي عدم فهم السياق والأغراض وعدم معرفة التفسير الصحيح إلى الفشل في ترجمة الزمن الصحيح الذي يحقق الوظيفة البلاغية المطلوبة. وبشكل عام تحافظ ترجمتا خطاب والعدوي على ظاهرة الالتفاتات في صيغ الأفعال، ومع ذلك هناك بعض القصور، لا سيما في ترجمة خطاب.

**الكلمات الرئيسية:** الالتفاتات في صيغ الأفعال، الدراسات القرآنية، اللغة الإنجليزية، العبرية، الوظيفة البلاغية

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The glorious Qur'anic text has its own particularities, connotations, and distinctiveness. Its language is so unique in terms of lexis; nouns, verbs, prepositions, particles., etc. One needs to expose to all these tools in comprehending a deep analysis of the Arabic language. The Glorious Qur'an takes its own approach in selecting lexical items, syntactic structures, and tense. Specifically, the Qur'anic words are selected very carefully, as they perform important functions within the Qur'anic text. This careful selection applies to the linguistic and morphological structure, definiteness and indefiniteness, and masculine and feminine, etc.

Among those linguistic structures that characterize the style of the Glorious Qur'an are the shifts between the different forms of verbs in one verse. Qur'anic text largely employs tense shift to achieve some rhetorical functions and purposes. Some of these changes happen in the same context where the form of verb in the Qur'anic context may be misunderstood as it is different from the usual pattern of Arabic concerning verb-tenses, such as expressing an event in the past in a present tense and expressing a future event in a past tense, etc.

Sometimes the Qur'anic context does not follow a single pattern in the temporal matching between consecutive verbs. Tenses in the Qur'anic text may flout from the context itself; the context mentions a present action, for instance, and the verb pattern occurs in the past tense or vice versa. This raises the question about the reason for this tense shift and about the related functions within the Qur'anic context. This does not come arbitrarily within the Qur'anic text, but rather due to the aesthetic and rhetorical techniques or constraints required by the context.

## **Objectives**

The first objective of the current study is to determine and explore shifts in verb tenses in the Glorious Qur'an and their rhetorical purposes and functions. The second one is to find out what determines the functions and tense-shifts. The third objective is to discuss the translations of these shifts, within the Qur'anic text, to English and Hebrew. This is to explore the similarities, differences and value of each translation.

## **Questions of the Study**

The study answers three questions; 1) What are the rhetorical purposes and functions of the shifts of tenses in the Glorious Qur'an? 2) What determines the functions associated with tense-shifts? And 3) were these functions and the related forms rendered to English and Hebrew successfully and similarly or not.

## **Data**

In order to determine the accuracy of translating shifts in terms of verbs in the Glorious Qur'an, two translations are discussed in rendering tense-shift among verbs, whether at the level of the deep structure that requires matching the verb tenses with the linguistic context, or at the surface structure that is used.

The two translations used in this study are:

1. Subhi Al-Adawy's translation: 'The Qur'an in another language' (2013).
2. Dr. Mustafa Khattab's translation of the Glorious Qur'an: 'The Clear Quran' (2016)

## **Significance**

Several researchers have handled the issue of translating the meanings and functions of the Glorious Qur'an and have discussed tense-shift within the Qur'anic text. However, none of those studies has discussed tense-shift in English and Hebrew translations of the Glorious Qur'an contrastively, especially in Khattab's and Al-Adawy's translations. This study examines tense-shift in the verbs within some verses of the Glorious Qur'an and contrasts the translated English and Hebrew texts, i.e. Khattab and Al-Adawy.

This study pays attention to rendering the meanings of the Glorious Qur'an into English and Hebrew in terms of verb-tense shift. Tense-shift in the Qur'anic context is a deviation from the norm, so the choice of this topic came in the way of searching for the purposes, implications and functions where a shift in tense is found, and for how this issue is rendered and translated into

English and Hebrew languages. Since shift in the Qur'anic context is a linguistic phenomenon that highlights the rhetorical aspect in the Qur'an, where there is a functional relation of an expression\ a form and the multiplicity of meanings and semantics, this study shows the rhetorical and semantic value of tense shift within the Qur'anic context, discusses the ways this shift is translated, and determines the accuracy of the translation by either two translators. The study, also, highlights the impact of the mother tongue and mother culture on translation from Arabic to English and Hebrew through studying two translations of two Muslim translators. This study is important in responding to the suspicions of some orientalists who twist such linguistic phenomena in the Qur'anic text to challenge the Glorious Qur'an as a miracle. This study attempts to explore shift in tense in the Glorious Qur'an to get the true functions or purposes out of using such shifts.

### Theoretical Background

A verb, as stated in Crystal (1980, p. 374), is a syntactic class that 'signals events and actions...' and may be inflected for tense and aspect or mood and voice. It may require 'agreement(s) with other constituents [in the sentence], person, number, or grammatical gender' (Mish, 1991, p. 1309).

