



Title: **Semantic-Literal Translation of Anthropomorphic Qur'ānic Verses:
An In-depth Rationale for Sheikh Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili's
Translation Approach in Tarjuman Al-Mustafid**

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Semantic-Literal Translation of Anthropomorphic Qur'ānic Verses: An In-depth Rationale for Sheikh Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili's Translation Approach in *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*

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Abstract

Texts related to anthropomorphism have been a subject of polemic. Additionally, these texts have become one of the main factors in shaping the sectarian landscape in the Muslim community. This polemic also influenced the Malay world of Nusantara. There were works by Malay scholars who directly engaged with texts related to anthropomorphism. In general, Ahl al-Sunnah holds that such texts can be dealt with through the methods of *ta'wīl* or *tafwīdh*. However, there are claims that the semantic-literal (SL) translation approach is not permissible because it is considered to liken Allah to created beings. The current qualitative study aimed to examine Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili's translation approach to the anthropomorphic verses in his *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*. Furthermore, the study also employed textual and thematic analysis. Data was extracted from 20 selected verses representing 11 anthropomorphic attributes. The findings revealed that Sheikh Abdul Rauf (d. 1693) applied a SL translation approach to a small number of Qur'ānic verses related to anthropomorphism. A literature review indicated that although this approach is not prioritized, it has a solid basis for practice. It aligns with the views of certain scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah, and has been practiced in the Nusantara by many figures. This approach also accommodates strategies for translating figurative language and the linguistic knowledge background of the Malay community. The study concluded that Sheikh Abdul Rauf (d. 1693) demonstrated intellectual maturity in filtering and selecting

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appropriate scholarly opinions rather than merely following popular views, while still preserving the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah among the general Malay Nusantara society.

Keywords: anthropomorphism, semantic-literal, translation, *tafwīdh*, *ta'wīl*

Introduction

The interpretation of texts, that outwardly ascribe anthropomorphic attributes to God, has been a subject of intense discussion since the early development of Islam. This issue is so controversial that it forms part of the basis for the differences and divisions among several schools of thought within Islamic theology.¹ The discourse on anthropomorphic texts among schools, such as the Ash'ari, Maturidi, and Hanbali can be considered to have reached maturity and clarity, with numerous writings and explanations documented on the subject. The Ash'ari school, for instance, adopts the approaches of *ta'wīl* (metaphorical interpretation) or *tafwīdh* (ascribing the meaning to God) for engaging with and understanding anthropomorphic texts. The Hanbali School, on the other hand, mandates *tafwīdh* only, except for certain texts that have been interpreted by earlier scholars.

Nevertheless, the aspect of translating these texts into the target language has become a point of contention. This is because the general non-Arab speaking public experiences a situation quite different from the context and target audience in religious works written in Arabic. They do not have the linguistic background knowledge of the primary and secondary meanings of the words or verses in Arabic that are the subject of discussion among theological scholars. The meanings of Arabic words or verses, whether primary or secondary, *haqiqa* (literal) or *majaz* (figurative), first, second, and third layers of meaning, or literal and functional meaning, do not even exist in their linguistic background knowledge. Moreover, it is difficult to explain and distinguish the literal and apparent meanings that are impossible for God, from the metaphorical and figurative meanings that are appropriate for God and consistent with the usage of the Arabic language and culture. Thus, the interaction with anthropomorphic verses among the general non-Arab speaking public is not fully representative of what is contained in the discussion of anthropomorphism in Arabic works. Instead, it has a unique approach that celebrates local characteristics and does not merely reproduce and apply a particular method or guideline.

The Malay community, known for its strong connection with religion, is also involved in the issue of the meaning of anthropomorphic verses. The chain of events can be seen in the writings of Nusantara scholars on this issue, especially in the field of theology. The work *Risalah Manhaj Ahli Sunnah*, written by a scholar known as Ayah Dir (d. 1991) (Abdul Qadir bin Wangah)², was prompted by the many questions seeking to understand the meaning and purpose regarding Taha 20:5.³ This directly illustrates the interaction of Malay scholars, particularly on how they explain and make anthropomorphic verses understandable to the general public who have no higher education in Arabic and religion. In addition to works related to theology, the translation of the Qur'an also provides an overview of how Nusantara scholars present and convey the meaning of anthropomorphic verses to the public. To understand how Nusantara scholars translate anthropomorphic verses, this study

¹Abdul Qahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq wa Bayan al-Firqah al-Najiyah* [The Difference Between the Sects and the Explanation of the Saved Sect] (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadidah, 1977), 6.

²Ayah Dir (Abdul Qadir bin Wangah) was a highly respected 20th-century traditional Islamic scholar renowned for his profound grasp of theology and his dedication to educating the Nusantara community. During this period, he authored *Risalah Manhaj Ahli Sunnah* as a crucial guide to help the contemporary lay public easily access and understand complex theological concepts without requiring advanced knowledge of Arabic.

³Abdul Qadir Wangah, *Risalah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah* [Treatise on the Methodology of the Ahl al-Sunnah] (Patani: Percetakan Saudara Press, n.d.), 1–2.

explored the approach of one of the Malay scholars from Aceh, Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili (d. 1693), in translating anthropomorphic verses for the reading of the Malay Archipelago community. The corpus of this study is his well-known work, *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*.

