



Semantic adjustment in Matthew 6:12 in the Smith-Van Dyck Arabic Bible



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Dates:

Received: 18 Mar. 2023 Accepted: 08 Aug. 2023 Published: 17 Nov. 2023

How to cite this article:

Yahya, Y.K., Afandi, Z. & Burdah, I., 2023, 'Semantic adjustment in Matthew 6:12 in the Smith-Van Dyck Arabic Bible', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(2), a8693. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8693

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This research focused on one of the messages in the Lord's Prayer, particularly Matthew 6:12 about prayer for forgiveness and forgiveness to others in order to suggest a concept revision for the sake of a rather normative modern Arabic audience. In the Smith-Van Dyck version, asking God for forgiveness serves as the basis for forgiving sinners by using the present and future form of the verb نففر کما (as we will forgive). This translation is in contrast to 1881 Jesuit Arabic Bible, which used the past tense غفرنا کما and عفین الله (as we have forgiven) as written in the Greek Bible as ὀφειλήματα `debts' by referring to the debt metaphor. This study examined the Arabic translation of Matthew 6:12 in the perspective of Nida and Taber's semantic adjustments. In light of the research findings, it was clear that the semantic adjustment and grammatical adjustment in the translation did not run on the grammatical structure of the Arabic language. The translation into Arabic also did not comply with the original source of the text, but it was accentuated by the interpretation of 'debts' into 'sins'.

Contribution: In conclusion, this fact can be seen from the choice of the word ' $\dot{\dot{}}$ ' and the use of the future tense ($fi'l mu d\bar{a}r'i$) as opposed to the source text that uses the past tense ($fi'l m\bar{a}dy$).

Keywords: Arabic Bible; semantic adjustment; translation; Lord's Prayer; Smith-Van Dyck.

Introduction

The Middle East has been recorded as the first region to receive the Bible teaching on Pentecost Day as set out in Acts 2:8–11 (Bailey 2008:12–13; Ruck 2011:11). The diocese located in Antioch is a centre for evangelising non-Jews. This diocese, along with the dioceses of Rome and Alexandria, became the three archbishops recognised at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD (Ruck 2011:13). This lasted until the biggest schism in 1054 occurred between the Church of Rome and Constantinople which was called the 'East-West Schism' (Michel 2001:91; Ruck 2011:89–90).

The Eastern churches were also the most successful churches in missions before the 14th century AD or before the Catholic-Colonial movement came to power (Thompson 2018:187). However, along with the development of the churches in the Western World and the development of Islam in this region, there had been declining influence of Christianity as the increasingly powerless minority. In addition to being a minority group, they have also become a minority in terms of liturgical language. Arabic is identical to Islam and Hebrew is closely related with Judaism, while Christianity does not have its own liturgical language. This is what makes them often referred to as 'the forgotten faithful' (Bailey 2008:9; Michel 2001:15).

The Bible that becomes the object of this research is the Smith-Van Dyck Arabic Bible. This Bible is a translation of the Bible in the 19th century AD by American missionaries initiated by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). This Bible was first published in 1865 in Beirut, which was the work of Dr Eli Smith and Dr Cornelius Van Dyck. In its development, this Bible is the most widely spread Arabic Bible in the Arab-Speaking Christian Community and is considered the most perfect and authoritative translation (Sharkey 2017:205; Somekh 1995:189). Because of this, it has become a reference in many liturgies of the Arab Christian community, including in the liturgy of the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is one of the most important prayers in the history of Christianity (Hammerling 2008). This prayer is known as the ideal patron prayer because it was taught by Jesus himself and is the crystallisation of the overall teachings of the Bible (Black 2018:xxi). This prayer is also considered as the prayer with the most perfect structure (Calvin 1845) and the greatest prayer (Crossan 2010; Dumitraşcu 2013) because it contains messages of the spirituality, theology and ecclesiology of the church (Gunawan 2015:380). Therefore, it is no exaggeration to consider this prayer as 'the pearl of great value' (Hammerling 2008). In the Calvinist tradition, this prayer is the main pillar in every