### Tense, Aspect, Mood, and Voice

#### *Tense – (past-present-future)*

Tense "is used to show the time when the action of a verb takes place" (Jarvie, 1993, p. 37). Therefore, verb-forms indicate or express time of action; past, present or future. They may refer to a state too, (Crystal, 1980, pp. 52–353). According to Cambridge Dictionary<sup>1</sup>, tense shows 'the time at which an action happened'. According to Your Dictionary<sup>2</sup>, tense is achieved in verbs by time and completeness or continuation of an action.

#### *Aspect – (complete-continue-repeat)*

According to the Linguistic Glossary<sup>3</sup>, aspect indicates the time category of verbs. It denotes, according to Jarvie (1993, p. 39) "the point from which an action is seen to take place". Then, *aspect is a time-category*, as Nordquist (2019) has discussed. It denotes completeness (past), continuation (duration), and regularity (repetition) of an event or a state. Perfect, progressive and perfect progressive are English-verb aspects, (Chung & Timberlake 1985, p. 213).

According to Biber, Conrad, and Leech (2002), the perfect aspect usually indicates a preceding time. Jarvie (1993, p.

39) claims that the perfect aspect denotes a completed action. However, the progressive aspect denotes that the action is in progress; continuing. When coming with each other, perfect and progressive aspects combine to refer to 'a past situation or activity that was in progress for a period of time.' (Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002).

***Mood – (imperative–subjunctive-indicative)***

Semantic and syntactic contrasts that are marked by different patterns of a verb (imperative – subjunctive - indicative) are called moods, (Crystal, 2003, p. 299).

***Voice - (singular-dual-plural-first-second-third)***

I, he, she, and the other pronouns are examples of the voices that may determine some changes within the combined verbs.

**Tense Shift**

When a change of the tense occurs within a sentence, it is called *tense-shift*. Abdel-Haleem, (1992, pp. 410-411) has stated the meaning of shift (called Iltifat by Al-Zarkashi) as 'the change in the tense of the verb'. He has, also, stated some functions of tense-shift; variety, refreshment, renewing, etc. It seems that there is a direct relationship between verb forms and time. Swan, (2005, p. 5), argues for the opposite stating that a past verb may not be used to talk about past actions, (but for unreal present or future). Again, the simple present can refer to a definite schedule in the future time. Verbs like open, close, begin, end, arrive, leave, etc. are used to denote future time. (Azar and Hagen, 2017, p. 62). This works in Arabic and Hebrew too.

Sometimes, a tense-shift is necessary to indicate a change in the time frame of an action. For example, switching from present tense to past tense is, sometimes, necessary to reflect what people said at that point in time.<sup>4</sup> At other times, a shift in tenses may be for a specific rhetorical purpose, i.e. for a certain pragmatic function which is necessary for comprehending the message employed. A shift in tenses, as stated by Abdel-Haleem (1992, p. 423), is considered as 'a grammatical shift for a rhetorical purpose'. Therefore, this shift is done for a specific cause or reason. (Ibn al-Athir in Abdel-Haleem, 1992, p. 431).

In fact, one of the most important areas of shift in the linguistic context at the lexical level is what concerns verbs. Verb-tense shift is often found to occur within the same context, such as; using a present tense, for instance, instead of past or future tenses, while

other verbs in the same context are in past or future. This is often exploited in the text of the Glorious Qur'an. It does not come arbitrary or randomly, but rather due to some linguistics constraints or pragmatic purposes required by the context, or even due to aesthetic techniques and rhetorical functions within the text.

In fact, the present tense acquires additional semantic aspects and performs different stylistic functions, as narrating about a past case, i.e. historical usage. Again, the past can be expressed in the present, and it is a common use in narrating. Such tenses-shift helps the readers visualize the scene very precisely and recall the act and its features with extreme accuracy. It also helps the recipients as they can feel the events and understand the whole details. They can interact with these details and be inspired by the cues and considerations. These functions are performed by using the present tense with a high efficiency that no other derivational form performs. The present tense, here, achieves the temporal applicability between the time of the narration and the time of the event itself. However, the past tense may deprive a narrated event from its suggestive expressive value. Yet, it gives the event a documentary value.

With respect to this shortcoming of the past tense in depriving readers or hearers from visualizing a narrative tale or story, the use of past tense makes the hearer absent and keeps his far away from the time of the event and therefore, his interaction with the event becomes a partial interaction. Past tense does not enhance imagination and involvement in the event and all its details. In contrast, present tense helps hearers and recipients to utilize all their senses and emotional interactions to feel the spiritual harmony generated by keeping pace of the events.