2. Literature Review

The translation of the Qur'ān is a complex and difficult endeavour. It constantly faces the need to preserve the linguistic structure of the text alongside the importance of ensuring that understanding can be carried across various cultures. Contemporary translation studies emphasize that the Qur'ān possesses a unique syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical style that makes it impossible to be translated absolutely and entirely.⁴ Consequently, translators often need to use translation shifts and contextual strategies to maintain the translation objectives and the theology of the text.⁵ Scholars generally categorize Qur'ān translation into literal and interpretive approaches.⁶ However, literal translation alone is often inadequate for conveying complex theological elements. It may lead to the risk of misrepresenting the meaning. The translation of sacred texts requires cultural, hermeneutical, and doctrinal sensitivity, which at present cannot yet be replaced by automated systems. This simultaneously necessitates the involvement of human experts in translation.⁷

To achieve equivalence of meaning, translators often use oblique strategies, such as modulation and explication. These strategies require reliance on reputable classical exegetical works.⁸ This strategy can be achieved through the domestication and foreignization frameworks by Lawrence Venuti. Through it, deep ideological foundations can be applied in translation. Nevertheless, a critical analysis by Mohamad and Sahad shows that excessive domestication approaches can compromise Islamic epistemology by imposing Judeo-Christian anthropomorphic narratives onto the Qur'ānic text. Conversely, the retention of foreign elements by Muslim translators successfully preserves the theological integrity of the Qur'ān.⁹ The use of translation techniques driven by ideological motives has also proven effective in regional languages. For instance, Tolaki and Sundanese translations

⁴Sultan Samah A. Almjlad., "Semantic Untranslatability in Quranic Discourse: Challenges and Contextual Remedies in English Translation," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2025): 3–5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2542336>; Ali Mohammed Saleh Al-Hamzi, "Translation Shifts of Quranic Conjunctive Relations in English: Insights from the Musa–Pharaoh Narrative," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 13, no. 1 (2026): Article 2604955, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2604955>.

⁵Almjlad, "Semantic Untranslatability," 3, 5, 15.

⁶Mohamad Hussin and Muhammad Hakim Kamal, "Translation of al-Quran into Malay Language in the Malay World," *IJISH (International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities)* 4, no. 1 (2021): 7, <https://doi.org/10.26555/ijish.v4i1.3322>.

⁷Sarah Sahki, "Analyse comparative de la traduction de textes religieux de l'arabe vers le français et l'espagnol : traduction humaine versus intelligence artificielle (Chatgpt) dans l'ouvrage de Al Qarni « لا تحزن »", [Comparative Analysis of the Translation of Religious Texts from Arabic into French and Spanish: Human Translation Versus Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT) in Al Qarni's Work "La Tahzan"], *Traduction et Langues* 24, no. 2 (2025): 82, 100, <https://doi.org/10.52919/translang.v24i02.1052>.

⁸Lubna Abd Rahman, Muhammad Syafif Faiz, and Arnida A. Bakar, "Translation of Anthropomorphic Verses of Attributes of Allah in *Tafsir Pimpinan ar-Rahman* from the Perspective of the Theory Translation of Newmark and Vinay and Darbelnet," *Abqari Journal* 32, no. 2 (2025): 202, 222–223, <https://doi.org/10.33102/abqari.vol32no2.619>.

⁹Mohd Zulfahmi Mohamad, and Mohd Nizam Sahad, "Reassessing the Translation of Anthropomorphic Verses in the Qur'an by N. J. Dawood: A Critical and Comparative Analysis," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 27, no. 1 (2025): 314, 316, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol27no1.8>.

maintain the interfaith theological boundaries between religions by using precise semantic equivalence, loanwords, and the orientation of the source language. All of these aim to preserve the syntactic foreignness of the Arabic language.¹⁰ Moreover, the translation of anthroponyms is also subject to these ideological shifts and likewise depends on the linguistic and cultural background of the translator.¹¹

2.1. Theological Analysis of *Mutashabihat* Verses

Theological discourse heavily scrutinises *mutashabihat* (ambiguous) verses, particularly those depicting God's anthropomorphic attributes. Islamic theology categorically rejects any form of anthropomorphism or corporeal embodiment, anchored in the doctrine of *tanzih* (absolute transcendence), which asserts God's incomparability to His creation.¹² In general, the mainstream school of Islamic creed, namely the Ash'ari, has outlined two approaches to engage with verses on anthropomorphism. The first involves surrendering the true meaning of the verse to Allah and denying any corporeality or resemblance to creatures (*tafwīdh*). The second involves interpreting the verse within Arabic linguistic conventions, in a manner befitting the majesty and greatness of Allah (*ta'wīl*).

The *ta'wīl* approach has been adopted by most Qur'ānic translations worldwide. For instance, Qur'ānic translations in the Malay Archipelago are largely based on *ta'wīl* rather than *tafwīdh*. The implicit meanings explained by Ash'ari scholars in their works have been used as direct translations of most verses on anthropomorphism. The use of the recognised implicit meaning as a translation does not create academic tension. This is because it aligns with the *ta'wīl* approach and is consistent with translation approaches, such as explicitation, the functional approach, and metaphor translation.¹³ Meanwhile, a critical comparative analysis by Mohamad and Sahad demonstrates that translations of anthropomorphic verses are deeply intertwined with the Islamic doctrine of *tanzih* (absolute transcendence).¹⁴ Their study reveals that non-contextual or overly literal translations by Orientalists often clash with orthodox interpretations. However, scholars, such as Liew highlight that navigating anthropomorphism in translated works requires careful assessment of the author's underlying theological intent rather than merely judging the text's literal surface.