activity and the starting point in teaching the basic doctrines of the church (Bosch 2011; Thianto 2011). As Calvin and Martin Luther believed, it is important for Christians to listen to sermons, read the Bible, sing hymns and also pray in their own language (Thianto 2011). In addition, this prayer is the most commented on Bible text in the history of Christian literature (Lampe 1975). Therefore, in order to portray the theological development of Arab Christian society, the authors chose this prayer as a reflection of the translation of the Bible into Arabic. Apart from being written in the Bible, this prayer has also been transformed into various forms, including the digital versions. Some of the widely accessed digital version of this prayer is the official website of the Coptic denomination in Egypt (St-Takla n.d.), on the Jesusfilm.org video in the modern standard Arabic version (Jesus Film Project n.d.), as well as videos on the YouTube channel (St Luke's Kentish Town 2017). Of the three media, all refer to the Van Dyck 1865 version of the translation.

The translation of the Smith-Van Dyck Bible (SVD) version has several differences from other Arabic translations. One of the stark differences is in verse 12, which is written in the SVD Bible as follows:

'waghfir lanā żunūbanā kamā naghfiru nahnu ayḍan li almużnibīna ilaynā'

While in *al-Kitab al-Muqaddas al-Thib'ah al-Yasu'iyyah* (Jesuit Arabic Bible/JAB), it is written as follows:

'wa'finā mimmā 'alaynā, faqod a'faynā nahnu ayḍan man lanā 'alayh'

It is clear from the translation that the SVD Bible translation refers to fi'l muḍari' (present tense) in the expression of verse 12, namely 'كما نغفر نحن أيضا' means `like we will forgive too`. Meanwhile, the translation in JAB uses fi'l maḍy (past tense), namely 'نقد أعفينا نحن' which means `as we have forgiven'. The different choice of words can lead to diverse interpretations of the concepts of apology and forgiveness.

On this basis, this research aims to analyse the quality of the translation of the Van Dyck 1865 Bible by referring to the guidance provided by Nida and Taber in the form of semantic adjustments as a translation guide (Nida & Taber 1982). According to them, the rendering of the source text into the target text is often hampered by non-equivalence that gives rise to misconceptions about the discourse in the verse. A translator is required to comply with two aspects: keeping the contents of the message intact and presenting the complete structure of the translated result as in the source language. The first option will result in a contextual translation that changes structure of the source text in order to maintain the intended message, while the second option will produce a translation that has the potential for 'loss of

semantics' because of the difference between the source language and the target language. Therefore, they formulate the process and results of translation into two classifications, namely the translation process with semantic adjustments and the translation process with structural adjustments with their respective advantages and disadvantages. This guidance, based on both semantical and grammatical adjustments, underlies the research approach in analysing the results of the translation of the text to find out the quality of Van Dyck's translation. This analysis also helps researchers place these two translations into translations with formal or dynamic equivalence as translating the Bible into other languages (Luthy 2021).

Literature review

Research on the Lord's Prayer with language and cultural approaches has been widely carried out. These studies analyse the prayer from various approaches, such as historical, linguistic, translation and cultural approaches. One of the most comprehensive studies of the Lord's Prayer was conducted by Dobschütz (1914), which described the translation of the prayer from Greek into English. He also explained about the content analysis of the Lord's Prayer and compared the contents of these prayers found in the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke, even the Gospel of Marsion and other texts. From a historical standpoint, Clark (2014) conducted research on the diachronic and synchronic Our Father's Prayer from the Jewish prayer tradition, which was later adopted into Christian rituals. Clark (2016) completed his research by comparing the changes and refinements of the Lord's Prayer since the 1st century of Christianity in Palestine and later in the Deuteronomistic period. He also compared the contents of the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke and the Gospels of the Didache and used Tertullian's perspective in interpreting them. That research completed Bahr's research (Bahr 1965) and Hammerling's research (2008) in analysing the use of this prayer in primitive churches as well as ancient churches in Asia.