### **Tenses in English, Hebrew and Arabic**

English verbs can refer to past, present and future time. They can also refer to simple, progressive and perfect actions. 12 combinations of these may happen and get the related features. For example, simple present can refer to regular events or general actions; and it may refer to facts. The simple present is used to 'express habitual or everyday activities.' The progressive present can refer to an action that is happening at the moment of speaking. The perfect present can refer to an action that happened in the past and linked to a later time. (Azar and Hagen, 2017, pp. 2-7). The progressive can refer to future planned action. The context helps a lot in this specific use. (Azar and Hagen, 2017, p. 62). Perfect

present can, also, refer to events that have not happened before or that have happened in the past when the exact time of the event is not specified. It can be used to denote repeated actions too. (Azar and Hagen, 2017, p. 31). For the past tenses, the features related to past time are adopted. Future tenses, likewise, work in a future time using ‘will’ or ‘be going to’.

Hebrew tenses are three main simple forms;<sup>5</sup> past, present, and future. Various signals are used to denote other time-actions, i.e. in deciding which happened before which. There is no progressive/perfect in Hebrew. They are recognized by context and by time markers (words mark and denote time), such as: **עכשוו** - “Now”, **תמיד** - **כרגע** - “Right now”, **תמיד** - **בדיוק** - “At present”, **תמיד** - **אתמול** - **כל יום/שבוע/חודש/שנה** - “Every day/week/month/year”, **אתמול** - **אתה מחר** - **לא מזמן** - “Yesterday”, **אתה מחר** - **כבר** - “Not long ago”, **אתה מחר** - **מחר** - “Already”, **אתה מחר** - **בקרוב** - **곧** - “Tomorrow”, **אתה מחר** - **בקרוב** - **עד מעט** - “Soon”, **אתה מחר** - **כבר** - **עד זמן מה** - “In a while”, **אתה מחר** - **כבר** - **עד זמן מה** - “In no time”, etc.

Concerning Arabic, tenses refer to past (perfect), present and imperative. Perfect indicates mostly a past, completed action, or an established fact” Abü Shaqrä, 2007, p. 78). The imperative can express other meanings such as plea, invocation, debility, etc. Gellati (1998). Time markers are used to denote exact time of action like, **قد** **كان** - **قد فعل** - **كان قد سوف** for future, **قد** **فعل** - **سوف** for past, and **قد** **يكون** for uncertain present. (Reishaan and Ja'far, 2008, p. 110; Ouided, 2009, pp. 26-32; Abü Shaqrä, 2007, p. 78). Sibawayh (-180) has defined tense of a verb as a combination of the meaning of the verb with its event, and its indication of the times, which are: the past, the future and the present. Sibawayh has, also, argued that time of an action is determined by the context and the other time markers or clues that are important to interpret the purposes of the verbs used.

One tense can express another in Arabic, e.g. the past may refer to the future implying invocation of Allah, e.g. ‘Allah protected you **حفظك الله**’, (Ouided, 2009, p. 27). Again, the context determines and clarifies the intended meaning.

### **Review of Literature**

Several studies have explored English and Hebrew translations of the Glorious Qur'an. However, rarely to find a study that contrasts an English translation of the Glorious Qur'an to a Hebrew one. Some studies have discussed translating tenses from English into

Arabic or from Arabic into English. Others have contrasted tenses in both languages. Some studies are presented below.

Reishaan and Ja'far (2008) have conducted a study about forms of verbs and the related tenses in English and Arabic. This study focuses on what grammarians have attempted to do concerning the notion of tense and time. The results of this study are: Arabic and English agree to some extent. However, the Arab grammarians have preceded their English peers in terms of describing tense and time.

Dawood (2008) has discussed the intended functions of tense-shift in some Qur'anic ayas. Through examining two translations of the Glorious Qur'an namely, Abdel Haleem (1992) and Ali (2001), Dawood has discussed the change of the past to present or to future in some verses. Some of the major findings that the researcher has reached at are:

- In indirect English speech, the present tense can be used with the past to indirect a fact.
- In English, context determines and helps interpret the use of the present tense especially in embedded phases.
- In Arabic, verbs have a variety of tense-shifts. They need context to be fully understood. Forms only cannot help. Tense-shift are used for required rhetorical reasons.
- In many cases, past tense is used to refer to future events. This is to make the act as if it were certainly complete.
- Present tense is used to refer to past time. This is to invoke/conjure up the scene in the minds as if it were happening at the moment.
- Use of present then past instead of future makes the action already completed.

Ouided (2009) has conducted a research on translating the perfect present from English into Arabic using markers like **فَكَانَ**. It is found that it is better to use the perfect present in TT. Another finding refers to context as the main determinant of the meaning and then, form. Ouided concludes that context should be taken into consideration as it denotes the true time of an action or story. Quided, also, finds that **فَ** is not used for questioning nor for negating/continuation. Therefore, Arabic does not use clear and corresponding one tense in English. This is due to these two languages are different.

Salman (2010) has discussed tense shift in Quranic translation into English. by tense-shift, Salman means shift from using a form of a verb in the source text to another form in the target text. She did

not study shift of tenses in the same verse. Data of her study are Part 30. She has focused on two tenses; namely past and present. She has handled Ali's, Shakir's, and Pickthal's translations. Shakir's has been proved to have tenses-shift more. Salman's research (2010) concludes that there are many shifts while translating from Arabic into English. Of that present instead of the past-tense is used more.