The *tafwīdh* approach to translating verses on anthropomorphism can provoke polemics, suspicion, and accusations if not handled properly. There is a widely held view associated with *tafwīdh*: that verses related to anthropomorphism cannot be translated into languages other than

¹⁰Fahmi Gunawan et al., "Theological Ideologies in Translation: Rendering Interfaith Qur'anic Verses into Tolaki between Fidelity and Context," *Traduction et Langues* 24, no. 2 (2025): 64, <https://doi.org/10.52919/translang.v24i02.1051>; Roni Nugraha, Intan Permanik, and Jajang A. Rohmana, "Translating Sacred Scriptures in Sundanese: A Comparative Analysis of the Bible and the Qur'an in West Java, Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 525, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6187>.

¹¹Mahmoud Afrouz, "How Three Different Translators of the Holy Qur'an Render Anthroponyms from Arabic into English: Expanding Verme's (2003) Model of Translation Strategies," *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 69, no. 4 (2021): 22, 27, <https://doi.org/10.5195/names.2021.2255>.

¹²Mohamad and Sahad, "Reassessing the Translation," 295, 316.; Han Hsien Liew, "Navigating Anthropomorphism in Malay Islam: Tarjumān al-Mustafīd's Treatment of the Bodily Attributes of God," in *Malay-Indonesian Islamic Studies: A Festschrift in Honor of Peter G. Riddell*, ed. Majid Daneshgar and Ervan Nurtawab (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 184, 186, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004529397_009.

¹³Abd Rahman, Faiz, and Bakar, "Translation of Anthropomorphic Verse," 204,208.

¹⁴Mohamad and Sahad, "Reassessing the Translation," 295.

Arabic. Anthropomorphic words attributed to Allah are held to be untranslatable because doing so respects the concept of submitting the true meaning to Allah. This view is attributed to well-known figures, such as al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) in his work *Iljam al-'Awam*. He outlines seven steps to be taken regarding *hadith* or verses that appear to liken Allah to the attributes of creatures. The fifth step is *Imsak*, which prescribes not altering the words or rendering them into other languages.¹⁵ Another such figure is Ibn Suraij (d. 306 AH), who is quoted as saying, “we do not translate His attributes into languages other than Arabic.”¹⁶

Additionally, another figure is Alauddin al-Bukhari (d. 730 AH). He states that it is not permissible to replace *mutashabih* words with other words, whether in Arabic or in other languages, such as Persian.¹⁷ This is because this opinion is widely held and endorsed by authoritative figures, such as al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH), it has influenced the position of some contemporary researchers. Syed Salim has defined *tafwidh* solely through this view, namely, maintaining the words of the text as they are, without translating them literally, and believing that the texts have meanings worthy of the majesty of Allah.¹⁸ Nasimah Abdullah et al. states that the approach of translating the literal meaning can be associated with the influence of the *al-Tashbih* (likening Allah to creatures) school of thought.¹⁹ Azizul Azra Abdul Razak et al. likewise dismisses the approach of semantically translating anthropomorphic verses as inconsistent with the true *manhaj salaf*.²⁰ Muhadir Haji Joll states that the approach of translating anthropomorphic verses is the *manhaj* of the Salafi-Wahhabi school, not that of the true *Salaf* scholars.²¹

2.2. The Tradition of Nusantara Tafsir

In the Malay world, theological debates revolving around the *mutashabihat* verses have had clear and profound effects. The earliest written evidence of navigating the linguistic and doctrinal difficulties of the *mutashabihat* verses is the work *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* by Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili (d. 1693). His work is academically recognized as the first complete Qur'anic commentary

¹⁵Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Iljam al-'Awam 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam* [Restraining the Masses from the Science of Theology] (Beirut: Dar al-Minhaj, 2017), 66–69.

¹⁶Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Uthman al-Zahabi, *Al-'Uluw li al-'Ali al-Ghaffar fi Idah Sahih al-Akhbar wa Saqimiha* [The Elevation of the Exalted, the Forgiving, in Clarifying the Authentic and Defective Reports] (Riyadh: Maktabah Adwa' al-Salaf, 1995), 208.

¹⁷Alauddin al-Bukhari, *Kasyf al-Asrar 'an Usul Fakhr al-Islam al-Bazdawi* [Unveiling the Secrets of the Principles of Fakhr al-Islam al-Bazdawi] (Istanbul: Syarikat al-Sahafah al-Uthmaniyah, 1890), 60.

¹⁸Syed Salim Syed Shamsuddin, “Integrasi Ilmu Usul Fiqh, Usuluddin dan Mantik dalam Karya Akidah Jawi untuk Memahami Nas-nas Mutasyabihat: Tinjauan terhadap Kitab Risalah Manhaj Ahli Sunnah oleh Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Qadir bin Wangah,” [Integration of Usul Fiqh, Usuluddin, and Logic in Jawi Creedal Works to Understand Mutashabihat Texts: A Survey of the Book Risalah Manhaj Ahli Sunnah by Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Qadir bin Wangah], *Sains Insani* 4, no. 2 (2019): 4.

¹⁹Abdullah, Lubna Abd. Rahman, and Abur Hamdi Usman, “Terjemahan Ayat Mutashabihat: Analisis Fungsi Prosedur Eksplisitasi” [Translation of Mutashabihat Verses: Analysis of the Function of the Explication Procedure], *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 4, no. 2 (2019): 163.