Research conducted from a linguistic point of view includes various approaches and branches of linguistics. Lanier tries to analyse the text with a thematic approach and semantic structure in the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew (Lanier 1992). Similar research using a sociolinguistic approach to find the true message and meaning of the prayer was conducted by Ong (2013). Meanwhile, Robbins analysed the text in the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Mormon using a socio-rhetorical interpretation, which starts from the texture in the text, the inter-texture with Hebrew and Aramaic sources, to the cultural and social texture of the text to find out the ideological texture of the text (Robbins 1995). That research also inspired Dumitra cu to see the spirituality of the Eastern church in the prayer to understand the message conveyed in the culture where Jesus and the Apostles lived (Dumitraşcu 2013). Research based on Semitic cultural views in understanding the message contained in the prayer and the context when Jesus taught

the prayer to his followers was also carried out by Bailey using ethnographic studies and Arabic sources, as a language that is allied with Aramaic and Hebrew (Bailey 2008). Rahardi offered a more comprehensive approach than just a linguistic approach through a pragmalinguistic approach to the phatic particles in the prayer. From his research, he concluded that the prayer contains phatic particles, consisting of the meaning of request, supplicating, hoping and begging. This interpretation helps Christians understand the prayer better (Rahardi 2014).

Another approach that is widely used in understanding this prayer is the translation approach. This prayer is one of the universal prayers taught and practised by many Christians around the world. Therefore, translation into the local languages of these adherents becomes urgent (Thianto 2011). Wendland, who researched processes of oral-based translation into the Chewa language in Africa, put forward an approach using poeticising (Wendland 2012). Meanwhile, Ekem analysed how the translation was carried out by Jacobus Capitein in conveying the Lord's Prayer into the Mfantse language used in Ghana. The research shows that in the translation process, Capitein used a local language-based hermeneutical approach for ease of understanding of the local Christians (Ekem 2007). Research on translation into Ghanaian also involves an approach to the Ghanaian cultural context, as was done by Wandusim with a historical-reception study (Wandusim 2022). In the Asian context, the translation of the prayer into Malay in the early 17th century was addressed by Thianto (2011), while the translation into Indonesian was raised by Galingging (2014).

This research particularly addressed the translation quality of the Bible into Arabic and the acceptability of Van Dyck's translation of the 1865 Bible. Grafton, who conducted research on the quality of the translation after more than a century, denoted that this version of the translation is still dominantly used in Arab Christian communities (Grafton 2015). On the other hand, Hjälm, who analysed the translation of 1 Ezekiel in 5 unpublished Arabic Christian manuscripts between the 9th and 14th centuries AD, which came from the Syriac language Peshitta, highlighted that the oldest version of the translation was dominated by literal translation, while in the newer version it had more additions and comments to clarify the narrative in the Bible (Hjälm 2016). In the translation process, Hjälm also found that in the early translation of the Bible into Arabic (around 9th century AD), some translations deliberately used sentence structures and some 'typical' Islamic vocabulary to show the Bible's ability to absorb Islamic messages in Christian dogma (Hjälm 2018). Her research confirms that there are differences in the orientation of the translation process in that range. Initially, the former translation focused on the literal aspect (prioritising the structure of the text), but the later version of translations emphasised semantic accuracy. Furthermore, Gibson et al., who conducted research using historical analysis of the period of translation and methods of translating the Bible into Arabic from the 9th century AD to

the modern century (Gibson et al. 2018), articulated that in the translation process, translators used various methods considered the most accurate, acceptable and readable by native speakers. This research also reinforced Kashouh's research, which mapped Arabic Bible manuscripts from the 8th to 19th centuries (Kashouh 2012).

The Bible translations into Arabic are also examined in accordance with the political interests of the ruling powers. One of them is the research conducted by Heather J. Sharkey regarding the Arabic Bible in Sudan, which succeeded in showing the relationship between Bible translation in Sudan and British colonial interests. Because of the dominance of political interests in the translation, this research is considered a failure in translating the holy book definitively and in a balanced way (Sharkey 2011). This research also confirms previous research conducted by Jacquemond (1992), which stated that the process of translation from French to Arabic was influenced by the French cultural hegemony.

Given the aforementioned previous studies, this research aims to refine the discussion about the Arabic Bible by selecting this particular prayer because of the widely held assumption by Christian believers that it was taught by Jesus to his followers that is recorded in the Bible. Thus, it is of great interest to know how this prayer was and is perceived and transmitted in Arabic, which makes it necessary to study the translated version into Arabic, particularly in terms of its accuracy, acceptability and readability in Arabic-speaking communities through Arabic grammatical structure. Furthermore, this research also tries to suggest a concept revision for the sake of a rather normative modern Arabic audience.