Hijjo and Kadhim (2017) have analyzed the grammatical-shift from English to Arabic translations of BBC news text. The research determines the kinds of grammatical-shifts between English as ST and Arabic as TT. They adopt model of Catford to translations (1965). The results indicate that some elective and mandatory shifts are conducted. All kinds are used to maintain the messages of the ST. However, meaning is not preserved in rendering passive into active voice. Nevertheless, they are successful in rendering the overall messages clearly.

Amin (2020) has studied the rhetorical features of tenses in Arabic and English texts. She has argued that both languages have used the feature normally. However, there are abnormal uses where there are not equivalent time-indicators. The three time-indicators are speech, event, and reference. Amin (2020) concludes with the advice that rhetoric features should be considered in rendering or searching for the proper equivalent structure. Rhetorical reasons determine the marked use of verb-tense. In addition, present is used to denote history in English. However, past instead of future is used in Arabic along with the perfect-tense. Again, Amin considers context is the core for clarifying meaning and function.

For Hebrew, little research has been done concerning shift in the Qur'anic text and its translation into Hebrew. Al-Zanati has conducted a study entitled 'The rhetorical problems in the Hebrew translations of the meanings of the Glorious Qur'an'. Al-Zanati has dealt with the phenomenon of shift in the Glorious Qur'an and the translation of its meanings into Hebrew language in Reckendorf's, Rivlin's, and Shemesh's translations.

It is clear so far that the topic of the current study needs to be tackled. It examines translating tenses-shift in English and Hebrew translations of the Glorious Qur'an. Contrasting English to Hebrew and Arabic has not been conducted before, especially tense-shifts. It handles Khattab's and Al-Adawy's translations into English and Hebrew consecutively. This distinguishes it from any other study

that has been done before, as both translations have not got enough research so far.

### **Method**

The method followed in this study is the applied approach. First, the selected verses that contain verb-tense shift are presented along with their translations -English and Hebrew- and commentary (*Tafsir Ibn Abbas*, 2007, is adopted when it is needed). Second, the function and rhetorical purpose of each shift is discussed. Purposes and functions of shifts in the verses are explained according to the interpretation books of the Glorious Qur'an. Then, the translations of these verses, concerning shifts, are discussed and analyzed (in English and Hebrew consequently). A contrast between the Arabic text and its translation is conducted. In addition, proposed translations, if applicable, are presented. In addition, analyses and critiques of the translated verses in English and Hebrew are done for each translation separately. This is to explore and discuss the accuracy of conveying the Glorious Qur'anic meanings\functions in translation, and to compare the two translations with the source text. Data are categorized according to type of shift in the tense of verbs in the Arabic text. Then, analysis and discussion follow.

### **Results**

The discussion is classified according the type of shift used in the verses under question.

#### **1. Using Present Tense Instead of Past Tense**

As for the first type; using present tense instead of past tense or to denote an event that has already passed. It is intended to evoke the image of the past event, as if it were a clearly visible matter. The change from using past tense to present, as stated by Hassn Tabl, (1998, p. 79), is a change that is explained by the difference between the two forms of the performance of the meaning or the indication of the event. The first form denotes a matter that is cut off from its occurrence (past), while the second (present) is a matter that its occurrence is renewed by the renewal of time. Therefore, using present form has the ability to evoke the meaning and evoke its image in the listener's imagination as if he were watching it.

قوله تعالى: (أَفَكُلُّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهُوِيْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ اسْتَكْبَرُتُمْ فَرِيقًا كَذَبْتُمْ وَفَرِيقًا نَقْتَلُونَ) البقرة – ٨٧

The Hebrew translation

הָאָם כָּל שֶׁבָּא אֲלֵיכֶם שְׁלִיחָה בָּמָה שָׁאַנְיָ מְאוֹת נְפָשׁוֹתֶיכֶם הַתְּנַשַּׁאַתֶּם בְּקִבּוֹצָה כְּחַשְׁתָּם וּקִבּוֹצָה קַוְטָלִים

The English Translation. ‘Why is it that every time a messenger comes to you ‘Israelites’ with something you do not like, you become arrogant, rejecting some and killing others?’ (2:87)

**Analysis.** In this context, a shift occurred from the past tense verb ‘كذبتم’ “you rejected” to the present tense verb\present participle ‘تقتلون’ “you kill - killing”. The context requires temporal matching between the verbs to be as “you rejected some and killed others”. This shift from past to present tense because the present\participle denotes renewal; the killing is renewed (in the sense of its effects). The effect of that is renewed. Also, the attempt to kill the prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him is renewed. In addition, the present tense depicts this heinous crime as if one was witnessing it; the killing process is presented and recalled in front of the hearers, renewed and repeated. This has previously been observed by Abdel-Haleem, (1992, p. 421). He argued that imperfect tense-shift raises various functions. It refers to an important event that needs to be conjured up to the minds as if it were happening in the moment of speaking. This asserts the idea of the historical present, when the past is expressed in the present to help the readers visualize the scene very precisely and recall the act and its features with extreme accuracy.