²⁰Azizul Azra Abdul Razak et al., “Penyelewengan Penterjemahan dan Penafsiran ke Atas Ayat-Ayat Berkaitan Sifat-Sifat Ketuhanan dalam al-Quran,” [Deviations in Translation and Interpretation of Verses Related to Divine Attributes in the Qur'an], *Journal of Social Transformation and Regional Development* 2, no. 3 (Special Issue, 2020): 63–68.

²¹Muhadir Haji Joll, *Sifat 20: Suatu Pengenalan Asas* [The 20 Attributes: A Basic Introduction] (Petaling Jaya: Galeri Ilmu Sdn Bhd, 2018).

in the Malay language.²² This work has consistently attracted the interest of researchers, both past and present. Re-evaluations of the content of *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* disprove the early Orientalist assumption that this work was merely a translation of *Tafsir al-Baidawi*. Instead, *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* is a textual translation of *Tafsir al-Jalalain*, reinforced with references to *Tafsir al-Khazin* and interspersed with *qira'at*.²³

A unique feature of the Nusantara scholarly tradition is vernacularisation. Qur'ānic concepts are adapted to local culture and traditions to be in harmony with the realities of Malay society. For instance, the term *safarin* (journey) is translated as 'voyage', and *al-fulk* is translated as 'boat,' or 'ark.' This translation reflects the maritime nature of Acehnese society at that time.²⁴ This approach also applies to the engagement with ambiguous verses. Rauf al-Singkili (d. 1693) interacts carefully between semantic-literal (SL) translation and functional-implicit (FI) interpretation (*ta'wīl*) to avoid theological confusion and polemics. This includes the polemics warned against by classical scholars, such as al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH).²⁵

This translation tradition continued to develop into the 20th century through modern works, such as *Tafsir Pimpinan ar-Rahman* in year 1980. Although utilizing modernized Romanized Rumi Malay syntax, it remains firmly committed to the tafsir approach.²⁶ This literature review highlights that Qur'ān translation goes beyond mere lexical and semantic transfer. It represents a synthesis of culture, linguistics, and profound theology. From the 17th century to the present, Nusantara *mufasssirs* have effectively synthesized the doctrinal theology of *Ahl al-Sunnah* with contextual interpretation strategies. This unique effort aims to localize the understanding of the Qur'ān within society. The synthesis of meaning-oriented translation, faithfulness to the text, and adherence to the concept of *tanzīh* successfully conveys the divine message to non-Arab audiences. This success laid the foundation for the methodological framework employed in this study.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. The primary objective was to examine the translation methodology utilized by Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili (d. 1693) in the anthropomorphic verses within *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*. Therefore, *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* served as the primary corpus of this study. A qualitative approach was selected as it allows for an in-depth analysis of both the literal and implicit meanings contained within the research corpus, thereby deeply understanding Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili's translation approach.

To ensure data accuracy, purposive sampling was employed to select the relevant data. A dataset comprising 20 Qur'ānic verses that explicitly contain anthropomorphic elements was selected. These verses were categorized thematically into 11 main divine attributes, encompassing *Al-Wajh*, *Al-Yad*, *Al-'Ain*, and *Al-Istiwa'*, among others. The selection of these verses was made purposively based on anthropomorphic characteristics that are closely related to the focus of the study. The SL approach refers to translating the meaning of a word based on its denotative and explicit meaning, without taking into account figurative or connotative meanings. In other words, it is a literal translation. The

²²Mohamad Hussin, and Muhammad Hakim Kamal, "Translation of al-Quran," 2, 8.; Muhammad Amin, Yusuf Rahman, and Zulkifli "Reassessing the Originality of Tarjuman al-Mustafid: Dāūd al-Rūmī's Contributions and the Scholarly Significance of the First Tafsir in the Archipelago," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025): 160, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5818>.; Liew, "Navigating Anthropomorphism," 182.

²³Amin, Rahman, and Zulkifli, "Reassessing the Originality," 160.

²⁴Liew, "Navigating Anthropomorphism," 204; Hussin and Kamal, "Translation of al-Quran," 3.

²⁵Amin, Rahman, and Zulkifli, "Reassessing the Originality," 168, 178.

²⁶Hussin and Kamal, "Translation of al-Quran," 9, 12.

FI approach, on the other hand, interprets the implicit meaning of a word or verse to be translated. This interpretation is also known as *ta'wīl* or hermeneutics.

Data analysis was conducted systematically, comprising three main phases. Firstly, the categorization phase. Each translated verse was categorized based on its translation approach: SL or FI. Secondly, the comparative analysis phase. This phase aimed to identify the similarities and differences between the Malay translation by Sheikh Abdul Rauf and other reference texts. Finally, a theological synthesis was conducted to evaluate translation strategies that align with the *Ahl al-Sunnah* theological framework, namely *tafwīdh* (entrusting the meaning to God) and *ta'wīl* (figurative interpretation). The analysis was also executed critically and factually and was not purely narrative in nature.

4. Results

The Qur'ān contains 11 thematically distinct attributes related to anthropomorphism, each encompassing several related verses.²⁷ For this study, the researchers drew solely on the list compiled by Syed Salim, who identified several Qur'ānic verses as examples for each of the eleven attributes related to anthropomorphism.²⁸ Drawing on this list, the current study recorded the translation by Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili alongside the categorisation of each verse's translation approach, classifying it as either an SL or FI (*ta'wīl*) translation.

