| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Translating Divine Attributes: A Comparative Analysis of *Al-Aziz Al-Hakim* in Selected Qur'anic Translations

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| **ABSTRACT**

Translating divine attributes from the Qur'an into English Qur'an translation involves decisions shaped by theological, linguistic, and contextual considerations. The pair العزيز الحكيم (*Al-Aziz Al-Hakim*) appears exactly 47 times in the Qur'an. This paper investigates M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's context-sensitive translations regarding these specific attributes. Most often, "the power to decide," "the Exalted, the Decider," "the Mighty, the One to Decide," and "the Well-Informed Judge." Other modern translators, like Mustafa Khattab and Musharraf Hussain, consistently employ "the Almighty, All-Wise" and "the Almighty, the Wise," respectively. Using Vermeer and Reiß's (2013) Skopos theory as a guiding theoretical framework, this paper examines Abdel Haleem's context-sensitive translation approach, exploring why and how the translation purpose and audience affect translation decisions. The findings indicate that 44 instances are rendered identically by Abdel Haleem, whereas three use context-driven variants. This suggests that variation is intentional and reflects a functionalist translation strategy rather than inconsistency. Khattab and Hussain's translations are consistent in translating the two attributes. Both of them put more emphasis on uniformity and doctrinal clarity over context-based variation.

| **KEYWORDS**

Translation; divine attributes; Skopos; Qur'anic verses; context-sensitive translations; Al-Aziz Al-Hakim

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

Translating the divine names (Asma' Al-Husna) presents significant challenges due to their theological depth and linguistic precision. Each attribute carries nuanced meanings rooted in Islamic theology and the Arabic language traditions. *Al-Aziz Al-Hakim* is a combination of two divine attributes: *Al-Aziz*, referring to might, power, and exaltation, emphasising God's absolute authority and majesty; and *Al-Ḥakim*, highlighting wisdom, justice, and the ability to judge decisively and rightly. The pair of divine names appears together 47 times at the end of the verses, and in all cases, the attribute Al-Aziz precedes Al-Hakim. According to Ibn Kathir (1999), Al-Aziz denotes that the one for whom nothing is impossible, and He is capable of all things; *Al-Hakim* means He is the wise in His actions and words, He places things in their proper places; and His wisdom and justice. Ibn Ashur (1984, p. 378) adds that "Then He followed this with the attributes *Al-Aziz Al-Hakim*, because *Al-'Izzah* (Might) covers meanings of power and choice, while *Al-Ḥikmah* (Wisdom) includes meanings of complete and comprehensive knowledge."1

Scholars have examined the reasons behind the Qur'anic ordering of *Al-Aziz* (the Almighty) before *Al-Ḥakim* (the Wise), drawing several conclusions. Firstly, this order reflects logical reasoning, because recognising God's might and power logically precedes understanding His wisdom, given that power is immediately observable, whereas wisdom is discerned through deeper reflection. Furthermore, *Al-Aziz* pertains to attributes of God's essence, while *Al-Ḥakim* relates more to attributes expressed through divine

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actions. Finally, power signifies the means (creation), which inherently precedes wisdom, representing the ends or purposes behind these actions (Al-Othaim, 2020).

All 47 verses that contain the attribute pair *Al-Aziz Al-Hakim* have been collected, and I have identified them along with their corresponding English renderings. The focus was on examining the consistency and variation of translating the attribute pair. Abdel Haleem's translations of the two attributes exhibit significant variation, whereas translators such as Mustafa Khattab and Musharraf Hussain consistently employ fixed phrases. This paper presents three examples of Abdel Haleem's (2016) translation for each choice, where he translates the two attributes into four different translations: 44 times are translated as "the power to decide," however, the remaining three are translated differently as "the Exalted, the Decider," "the Mighty, the One to Decide," and "the Well-Informed Judge.". However, Mustafa Khattab (2019) and Musharraf Hussain (2018) consistently use "the Almighty, All-Wise" and "the Almighty, the Wise," respectively.

This paper employs Vermeer and Reiß's Skopos theory (2013) to analyse these differences, investigating how each translation's intended purpose and target audience influence its translation decisions. It argues that Abdel Haleem's variation approach is context-sensitive and strategic, rather than a fixed approach.