In addition, the past tense has been preferred at first in using the verb form ‘كذبتم’ “you rejected” because the vision that motivates contemplation and consideration is not related to this action in itself, but rather to its arising results or consequences, (Hassn Tabl, 1998, p 79). However, using the form of the present tense\present participle ‘تقتلون’ “you kill - killing” requires considering its consequences, indicating its occurrence, which is represented in the consequences of killing the Prophet which is the core of the message in the verse.

On this basis, the change from the past-tense to the present-tense in the verse, when expressing an event which is the core of the lesson of the verse, is to evoke contemplation and therefore, focus on the message. Thus, the shift which favored the form of the present in its expression, is in itself the subject of contemplation. Hassan Tabl, (1998, p. 80). It also, helps in representing situations with all its overflow of vitality, excitement, strangeness and astonishment. Khattab translates all verbs into present or present participle (gerund) -**comes, become, rejecting, killing**. He tries to renew the

scene and recall events by the hearers. As for Al-Adawy, he adheres to the past tenses mentioned in the verse, (שׁבָא אֲלֵיכֶם) and (you were arrogant) (הַחֲנִשָתֶם) as well as the past (you rejected) with (כְּחַשְתֶם). Yet, Al-Adawy commits himself to meet the present-tense shift (you kill\killing) - (קֹטְלִים), which confirms that the translator is aware of the shift used according to the context of the noble verse.

## 2. Using Present Tense Instead of Future Tense

As for the second type: the present-tense is used instead of future-tense; to indicate an event that takes place immediately or in the future. Also, this usage performs rhetorical renewal and occurrence of an action, and that this action continues to exist. Then, this type of shift in the Qur'anic text indicates renewal and continuity of the event. In addition, it indicates the lengthening of the scene of the event. Moreover, it focuses on the outcome\result of the event.

(الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا يَذْكُرُ اللَّهُ تَطْمَئِنُ الْقُلُوبُ) الرعد ٢٨

אללה אשר האמינו ונרגעים לבבותיהם בזכר אללה הלא בזכר אללה נרגעים הלבבות

English translation. [13:28] ‘those who **believe** and whose hearts **find comfort** in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort.’ Sura 13: The Thunder (al-Ra‘d)

**Analysis.** The shift of the verb (find comfort\rest) from the context of the past to the present tense to indicate renewal and continuity of reassurance. Also, this indicates no doubt or hesitation. While faith\belief is mentioned in the past tense form “believed” to check, verify and confirm that the state of believing is achieved.

Khattab uses the present form for both verbs; ‘**believe**’ and ‘**find comfort**’. He has achieved the meaning of renewal and continuity of the second act, yet he failed to achieve and confirm that something did happen (they have already believed).

As for Al-Adawy, he realizes the shift between the tenses in this Noble Verse, where he uses the past tense (those who believed) (אשר האמינו), and he uses the present tense (and their hearts are reassured) (ונרגעים למ באו). This indicates that the translator is aware of the tense shift in the Quranic verse, and he tries to preserve this shift during his translation of the Quranic text.

قوله تعالى : (وَالَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَبْتَغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَيَرَوُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عُذْنَى الدَّارِ) الرعد ٢٢

ואלה אשר **מארכיכים** רוח למן רצוי פני רבונם **ומקיימי** את התפילה **והמושיכים** ממה של **פרנסות** בסתר ובגלו **והודפים** בטובה את הרעה אלה להם הסוף הטוב העולם הבא

English translation. Sura 13: The Thunder (al-Ra'd) verse 22. And 'they are' those who **endure** patiently, seeking their Lord's pleasure,<sup>1</sup> **establish** prayer, **donate** from what We have provided for them—secretly and openly—and **respond** to evil with good. It is they who will have the ultimate abode.

**Analysis.** The tense of the verb (respond) is present; It is shifted to the present, despite the sequence of the past verbs used in the context of the verse; endured, established, donated. This shift denotes the meaning of replenishment and renewal. People are usually subject to bad deeds in different degrees, they may find remedy and prescription for this in responding to evil or bad deeds with good deeds all the time.

Khattab uses all tenses in present form; **endure**, **establish**, **donate**, and **respond**. He may comprehend that all these acts need renewal and need to be done all the time. However, the Arabic verse uses past tense for the first three verbs to assure and confirm a state or act where present tense does not.

Likewise, Adawi does in his translation, where he used the present tenses instead of the past tenses (וּמְקִיִּים אֵיהֶה), (מָרִיכִים רֹוח), (וְהוֹדִיפִים בְּטוּבָה), and uses the present tense for the last verb, just as Khattab does.