Table 1. List of Translation Approaches for Anthropomorphic Verses by Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili

	Verse	Translation	SL/FI
		<i>Di sanalah kiblatNya yang telah diredhai akan dia</i>	
	al-Baqarah 02:115	["There is His qibla that has been approved of"]	FI
		<i>Dan kekal zat tuhanMu yang mempunyai kebesaran</i>	
<i>Al-Wajh</i>	al-Rahman 55:27	["And the essence of your Lord remains, which has greatness"]	FI
		<i>Tiap-tiap sesuatu melainkan zatNya ... bagiNya jua hukum yang lulus</i>	
	al-Qasas 28:88	["Everything except His essence ... for Him only is the applicable law"]	FI
		<i>Supaya dikasih akan dikau atas kebelaanKu dan peliharaanKu</i>	
	Taha 20:39	["So that you may be loved for My sake and My care"]	FI
<i>Al-'Ain</i>		<i>Dan perbuat olehmu suatu bahtera dengan segala penglihat Kami dan peliharaan Kami dan suruh kami</i>	
	Hud 11:37	["And make for yourself an ark with Our sight and Our care and Our command"]	FI

²⁷Muhammad Rabi' Jawhari, *Ta'wīl al-Salaf li Sifat Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* [Interpretation of the Salaf regarding the Attributes of Allah the Almighty] (Al- 'Ajuzah: Maktabah al-Iman, 2013).

²⁸Syed Salim, "Integrasi Ilmu Usul Fiqh," 4.

	Verse	Translation	SL/FI
<i>Al-Yad</i>	al-Mu'minun 23:27	<i>Perbuat olehmu bahtera pada hal dengan peliharaan kami memeliharaakan dia daripada tersalah</i> [“Make for yourself an ark while under Our care, guarding it from error”]	FI
	al-Fath 48:10	<i>Tangan Allah di atas tangan mereka itu</i> [“The hand of Allah is above their hands”]	SL
	al-Hujurat 49:1	<i>Hai segala mereka yang percaya jangan kamu terdahulu pada perkataan dan perbuatan di hadapan Allah dan RasulNya dengan tiada izin keduanya</i> [“O you who believe, do not precede in speech and action before Allah and His Messenger without their permission”]	FI
	al-Ma'idah 05:64	<i>Tangan Allah Taala tergenggam daripada melimpahkan rezeki atas kita</i> [“The hands of Allah Almighty are clenched from overflowing sustenance upon us”] <i>Hai kerugianku inilah waktumu atas yang telah kamu tinggalkan daripada taat akan Allah Taala</i>	SL + FI
<i>Al-Janb</i>	al-Zumar 39:56	[“O my loss, this is your time for what you have left behind from obeying Allah Almighty”] <i>Sebut olehmu hari yang sangat pekerjaan pada hari kiamat kerana berkira-kira dan membalas</i>	FI
<i>Al-Saq</i>	al-Qalam 68:42	[“Mention by you the day of great deeds on the Day of Judgement because of reckoning and retribution”] <i>Allah Taala jua yang dimaksud daripada segala hajat</i>	FI
<i>Al-Samad</i>	al-Ikhlash 112:2	[“Allah Almighty alone is the purpose of all needs”] <i>Dan ia juga yang kuasa atas segala hambaNya</i>	FI
<i>Al-Fauqiyyah</i>	al-An'am 06:18	[“And He is also the One who has power over all His servants”] <i>Tuhan yang bernama Rahman atas Arasy tetap ia dan nyata dengan tetap yang berpatutan dengan Dia</i>	FI
<i>Al-Istiwa</i>	Taha 20:5	[“The Lord named Rahman is established on the Throne, and it is evident with a firm establishment that befits Him”] <i>Bahawasanya Allah Taala serta segala orang yang takut kepadaNya dengan menolong dia</i>	SL
<i>Al-Ma'iyah</i>	al-Baqarah 02:194	[“Indeed, Allah Almighty is with all those who fear Him by helping them”]	SL + FI

	Verse	Translation	SL/FI
<i>Al-Qurb</i>	al-Baqarah 02:153	<i>Bahawasanya Allah Taala serta segala orang yang sabar dengan menolong</i> [“Indeed, Allah Almighty is with all those who are patient by helping them”]	SL + FI
	al-’Ankabut 29:69	<i>Bahawasanya Allah Taala jua serta segala mukmin dengan menolongi mereka itu</i> [“Indeed, Allah Almighty is with all the believers by helping them”]	SL + FI
	Qaf 50:16	<i>Dan Kami terlebih hampir kepadanya yakni insan dengan pengetahuan daripada urat batang lehernya</i> [“And We are closer to him, that is, man, with knowledge than his jugular vein”]	SL + FI
	al-Waqi’ah 56:85	<i>Ketika itu kamu tilik kepadanya pada hal Kami terlebih hampir kepadanya daripada kamu</i> [“At that time you look at him while We are closer to him than you”]	SL
	al-Baqarah 02:210	<i>Datang pekerjaan Allah Taala di dalam segala naung</i> [“The command of Allah Almighty comes in all the clouds”]	FI

Table 1 shows the distribution of 20 verses on anthropomorphism across their translation approaches. It was found that 12 verses were translated into Malay using an FI approach. Further five verses were translated using a hybrid approach that combines SL and FI elements. In this hybrid approach, certain verses are given a literal meaning before the implied meanings are explained in accordance with the method of *ta’wīl*. This hybrid approach is acceptable and is even advocated by El-Sayed as a means of avoiding likening Allah to creatures.²⁹ Although, it carries a degree of theological ambiguity that the purely FI approach does not. Notably, there are three verses in which Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili employs a purely SL translation, namely al-Fath 48:10, Taha 20:5, and *al-Waqi’ah* 56:85.