Methods

Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the researchers collected data from library sources, namely the Smith-Van Dyck Bible Arabic Translation 1865 and the Jesuit Arabic Bible 1881. From the two translations, the researchers examined the translation of Matthew 6:12 semantically by way of highlighting the choice of words used in the target language and found a form of adjustment in the translation of the SVD Bible based on Nida and Taber's theory of semantic and grammatical adjustment (Nida & Taber 1982).

Semantic and grammatical adjustment in Matthew 6:12 translation

In SVD, the word 'forgive' is translated as 'اغفر' and 'أغفينا' and 'أغفينا'.

While in the JAB, the word is translated as 'أعفينا' and 'أغفينا'.

In al-Mawrid's dictionary, Ba'albaki wrote that 'forgive' has an equivalent word in Arabic with the word 'forgive' and 'أغد (Baalbaki & Baalkbaki 2008:455). Lexically, Ibn Mandzur stated that 'غفر' means 'to cover up the sins and mistakes that have been made' (Ibn Mandzur n.d.:3273), while the word 'defined refers to 'removing sins and mistakes and setting

them free'. However, it is noteworthy that Ibn Mandzur also wrote down the meaning of the word as 'برأه', which means 'to set it free' (Ibn Mandzur n.d.:3018).

Louis Ma'luf Al-Yasu'i, from the Jesuit school, in his dictionary al-Munjid had an opinion on these two words by articulating that in some contexts, the two are synonymous. However, several contexts may differentiate between the two. Al-Yasu'i defined 'نعن 'as 'taking away sins and leaving punishment for him'. In other forms' عنه 'also means 'to leave and set him free' (Al-Yasū'I 2015:517). Regarding the word 'غنر', al-Yasu'i defined it as 'covering [sins] and forgiving them' (Al-Yasū'I 2015:555).

At first glance, the lexical difference between the two is not much significant. However, al-'Askary provided a striking difference between the two terms by pronouncing that 'غفر' demands the elimination of punishment forsins and the awarding of rewards to the perpetrators. Therefore, he specialised the use of the word only for vertical relations, especially in the relationship between God and His servants or between master and servant. In other words, he placed this term as one of the attributes possessed by God. On the other hand, the word 'فع' denotes the elimination and forgiveness of mistakes and does not require the provision of rewards. Therefore, this word can be used in horizontal relations between humans, although both of these words have a synonymous relationship when the subject is God. When God forgives in the context of 'عفا', at the same time God also performs forgiveness in the context of 'غفر' (Al'Askary 1997:235-236).

The definition given by al-'Askary about the difference between the two words indirectly agrees with the interpretation of al-Yasu'i and JAB who used the word 'and 'أغفينا' in the translation of Matthew 6:12. They also avoided using the word 'غفر' in human relations. The same thing was also affirmed by Ba'albaki in al-Mawrid that the word 'أعفا' is also used in the context of forgiveness of debts (Baalbaki & Baalkbaki 2008:455) or amnesty (Baalbaki 1987:771). The choice of words also refers to the original text in the English version of the King James Version (KJV). In the KJV, the context of asking for forgiveness is release from debt ('And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors'). The translation is classified as a literal translation of the Greek version, which also has the context of forgiveness of debts (ὀφειλήματα). This word 'ἄφες' has several different translations into English. The word can be translated as 'to let go' (Mt 27:50), 'release' (Jn 11:48), or 'remit, cancel, pardon' (Mt 18:27, Lk 12:10, Rm 4:7 and 1 Jn 2:12) (Black 2018:163). According to Black, one of the differences in the context of the word affects its meaning. In Matthew 6:12, the request for forgiveness is made after they have confessed to forgiveness even if they were forced to as expressed by 'ἀφήκαμεν' 'we have forgiven'. This expression is different as it is written in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer that when they ask for forgiveness, at the same time they forgive those who

sin against them, which is expressed by 'ἀφίομεν' 'we (are) forgiving' (Black 2018:164).