### 3. Using Past Tense Instead of Present Tense

The shift from the present-tense to the past means using past-tense instead of present-tense. This type is used in several verses in the Glorious Qur'an. It may indicate stability, and realization of action or reduction and discontinuity according to the context involved. Also, this type of shift may indicate the following:

- the speed of realization and verification of the occurrence of an action,
- stable and fixed description,
- demonstrating a desire for an action to occur, and
- preceding a present act,
- demonstrating a desire to stop or terminate an act.

Among the Qur'anic contexts in which the shift to the past indicates the speed of the occurrence of an action is the following verse:

﴿وَيَوْمَ يُنَفَّخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَقَرَعَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَكُلُّ أَئْتُهُ دَآخِرِينَ﴾ [النمل، ٨٧].

בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִתְקֻעַּ בְּשׁוֹפֵר וַיְבָהֵל מִי שְׁבָشָׁמִים וְמִי שְׁבָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהָ אֲשֶׁר מִי שִׁירְצָה אֱלֹהָ וְכָלָם יִבּוֹאוּ אֲלֵיוֹ כְּנוּזִים

English translation. And 'beware of' the Day the Trumpet **will be blown**, and all those in the heavens and all those on the earth **will be horrified** 'to the point of death',<sup>1</sup> except those Allah wills 'to spare'. And all will come before Him, fully humbled. Sura 27: The Ants (al-Naml:87)

**Analysis.** Al-Zamakhshari (Al-Kashshaf, pp. 86-87) has discussed that when used instead of the present-tense, the past-tense is meant to indicate being earlier or being inevitable event. The Qur'anic context has shifted from the present-tense verb '**is blown**' to the past-tense '**were horrified**', which perhaps expected to be '**are horrified**' as the preceding tense. This is because the event has not occurred, yet it is inevitable; it is rather a talk about a distant future, which is the Day of Resurrection. The event is a result of the blowing, and it is proposed that it will inevitably exist. Here, the past tense indicates the realization and existence of the act and its being inevitably definite as if it is a complete and confirmed action. This is asserted by Abdel-Haleem, (1992, p. 422), that 'a shift to the perfect-tense leads to feel of already completed actions. Khattab uses future tense for both verbs; he uses '**will be blown**', and '**will be horrified**'. However, using future does not indicate confirming the act as much as using past tense. Past tense denotes realization of an event definitely. Therefore, Khattab had to use past tense to denote this inevitable future event.

As for the translation of Al-Adawy, it goes as the Arabic verse goes. Al-Adawy uses present tense, where it is used in the Arabic text (יְהִי עַל), and he also adheres to the past tense where it is used in the source text.

Using past tense instead of present tense is also used in the Glorious Qur'an to indicate that the act in the past tense happens before or precedes that in the present

וּבַיּוֹם **נִסֵּיָר** הַجְּبָل וַتֵּרִי **אֲلֹرֶץ** בָּارֶזֶת **וְחَשְׁרַנְאָהָם** **فَلֹمְנַעֲדִין** מִنْهָם **אַחֲדًا** (الكهف، ٤٧).

בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר **נִعְתִּיק** אֶת הָרִים **וְתַرְאָה** אֶת הָרִץ חֹשֶׁפֶה וּ**נוֹאָסְפֶם** וְלֹא **נִعְזֹוב** מֵהֶם אַף אַחֲרֵי

English translation. 'Beware of' the Day We **will blow** the mountains away, and you will see the earth laid bare. And We **will gather** all 'humankind', leaving none behind. Sura 18: The Cave (al-Kahf:47)

**Analysis.** The phrase (we assembled\gathered them) is in the past tense after a present tense (we blow away\ remove). This is to indicate that Allah will gather people before removing and blowing mountains and hills away. This is done in order to witness those great horrors, as if it were said: 'We gathered them before that'.

Therefore, past tense denotes preceding actions rather than present tense

Khattab uses future tense for both verbs; ‘will blow’, and ‘will gather’. It is clearly deviation from the function of the past tense used in the verse in Arabic.

#### **4. Using Imperative Tense Instead of Present Tense**

This shift means the shift from the present to the imperative.

قوله تعالى: (قُلُّوا يَا هُودُ مَا جِئْنَا بِيَتْنَةٍ وَمَا تَحْنُّ بِتَارِكِي الْهَيْتَنَا عَنْ قَوْلِكُ وَمَا تَحْنُّ لَكُ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ \* إِنْ تَقُولُ إِلَّا اعْتَرَكَ بَعْضُ الْهَيْتَنَا بِسُوءِ قَالَ إِنِّي أُشَهِّدُ اللَّهَ وَأَشْهَدُوْا أَنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ) هود: ٥٤-٥٣

אמרו: هو הוד! לא הבאת לנו הוכחה ואיננו עובי אלוהנו למען דבריך ואינו לך מאמינים איננו אומרים אלא פגע בכך אחת אלוהינו לרע אמר הנני מעיד עלי את אלה והעידו כי הנני נקי مما שאותם משתפים "

English translation. Sura 11: Hud: verse 53-54. They argued, "O Hûd! You have not given us any clear proof, and we will never abandon our gods upon your word, nor will we believe in you. (53) All we can say is that some of our gods have possessed you with evil." He said, "**I call Allah to witness, and you too bear witness,** that I [totally] reject whatever you associate (54)

Hassan Tabl, (1998, p. 84), indicates that this verse tells what Hud, peace be upon him, had said to his people in response to their denial of him, their mockery of him, and their false claim that he had insulted their gods.