Although most verses related to anthropomorphism have been translated in accordance with the *ta’wīl* method or the FI translation approach, the findings demonstrate that Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili also used a *tafwīdh* approach through the SL translation strategy in selected verses. On closer examination, it was found that he adopted this method for verses that are the subject of considerable debate both among and beyond the *Ahl al-Sunnah* community, such as al-Fath 48:10 and Taha 20:5. Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili in *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* appears to deviate from the mainstream position among the *Ahl al-Sunnah* by adopting the SL translation approach. This appears to contradict the opinions of authoritative *Ahl al-Sunnah* scholars, such as al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) and al-Bazdawi (d. 493 AH). However, he was a well-known scholar of Nusantara who served as the chief religious’ authority for the Aceh Sultanate during his tenure as its mufti, and a teacher to several eminent scholars in the Malay world. These included Sheikh Burhanuddin Ulakan (d. 1704), Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palimbani (d. 1789), Sheikh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah (d. 1736), Sheikh Muhyi Pamijahan

²⁹Ramadan Hassan Ahmed El-Sayed, “A Functional Approach to Rendering Some Selected Anthropomorphic Images in the Qur’ān into English,” (PhD diss., Helwan University, 2017), 184, https://haqeeqat.pk/roots/Tabweeb/00002.%20Allah/A_Functional_Approach_to_Rendering_Some.pdf

(d. 1730), and others. Consequently, his decision to adopt this approach should not be considered reckless or unfounded. It would likewise be unwarranted to suspect that he was influenced by a tendency to equate Allah with His creatures, that he held Wahhabi views, or that he had departed from the true *manhaj salaf*.

5. Discussion

Sheikh Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili's decision in *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* to adopt an SL translation approach for several anthropomorphic verses warrants careful examination. Several factors may have shaped this choice, namely the question of the ruling on translating anthropomorphic verses, the practice of Nusantara scholars, and the appropriate translation strategies of figurative language.

5.1. The Permissibility of Literal Translation of Anthropomorphic Verses

Sheikh Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili's decision to translate anthropomorphic verses using an SL strategy departs from the mainstream translation approach, as discussed previously. Indeed, if assessed against the position of al-Ghazali,³⁰ as expressed in his work *Iljam al-'Awam*, it would appear to contradict the *Salaf* view and constitute an error. However, passages from other scholarly works suggest that the SL translation approach applied to anthropomorphic verses is permissible, or at least a matter of scholarly disagreement among classical scholars. Chief among these is al-Bazdawī in his work *Usul al-Din*. "Is it permissible to use these attributes in languages other than Arabic? Some of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* say: It is permissible, but on the condition that it is not believed that they are limbs. Others are cautious and say: It is not permissible. This is the correct view."³¹

In this passage, al-Bazdawī records that some members of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* permit the mention and translation of *mutashabih* attributes, such as *Yad* (hand), into languages other than Arabic, on the condition that one does not believe that these attributes constitute physical limbs. He also notes that others take a cautious stance by prohibiting translations into languages other than Arabic, and he endorses this latter position. Nevertheless, this passage from al-Bazdawī demonstrates that, at the very least, whether or not to translate such verses is a matter of scholarly disagreement within the *Ahl al-Sunnah* tradition and not simply a settled matter of one uniform opinion. This position is corroborated by the testimony of other scholars, such as al-Shahrastani (d. 548 AH), who cites the cautious practice of certain scholars who did not translate the words *Yad*, *Wajh*, and *Istiwa* into Persian. The passage reads as follows: "Some of them (*Ahl al-Hadith*) are very cautious so that *Yad* is not read in Persian, nor *Wajh*, nor *Istiwa* and nothing else that comes in this category. Even if it is necessary to mention it, it is mentioned with what comes with its words. This is the safe way, and it is by no means an anthropomorphism."³²

The import of this passage from al-Shahrastani (d. 548 AH) conveys the same point as the foregoing quotation from al-Bazdawī. That is, the approach of maintaining the words of the attributes untranslated is the opinion and choice of *some* of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*, not a consensus among them. Notably, al-Shahrastani ascribes this approach to some of the scholars of *hadith* who follow the methodology of Malik bin Anas (d. 179 AH) and Muqatil bin Sulaiman (d. 150 AH), rather than to the Ash'ari wing of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*.

Regarding the translation of the word *Yad* specifically, Ibn Furak recorded a consensus among

³⁰Al-Ghazali, *Iljam al-'Awam*, 67.

³¹Abul Yusr Muhammad al-Bazdawī, *Usul al-Din* [Principles of Religion] (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyah li al-Turath, 2005), 39.

³²Muhammad bin Abdul Karim al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* [The Book of Sects and Creeds] (Cairo: Mu'assasah al-Halabi, 1968), 105.

Muslims in favour of attributing the word in Arabic and Persian to Allah.³³ However, this claim of consensus regarding the translation of *Yad* may still be disputed. This is because Abu Hanifah³⁴ and al-Ghazali³⁵ both hold that it is not permissible to translate the word *Yad*. This divergence of opinion at least demonstrates the existence of *khilaf* (scholarly disagreement), and Sheikh Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili's translation of al-Fath 48:10 therefore aligns with one of the existing scholarly opinions.