2. Theoretical Framework

Vermeer and Reiß's Skopos theory (1984/2013) argues that translation choices are primarily influenced by the intended purpose (Skopos) and the expectations of the target audience. Pym (2014) defines Skopos theory as "the set of propositions based on the idea that the target-side Skopos or purpose has priority in the translator's decisions." (p. 46) In the context of Skopos theory, "purpose" refers to the function of the translation. Therefore, the translator needs to adapt the source material to align with the purpose and expectations of the target audience, according to Skopos. It implies that translations may legitimately differ when purposes vary, such as clarity, readability, theological precision, ease of memorisation, doctrinal consistency, or interpretive depth. Thus, the objectives that translators aim to achieve from their interpretations guide their decisions. Accordingly, the theory justifies Abdel Haleem's departures from strict lexical repetition.

3. Analysis of Abdel Haleem's Translations

3.1 *"The Power to Decide"* (Q2:129)

(رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)

This translation stresses divine authority and decision-making, which aligns with the function of *Al-Ḥakim* as a just and wise ruler. In Q2:129, the two attributes conclude the supplications as a praise to the Almighty (Al-Razi, 1981). Al-Razi (1981, p. 60) emphasises that "*Al-Aziz* is the One who is able and not defeated; *Al-Hakim* is the One who is all-knowing and not ignorant of anything. If He is All-Knowing and All-Powerful, then whatever He does will be correct and free from futility and foolishness. If He were not like this, then the answering of supplications, the sending of messengers, and the revelation of the Book would not be valid from Him."

It is noteworthy that this translation is repeated 44 times, while the remaining three are translated differently, as presented in analyses 3, 4, and 5. Another example is (Q3:6 and 18). Al-Razi (1981) writes that *Al-Aziz* and *Al-Hakim* in Q3:6 achieve function, *Al-Aziz* signifies perfect power, while *Al-Hakim* represents perfect wisdom knowledge. It confirms what was mentioned in the previous verses: that Jesus' knowledge of some of the unseen, and his ability to give life and cause death in certain forms, is insufficient for him to be considered a god. The god must be perfect in power, which is *Al-Aziz*, and perfect in knowledge, which is *Al-Hakim*. In Q3:18, the two attributes follow the divinity because without them, the divinity is impossible (Al, Razi, 1981)

This choice, then, moves away from a strictly literal translation and instead focuses on a more functional approach that captures divine wisdom in governance. It also emphasises divine authority in decision-making, which is appropriate for verses highlighting God's sovereign governance.

3.2 *"The Exalted, the Decider"* (Q3:62)

(إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)

In this translation, the attribute *Al-Aziz* is rendered as "Exalted," highlighting divine transcendence, while the attribute *Al-Ḥakim* is translated as "Decider," emphasising God's ultimate judgment. Al-Razi (1981) and Abu Hayyan (1993) argue that these two attributes refute the suspicions of Christians who claim that Jesus is God, as they rely on two points. One is that he was able to revive the dead and heal the blind and the leper. The second is that they claimed he used to speak of the unseen and other matters. The verse implicitly refutes these claims and clarifies that divine attributes must include absolute power (*Izza, i.e.* the

adjective of *Aziz*) and absolute wisdom (*Hikma i.e.* the adjective of *Hakim*), neither of which fully applies to Jesus according to even the claims made about him by Christians themselves.

The translation shows a contextual interpretation that underscores Allah's power over human disputes. The focus shifts to God's transcendence and final judgement in human conflicts, making sure that the translation's aim is aligned with theological clarity in conflictual contexts.

3.3 *"The Mighty, the One to Decide" (Q16:60)*

(لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ مَثَلُ السَّوْءِ وَلِلَّهِ الْمَثَلُ الْأَعْلَى وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)

This translation keeps the word "Mighty" for the attribute *Al-Aziz,* which preserves a more traditional meaning. For the attribute *Al-Hakim,* "The One to Decide," maintains the notion of divine judgment while avoiding the philosophical connotations associated with "wisdom."

Al-Tabari (1997) interprets this verse by assuring that Allah has complete power to punish polytheists and sinners; nothing can stop His will. He governs all creation wisely, without mistake or flaw. This translation emphasises divine might and definitive judgment in moral and ethical contexts, avoiding philosophical complexities.