**Analysis.** The verse includes a change from the present tense form, ‘**I call Allah to witness**’, to the imperative form, ‘**you too bear witness**’: The present tense comes at first in addressing Allah, “**I call Allah to witness**”, then, A shift to the imperative happens when the speaker addresses his people, ‘**you too bear witness**’.

This shift suits turning from addressing Allah to commanding people. In general, using commands when addressing God is not proper at all, unless it is used for paying to Him. On the other side, it is not proper to call the nonbelievers to witness something as they are assumed to be unreliable. In addition, it can be considered a way of mocking the unbelievers and defying their will by using a command of testimony. Therefore, commands and imperatives are more proper for them. It is used to request not to call. This purpose is confirmed by Abdel-Haleem, (1992, p. 423), as he has argued that a shift to the imperative highlights a requested act, especially

from the indicative mood. Or it is used to mock the unbelievers' will to defeat his call. (Hassn Tabl, 1998, p. 84).

Thus, shift from the present tense to the imperative tense is necessary in this context as a request or in order to highlight the vast gap between the two testimonies and to indicate that the second of them is not a real testimonial, and that Hud, peace be upon him, commanded them to do it as a way of mocking them and defying their will.

This is to highlight the vast gap between the witnesses; God's call is true, proven and firm based on belief and certainty, however, their testimony is not real, but rather a form of irony, sarcasm and challenge\defiance of their will. In fact, he, Hud, wants to command his people to bear witness against themselves. It is nothing but complacency in their religion and an indication of their lack of care for them only. This assures irony and ability to argue for his debate. It is a strong challenge on the part of the Prophet Hud. He highlights the present tense that explains the honor, power and greatness of God, and then switching to the command form denoting meanness, and invalidating their humiliating position.

Khattab uses the present tense in addressing Allah, "إِنَّى أُشْهِدُ اللَّهَ، I call Allah to witness", then, he shifts to the imperative when addressing the people of Hud, "وَأَشْهُدُكُمْ، you too bear witness". Then, Khattab applies the tense used in the Arabic text employing tense shift to achieve some of the preceding stated rhetorical functions and purposes.

Al-Adawy has realized the shift from the present to the imperative too. Thus, he first uses the present verb "הָנַן מִיעֵד" and second, shifts to the imperative, "עִידוּ".

### Findings and Discussion

Shifts of verb-tenses in the Qur'anic text are among the most prominent, frequent, functional, pragmatic and stylistic issues in the Qur'anic expression. Findings show that Tense-shifts occur in the Qur'anic text frequently and have prominent functional purposes that require further research. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that tense shift exists in Arabic, English and Hebrew. In addition, tense shift has its related important functions and rhetorical purposes. These findings are consistent with that of Abdel-Haleem (1992) who asserts that change to a present tense helps the readers visualize the scene very precisely and recall the act and its features with extreme accuracy.

This part is categorized according to the order of the questions of the study. **For the first question: What are the rhetorical purposes and functions of the shifts of tenses in the Glorious Qur'an?** The results show the following.

1. The functions of using present tense instead of past tense are to:  
evoke the scene as if it were a clearly visible matter,  
denote renewal, as if it were a matter that its occurrence is renewed,  
invoke an important action to the minds as if it were happening at the moment,  
help the readers visualize the scene very precisely and recall the act and its features with extreme accuracy,  
focus rather on the arising results or consequences of an action,  
require considering the consequences, and indicating its occurrence,  
evoke contemplation,  
be in itself the subject of contemplation,  
help in representing situations with all its overflow of vitality, and strangeness,
2. The functions of using the present-tense is used instead of future-tense to:  
indicate an event that takes place immediately or in the future,  
perform rhetorical renewal and occurrence of an action,  
indicate continuity of an action; continues to exist,  
indicate the lengthening of the scene of the event,  
focus on the outcome\result of the event,  
indicate no doubt or hesitation,
3. The functions of using the shift from the present-tense to the past is almost used to:  
indicate stability, and realization\achievement of an action  
indicate being inevitable event,  
indicate reduction and discontinuity according to the context involved,  
confirm that the state of action is achieved,  
indicate the speed of realization and verification of the occurrence of an action,  
indicate stable and fixed description,  
indicate demonstrating a desire for an action to occur,  
precede a present act, indicate being earlier,  
indicate a complete and confirmed action (happening in the future),
4. The functions of using the shift from the present-tense to the imperative-form is mostly used to:  
be considered a way of mocking,

highlight a requested act,  
defeat others' call, a way of challenge

**For the second question: What determines the functions associated with tense-shifts?** The results show the following.

This study confirms that the functions of tense shift are associated largely with context of the text. Not only this, but tense-shifts are used according to the context. Context is crucial and plays an important source of information in interpreting the verses' functions and rhetorical purposes. The context is what determines the appropriate form concerning the tense of the verbs. One needs to study situations before translating verb tenses in the Qur'anic text. Therefore, considering the specific context of a verse, and the general context of the Glorious Qur'an, are important elements in arriving at the secret or function of shifts in the tenses used. Thus, a translator, besides being proficient in both languages, can render these shifts into English or Hebrew in a proper way.