The researchers try to explore several interpretations related to this verse from several priests of the Arabic church. Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, a priest from the Coptic Church, exerted several opinions of Eastern church fathers about the verse. Al-Ab Ishak (Fr. Isaac), one of the Church fathers explained that all humans have debts in the form of sins, not debts in the form of property and material things. After baptism, each individual has a debt in the form of sins. This is not because baptism does not wash away all sins but rather because after being baptised, humans cannot be separated from sins, both small and big, and thus they need forgiveness in their daily lives (Malaty 1982:140–141).

St. Augustine also shared a similar interpretation by mentioning that the prayer for forgiveness was mentioned after the prayer asking for sufficient food. This fact indicates that whoever asks God must live in Him. Therefore, one should always wish for the happiness of this worldly life and the life after death. Happiness in life after death cannot be achieved except by God's forgiveness of the sins that humans commit. Therefore, Jesus gave an example as a debt. This example is also reinforced in His words in Matthew 18:32 that He will forgive the debts of His servants if they ask for it (Malaty 1982:141).

This is also emphasised by Watson in seeing the relationship between debt and sin. The similarity between the two lies in two things. Firstly, debt arises because there are other parties rights that have not been fulfilled. In the relationship between humans and God, humans are indebted to God in the form of proper obedience. Human actions that do not show obedience will leave dependents in debt to God. Secondly, when a debtor cannot pay his debt by the specified time limit, he will be punished. As for humans, as long as they are in debt and sins, they are bound by their obligation to pay debts or ask for forgiveness for their sins. Until the end of a human's life, if they do not pay off the debt, they will not survive the life after death (Watson 1960:183–184).

The similarities between debt and sin can also be seen in the comparison of the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. In the same passage of prayer, Luke's Gospel directly mentions the prayer for forgiveness of sins (ἀμαρτίας 'sins'), in contrast to Matthew's mention of debt (ὀφειλήματα). In the Gospel of Luke, God's plea for forgiveness rests on the behaviour of those who have released those who owe them (Robbins 1995). When reviewing the translation of Matthew 6:12 in the SVD Bible version, the translation does not refer directly to the original text as written in the KJV and Greek versions. Instead of translating with debt, Van Dyck translated directly with sin without using debt metaphors, so that the prayers and requests that are delivered are related to human sin. This translation model is consistent with Luke 11:4 in the SVD Bible, so that both of them talk about sin. This is what makes the word forgive in Matthew 6:12 translated to 'عفر' followed by 'ننوبنا' 'our sins' in SVD Bible.

The SVD Bible also indirectly rejects the distinction between 'غفر' and 'أغفر' as mentioned by al-'Askary who takes the context of the use of these two words in the Qur'an. This also strengthens the argument that the SVD Bible does stay away from phrases and expressions in the Koran (Somekh 1995:189). The avoidance of using 'typical' Muslim phrases and expressions in the Qur'an is because of two reasons. Firstly, they need a translation of the Bible that can be accepted and understood by all people, both those who are theologically educated and those who are still lay people. Secondly, they need a clear separation and distance from the phrases and styles of the Qur'an. They prefer to include phrases and terms from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek as specific Arabic Christian terms as well as identity markers (Hjälm 2018; Somekh 1995:190–191).

In this translation, the SVD Bible shows a semantic adjustment, namely in the translation of 'forgive' and 'debts' into Arabic. The adjustment is a change of idiom from the original language into another idiom of the target language. These adaptations are also used to provide a clear explanation of what is meant by these words without using metaphors or idioms (Nida & Taber 1982:109).

Another thing that needs further attention is the use of different verbs in translating 'as we forgive our debtors' into Arabic. In this petition, after asking God for forgiveness, Jesus taught us to start by forgiving others. The SVD Bible translates the clause as 'لكما نغفر نحن أيضا للمذنبين البنا 'لما المذنبين البنا كما نغفر نحن أيضا من لنا عليه'. The first translation used fi'l mudāri' (present tense) while the second translation used fi'l mādi (past tense).