Yet, while the literal translation approach is regarded as permissible by some within the *Ahl al-Sunnah*, al-Ghazali's position differs significantly in tone. There is a meaningful difference between al-Ghazali on the one hand and al-Bazdawi and al-Shahrastani on the other, even though they lived roughly in the same century. Al-Ghazali states that the *Salaf* school does not change the words of the attributes in languages other than Arabic. In his view, it is obligatory to cite the words of the attributes in their original Arabic form, rather than render them into other languages, such as Turkish or Persian. This claim, however, warrants qualification in light of the passage cited above from al-Bazdawi and al-Shahrastani. When these positions are read together, al-Ghazali's view may be understood as not intended to deny the existence of *khilaf* or to reduce the range of opinions on this question to a single authoritative stance within the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. Rather, he presents his own opinion on the verses related to anthropomorphism namely, that their translation is impermissible and that preserving the original Arabic words is obligatory. Crucially, at the conclusion of this discussion, he states that the obligatory ruling of maintaining these words derives from *ijtihad*, the concept of *Ihtiyat* (caution), and analogy with the obligatory ruling of *Iddah*. Notably, he never invokes the term *ijma'* (consensus) at any point in this discussion.

In sum, the SL translation approach applied to anthropomorphic verses remains within the range of accepted opinions within the *Ahl al-Sunnah* tradition. Adopting this approach, as Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili did in *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*, does not transgress the *ijma'* (consensus) of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. The scholars, including al-Ghazali himself, hold that it is not permissible to reject matters that are within the scope of *ijtihad*.³⁶

5.2. Practice of Nusantara Scholars

The SL translation approach applied to anthropomorphic verses is not only consistent with one of the existing scholarly opinions but is also supported by the practice of Nusantara Malay scholars. Numerous Nusantara scholars have translated anthropomorphic verses using an SL strategy, both in their works in the field of creed and in their Qur'anic exegesis. They adopt either a hybrid approach (combining SL and FI) or a purely SL one. Examples include the following:

Table 2. SL Translations of Anthropomorphic Verses by Selected Nusantara Scholars

	Name	Work	Translation
1	Muhammad Said Umar (d. 1932) ³⁷	<i>Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan</i>	<i>Tuhan ar-Rahman itu atas 'arasy bersamaan yang layak dengannya</i> [“The All-Merciful is established over the

³³Muhammad bin al-Hasan bin Furak, *Musykil al-Hadis wa Bayanuhu* [Difficulties of the Hadith and Their Clarification] (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1985), 384.

³⁴Abu Hanifah Nu'man bin Thabit, *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar* [The Greater Knowledge] (UAE: Maktabah al-Furqan, 1999).

³⁵Al-Ghazali, *Ijlam al-'Awam*, 67.

³⁶Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 2:325.

³⁷Muhammad Said Umar, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* [Exegesis of the Light of Excellence] (Bangi: UKM Cetak Sdn. Bhd, 2017).

	Name	Work	Translation
			Throne, in a manner that is appropriate for Him.”] ³⁸ <i>tangan Allah terbelenggu dengan rantai dan tergenggam daripada mengeluarkan rezeki</i> [“The hand of Allah is shackled with chains and clenched from giving out sustenance”] ³⁹
2	Ahmad Muhammad Zain al-Fatani (d. 1908) ⁴⁰	<i>Faridah al-Faraid</i>	<i>Bermula Tuhan yang Rahman itu di atas Arasy-Nya tertinggi</i> [“The All-Merciful is established over His Throne”] ⁴¹
3	Abdul Qadir Wangah (d. 1991) ⁴²	<i>Risalah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah</i>	<i>Tuhan yang bernama Rahman itu atas Arasy tertinggi ia</i> [“The God named Rahman is on the highest Arasy”] ⁴³ <i>tangan Allah itu atas tangan-tangan mereka itu</i> [“The hand of Allah is above their hands.”] ⁴⁴ <i>dan tinggallah dan kekallah muka tuhan engkau</i> [“And remain and abide the face of your God.”] ⁴⁵

These Nusantara scholars and others serve as precedents for the SL translation approach and for determining its legal permissibility. It can therefore be concluded that this approach is an established practice recognised among Nusantara scholars.

Looking beyond the Nusantara, the SL translation approach is also attested as far back as the 18th century CE. Shah Wali Allah al-Dehlawi (d. 1762), in his *Fath al-Rahman fi Tarjamat al-Qur’ān*, translates Taha 20:5 as follows:

وی بسیار بخشاینده است، بر عرش قرار گرفت⁴⁶

[“He is very compassionate, established on the throne.”]

The *Fath al-Rahman fi Tarjamat al-Qur’ān* is the most frequently reprinted work of its kind in Persian and has served as the basis for modern translations in South Asia and Persia. It is therefore regarded as a significant milestone in the genre of Qur’ān translation.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that the

³⁸Taha 20:5.

³⁹Al-Ma’idah 05:64.

⁴⁰Ahmad Muhammad Zain al-Fatani, *Faridah al-Faraid fi ‘Ilm al-Aqaid* [The Unique Pearl of the Obligations in the Science of Creeds] (Patani: Matba’ah bin Halabi, n.d.), 6.

⁴¹Taha 20:5.

⁴²Wangah, *Risalah Manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*, 1,5.

⁴³Taha 20:5

⁴⁴Al-Fath 48:10.

⁴⁵Al-Rahman 55:27.