**For the third question: Were these functions and the related forms rendered to English and Hebrew successfully and similarly or not.** The study ends up with several findings and results.

In general, Khattab's and Al-Adawy's translations are successful regarding rendering tenses and tense-shifts into English and Hebrew. There are some shortcomings. Yet, they, at many times, achieve the required tense-shifts in their translations under this study. However, it should be pointed out that the functional purposes of the shift in tenses, sometimes, do not appear in their translations. This, perhaps, because Arabic is different in nature in certain stylistic aspects and features. The process depends on the competence of the translators in both languages too.

A major finding is that Hebrew translation keeps the same form of the verbs of the source text concerning tense shift. However, the English one does not. One of the most noticeable findings is that Khattab fails to translate past tense forms into past while there is a shift from past to present in the source text. This could not render the functions of the past-form which are complete and clearly achieved acts. Changes to present-tense instead of past-tense, to present-tense instead of future-tense, to past-tense instead of present-tense, and to imperative-tense instead of present-tense are less used by Khattab in rendering the verses under this study into English. In contrast to this, Al-Adaway keeps the forms of tenses

where Khattab does not. A major cause for this is the similarity between Arabic and Hebrew.

The second result is that generally Khattab uses future tense instead of using the past that is used in the source text. Doing so, he does not realize the inevitable future event indicated by the use of the past-tense form. Again, Al-Adawey uses tense-shift as it is used in the source text.

The research has also shown that Khattab has achieved the meaning of renewal and continuity, yet he again failed to achieve and confirm that something did already happen (using present instead of the past used in the source text). However, Al-Adawey adheres to the source text concerning tense shift and affirms that the act happened previously. Concerning the shift from present to imperative form, both Khattab and Al-Adawy apply the tense used in the Arabic text employing tense shift.

Then, this paper has argued that Khattab and Al-Adawy's translations of some verses into English and Hebrew indicate major differences concerning uses of tense shift. This study has shown that Al-Adawy's translation keeps tense shift as used in Arabic. On the contrary, Khattab's translation differs. This is perhaps due that Arabic is more similar to Hebrew rather than to English. Or it is perhaps a result of the existence of many tenses in English that are not found in Hebrew. Or it is perhaps due to incompetence knowledge on the part of the translator in terms of tense shift. For the last possible reason, the study shows that a very clear reason for the unsuccessful translation of the Qur'anic text, concerning tense shift, is not due to a deficiency in the language to which the Qur'anic text is rendered, but rather due to a failure on the part of the translator himself; incomplete understanding of the context, functions, or purposes and incomprehensive knowledge of interpretation and commentary lead to fail in translating the right tense that achieves the required\desired function. The translators' abilities vary in dealing with the Qur'anic text at the vocabulary level (the lexical equivalent) and at the morphological structure in terms of diversity between the subject's noun and verb forms, such as converting a noun into a verb or gerund for example.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

Some implications and findings are:

There are two problems of translation for which solutions should be sought; language competence and knowledge of the functions of

the linguistic devices such as tense-shift. This is, perhaps, the most obvious finding to arise from the above discussion. A translator is committed to be competent in both languages related to a translation, especially in religious translation.

Another important matter that determines meaning and function of a tense-shift is context; the situation and all surrounded details. A translator should take a special care of context that is related to tense-shifts when rendering verses of the Glorious Quran. This study suggests that translators of the Glorious Quran need to study and read about tense-shifts and the associated functions and pragmatic purposes before they proceed in translating this holy text.

If translators take the preceding implications in consideration, they will achieve precise translated texts which will surely render the true rhetorical purposes and functions of the source text. Then, the process of rendering\translation develops, and the readers of the rendered texts get the true meanings and functions that are similar to a great extent to those in the source texts.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Having discussed the topic of tense shift in some translated verses into English and Hebrew, yet several questions still remain to be answered. The following are some recommendations for further research.

- 1- Addressing tense-shifts in other translations of the Glorious Qur'an.
- 2- Studying aspects other than tense-shifts, perhaps lexical, syntactic, or pragmatic aspects, in the two translations of this study; namely Khattab's (2016) and Al-Adawy's (2013).
- 3- Studying other shifts, regarding nouns-verbs, verbs-nouns, gerunds-verbs, gerunds-nouns or even prepositional phrases in rendering the Glorious Qur'an into English and Hebrew.
- 4- Addressing the functions of tense-shifts in English and Hebrew languages.

These four points would be fruitful areas for further work.

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