In Arabic grammatical structure, the use of verbs is closely related with the time period of the activity. This opinion is corroborated by various opinions of Arabic linguists such as Sibawaich, Ibn al-Siraj, al-Zujaji, al-Zamakhsyari, Ibn Ya'isy, Abu Hayyan and Al-Radhi al-Astarbady. These experts argued that the verb (fi'l) in Arabic always refers to a certain time and place. The period of time in Arabic is inseparable into three types, namely the past, present and future (Al-Manshouri 2002:33; Sahen 2021:181–202). Furthermore, Abdu al-Hadi al-Fadly stated that fi'l has three roles, namely a semantic role, a morphological role and a syntactic role. One of the morphological roles of fi'l is to indicate the time when an activity occurs (Al-Fadly 1982; Jalul 2015).

Fi'l muḍāri' essentially refers to the work that takes place in the present and the future. Al-Daim mentioned several conditions in which fi'l muḍāri' refers to one of the two periods. Among the conditions that ensure that the fi'l refers to a future event is when it becomes the predicate of a predetermined job or when it is mentioned in a prayer (Abd al-Daim 2012). Conversely, fi'l māḍy refers to work done in the past or the time before the sentence was uttered. Arabic linguists such as Sibawaich, Ibn Jinni, Ibn Ya'isy and al-Radhi agree that the meaning indicated in fi'l māḍy refers to the period before the pronunciation, as long as there are no indications and explanations that the work was carried out in the present or the future (Al-Asady & Al-Azzawy 2018).

Because of the differences between the two fi'ls, the differences in translation are worthy of discussion. Prayer as written in Matthew 6:12 is the only prayer in the Lord's Prayer where human testimony is paired with divine action (Black 2018). Crossan mentioned that the verse is not a comparison 'as God forgives, so we also have to forgive' but a condition 'God will only forgive us, if we give forgiveness' (Crossan 2010:160) or also means as a consequence 'as a result of forgiving others, we ask You God to forgive us' (Black 2018:179). Therefore, in the JAB Bible, the use of fi'l māḍy pinpoints that 'because we have forgiven the debts of our neighbors, we ask for forgiveness from God'. The meaning contained in the translation is in line with the message conveyed by the verse as the interpretation of this verse. This is clarified again with Matthew 6:14-15 where it is indicated that God will only forgive those who are willing to forgive or release their brother's debts.

However, in the SVD Bible, this verse is translated using fi'l muḍāri', thereby leading to an interpretation as 'just as we will also forgive those who sin against us'. This translation implies that forgiveness from God is a requirement in granting forgiveness to fellow human beings. In fact, refusal to forgive and forget is a sin and human debt to God. As mentioned earlier, it is this debt that must be paid off by humans in order to achieve eternal happiness.

The two translations indicate that the translation of the Bible into Arabic does not always comply with the Arabic grammatical rules as understood by the public. In the context of Bible translation, the SVD version used a formal equivalence approach or focuses on word-by-word translation into Arabic. The JAB version used a functional equivalence approach adapted to the rules of the Arabic language (Luthy 2021). In addition to choosing an appropriate vocabulary, the use of verbs in the translation of Matthew 6:12 also shows the need for structural adjustments as mentioned by Nida and Taber, especially in word structure, particularly in Arabic verb structure (Nida & Taber 1982).

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the results of the translation of the SVD Bible have applied some adjustments that refer to the interpretation in Matthew 6:12. The results of the semantic adjustment and grammatical adjustment in the translation do not comply with the rules and grammatical structure of the Arabic language. The translation into Arabic also does not fully render the original text but made some adjustments by interpreting 'debts' as 'sins'. In addition, this can be seen from the choice of words 'sisis' as well as the use of verbs in the future form for source language texts that use the past tense. Therefore, in the translation of this verse, the quality of the SVD Bible translation as seen in Matthew 6:12 has a lower level of accuracy and legibility than modern standard Arabic translations.

This research was limited merely to translation of one verse of Arabic Bible. Further researches on this topic are suggested to examine some verses that are central to theological issues and raise issues related to the relationship between Jewish culture as the culture of the Bible's audience and the text. In addition, future researchers also need to analyse the relationship between language and culture, the ideology of the translator, as well as the translation techniques used in translating the various verses.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education (LPDP) and Postgraduate Program Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University for supporting the implementation of this research. The results of this study are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Y.K.Y., Z.A. and I.B. contributed to the implementation of the research, the analysis of the results and the writing of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research was funded by the Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education (LPDP), Ministry of Finance of Republic of Indonesia.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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