⁴⁶Shah Wali Allah al-Dehlawi, *Fath al-Rahman fi Tarjamat al-Qur’ān* [Victory of the Merciful in the Translation of the Qur’an] (n.p.: Nashr Ihsan, n.d.), 312.

⁴⁷Michael Brett Wilson, “Translations of the Qur’ān: Islamicate Languages,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.51>.

SL translation approach adopted by Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili in translating anthropomorphic verses was not limited to the Nusantara context but reflects a broader international tradition.

5.3. Translation Strategy of Figurative Language

In modern terms, verses related to anthropomorphism may be categorised as instances of figurative language, that is, language whose intended meaning diverges from the literal sense of the words.⁴⁸ Early (*Salaf*) and later (*Khalaf*) Muslims alike agree that the *mutashabihat* verses, which include anthropomorphic language, cannot be understood by their apparent meaning.⁴⁹ Beyond this point of agreement, scholars differ on the intended meaning once the literal or apparent meaning has been negated. For later scholars (*Khalaf*), who propose an alternative meaning appropriate to both language and religious belief, the translation process proceeds from this derived meaning. This is in line with the recognised objective of translation namely, “to occupy the same ‘semantic space’ in the TARGET language as that suggested by the SOURCE text.”⁵⁰

However, a different situation arises in the *tafwīdh* approach, in which the meaning is entrusted to Allah alone, to Whom the knowledge belongs. There is therefore no equivalent meaning to be transferred to the target language. Semantic non-equivalence is a common challenge encountered in the translation process. Religious belief is one reason a concept in the source language cannot be directly rendered in the target language.⁵¹

Drawing on the translation process outlined by Denroche, there are four stages of translation: (1) translate the source-text idiom with an idiom carrying the same image in the target language; (2) if this is not possible, translate with a different image; (3) if this too is not feasible, translate with a literal equivalent; and if all else fails, (4) leave the expression out altogether.⁵²

In the context of anthropomorphic verses, Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili opted for the third stage, given that no equivalent meaning could be established in the target language. This decision aligns with conventional strategies for translating figurative language.

5.4. Conclusion

Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili employed an SL translation approach in several Qur’ānic verses on anthropomorphism. While this approach has attracted considerable controversy when viewed from perspectives that are critical of or opposed to it being characterized as likening God to creatures, contradicting the *Salaf*, and associated with the Wahhabi school, among others it does not, in itself, represent a doctrinal transgression. Although it is not the mainstream approach, it remains within the scope of scholarly disagreement, given that a minority within *Ahl al-Sunnah* permits it subject to certain conditions. Moreover, the SL translation approach has been adopted by scholars from both Nusantara and other parts of the Islamic world in their writings.

This study also contended that the local context and community circumstances play a role in the inclination towards this SL approach. Hussin and Kamal emphasise that the method of translating the Qur’ān evolves according to the demands of time, local community, and social level.⁵³

⁴⁸Sam Glucksberg, *Understanding Figurative Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹Mulla Ali al-Qari, *Mirqah al-Mafatih Sharh Mishkat al-Masabih* [The Key to the Keys: A Commentary on the Niche of Lanterns] (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2002), 1:162.

⁵⁰Charles Denroche, “Translating Figurative Language,” *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2023): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1075/cogls.22011.den>.

⁵¹Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 21.

⁵²Denroche, “Translating Figurative Language,” 184.

⁵³Hussin and Kamal, “Translation of al-Qur’an,” 33, 34, 42.

Accordingly, the methodological guidance offered in Arabic scholarly works is not necessarily applicable in all contexts. Arabic works intended for Arab audiences can readily retain the original words without substitution. However, works directed at non-Arab communities who lack a background in Arabic must nonetheless fulfil the objectives of translation while safeguarding the foundational tenets of the faith. In the case of *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*, Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Singkili faced the task of occupying the semantic space in the target language, that is, conveying an Arabic expression to a non-Arab audience through an appropriate equivalent. He therefore departed from his source texts, rendering *Istiwa* with a meaning not explicitly provided by his primary references.⁵⁴ A similar approach was adopted by Ahmad al-Fatani, who translated *Istiwa* using an SL strategy in *Faridah al-Faraid*. Abdullah bin Ibrahim al-Fatani justified this as a *dharurah* (necessity) approach.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Sheikh Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili's decision to combine the SL and FI approaches across many verses on anthropomorphism reflects his concern to safeguard his community's faith from misunderstanding. The authors contend that, if this work is read in its entirety, the SL approach does not present a significant theological problem.

Author Contribution

Al-Muslim Mustapa: Writing - original draft (creating the first and full version of the article). **Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah:** Formal analysis and Validation (ensuring the integrity, rigor, and reliability of data, methods, results, and resources through reviewing, verification, benchmarking, fact-checking, and replicating). **Wan Hilmi Wan Abdullah:** Writing - review & editing (providing review input of figures, tables, and supplementary materials). **Nur Syazwina Mustapa:** review & editing (revising content based on feedback from internal and external reviewers). **Safinah Ismail:** Writing - review & editing (reviewing, copy-editing, refining language, and providing comments and suggestions).

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⁵⁴Liew, "Navigating Anthropomorphism," 203–204.

⁵⁵Abdullah bin Ibrahim al-Fatani, *Umdah al-Thalib al-Mujtahid fi Sharh Faridah al-Faraid* [The Support of the Diligent Student in the Commentary of the Unique Pearl of Obligations] (Patani: Matba'ah bin Halabi, n.d.), 49.

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