3.4 *"The Well-Informed Judge" (Q34:27)*

(قُلْ أَرُونِيَ الَّذِينَ أَلْحَقْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)

In this verse, Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to challenge the polytheists by asking them to present proof of any partners or equals they have associated with Him. Ibn Kathir and Al-Tabari interpret this verse by stating that Allah firmly rejects the claims of polytheists, affirming that He has no equal or partner. Instead, He alone deserves worship, possessing ultimate power and absolute authority to punish those who commit shirk (polytheism). He governs His creation perfectly and wisely, without any mistakes (Ibn Kathir, 1999; Al-Tabari, 1997).

In this translation, the word "Judge" corresponds to the attribute Al-Ḥakim, which pertains to legal and judicial functions, while "Well-Informed" incorporates divine omniscience. This translation adopts a more explanatory approach, shedding light on implicit meanings. It makes the concepts of judicial authority and divine omniscience explicit, aligning with the purpose of educating and informing readers about God's all-encompassing knowledge.

4. Discussion

The analysis reveals that Abdel Haleem's translation exhibits significant variation, reflecting contextual nuances in the surrounding verses and thereby highlighting interpretative flexibility. In contrast, translators such as Mustafa Khattab and Musharraf Hussain maintain a consistent translation strategy, which indicates their preference for uniform doctrinal clarity and ease of recall for the audience. This paper applies Skopos theory to examine the differences, investigating how each translator's intended purpose and target readership influence their translation choices. It also presents three examples of Abdel Haleem's (2016) translation of each choice. Where he translates the two attributes to four different translations: "the power to decide," "the Exalted, the Decider," "the Mighty, the One to Decide," and "the Well-Informed Judge."

On the other hand, Khattab consistently translates the two attributes as "the Almighty, All-Wise." Furthermore, Musharraf Hussain consistently uses "the Almighty, the Wise." Both translators emphasise uniformity and theological clarity. These consistent translations suggest a purpose of prioritising uniform doctrinal expression and aiding memorisation and theological consistency, which is particularly beneficial for devotional and educational contexts. Nonetheless, their approach may overlook nuanced contextual meanings, while Abdel Haleem promotes a context-sensitive approach.

Abdel Haleem's variation in translation choices distinctly demonstrates his adherence to Skopos theory, which emphasises the importance of translating texts based on their intended purpose and audience. Abdel Haleem carefully adapts each translation to the unique theological and ethical contexts of specific verses, prioritising interpretative nuance and modern readability. His translations thus effectively capture and communicate complex ideas embedded within the original Arabic text, making them accessible and relevant to contemporary English-speaking readers. By intentionally shifting wording, Abdel Haleem emphasises subtle differences in emphasis, whether highlighting divine authority, wisdom, or judgement, depending on the textual context. This flexible, purpose-driven approach acknowledges and accommodates the diverse interpretative traditions within Islamic exegesis (Tafsir), thereby enhancing reader engagement and understanding. According to Al-Othaim, the arrangement and

contextual placement of these divine attributes in the Qur'an hold significant rhetorical and grammatical implications, which Abdel Haleem implicitly respects through his varied translations (Al-Othaim, 2020).

In summary, Abdel Haleem adopts a context-sensitive approach to translation. Rather than sticking to a single fixed translation, he translates this divine pair based on the surrounding verses. In contrast, Khattab and Hussain maintain a consistent translation philosophy that focuses on uniformity and doctrinal clarity, emphasising predictability and reader understanding. Nevertheless, this consistency may sacrifice the richness of contextual nuances.

5. Conclusion

Abdel Haleem's selective variation in translating *Al-Aziz Al-Hakim* exemplifies a functionalist, purpose-driven model aligned with perspectives of the Skopos theory. Instead of following a fixed translation, Abdel Haleem's decisions are influenced by contextual interpretation and readability considerations. This approach enhances understanding for contemporary readers but raises concerns regarding consistency and doctrinal accuracy. However, Khattab and Hussain's consistent method guarantees theological uniformity, though it may limit the interpretative depth.

Future studies should assess how these translation strategies affect reader understanding and perceptions among diverse audiences, such as Arabic-speaking scholars and English-speaking Muslims. The application of Skopos theory in Abdel Haleem's translation of *Al-Aziz Al-Hakim* demonstrates that variations in translation are intentional and influenced by context.

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