

**The translation of the meaning of
“الظن” “Al dhan - supposition”
in the Glorious Qur’an
into English**

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Abstract

**The translation of the meaning of “الظن”
“Al dhan-supposition” in the Glorious Qur’an into English**

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The present study deals in its essence with the translation of the meanings of “الظن” – supposition” in the Glorious Qur’an into English. More specifically, it is an attempt to reduce the numerous translations of “الظن” - supposition” in the Glorious Qur’an suggested by Abdullah Yousif Ali into two only depending mainly on the context where it is used. Before that, a theoretical account of the different meanings of “الظن” – supposition” in Arabic will be given along with some relevant points related to it. Results indicated that our attempt is possible, plausible and convincing if we restrict the discussion to the context where “الظن” – supposition” is used.

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1. Introduction:

The Book Of Allah, the Glorious Quran, is the most truthful, real, authentic, sincere and candid Book which has ever been known in that it contains the words of Allah. It is the light that illuminates our secular life and the divine constitution that arranges the relation of human beings with their Creator along with organizing the relations between them. It is the ultimate notable miracle of the prophet Muhammad (May the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him). It is the Book that defies place and time in that it is suitable for all places and times ; It lights up the road for those who want to pass safely to paradise. It is the highest level of prodigy, legislation, wisdom and style that silenced all eloquent people regardless of their place, time and culture. It has descended from our Almighty Allah into the heart of His prophet Muhammad (May the blessing and peace of Allah Be Upon Him) more than 1430 years ago which ever since started to occupy the minds of interpreters, jurists, qualified scholars and translators

Among the English translations of the meanings of the Glorious Qur'an is that of the scholar, expert and master Abdullah Yousif Ali (2001). It was that translation which gave me the drive to investigate the possible meanings of الظن – supposition in the Glorious Qur'an and endeavor to suggest some other English equivalents of them in the present paper which might be useful for the practitioners in this field of investigation.

2. Aim:

In the English translation of the Glorious Qur'an under investigation, the translator used many different renderings of الظن – supposition in the Glorious Qur'an as exemplified below:

- “think” Yunis/24.
- “considered about” Yusif/42.
- “imagined” AL Anbiyah/87.
- put the best construction” AL Noor/24.
- gathered that” Sad/24.
- “conclude” AL Qiyamah/28.

- “feel” AL Baqarah/230.
 - “understand” AL - Haaqqah/20.
 - “did think”/22.
 - “did entertain” Saad/23.
 - “thought” AL Fath/12.
 - “conceived” AL Fath/12.
 - “came to think” AL Jin/7.
 - “bear in mind the certainty” AL Baqarah/46.
 - “apprehend” AL Kahf/53.
 - “little did ye think” AL Hashr/2.
 - “convinced” AL Baqarah/243.
- etc.

This diversity in translations makes you curiously wonder why! As native speakers of Arabic, we know that الظن – supposition in Arabic doesn't have such diverse meanings or, more precisely, senses. Our aim is therefore is to restrict or reduce the numerous English translations of الظن – supposition in the Glorious Qur'an suggested by Abdullah Yousif Ali to two only as it will be explained later.

3. The procedure:

After consulting some reliable books of interpretations, we come to the conclusion that if الظن - supposition is linked with a believer or mentioned in a context of praise, then it is mostly taken to be as اليقين - ‘certainty’. On the other hand, if it is linked with a disbeliever or mentioned in a context of lampoonery, then it is mostly taken to be as الشك - ‘doubt’.⁽¹⁾

1. The books of interpretations we consulted are: Safwat AlTafaseer, Tafseer Al - Jalalaen, Ma'ani Kalamat Al - Quran Al - Kareem.

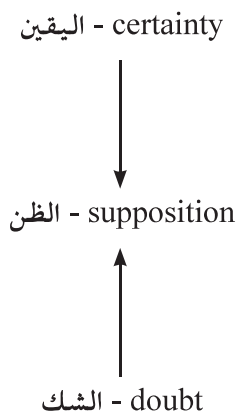
The Arabic – Arabic dictionaries we dealt with are: At Qamoos Al - Muheet Al - Mukhtar Min Sihah Alu'ah.

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Bearing in mind these two points, we will, depending on the context, suggest only one translation for الظن - supposition if it means اليقين - ‘certainty’ and one translation for it if it means الشك - ‘doubt’. The two suggested translations are “know for certain” and “suppose” respectively. We will try to apply them to some ten contexts (Ayahs). These Ayahs have been chosen randomly, analyzed and by the end of the research paper a statement of generalization would be made concerning the rest (i.e. Ayahs). The data represent 15% of the whole population (65 Ayahs). This ratio is acceptable in such descriptive papers.

4. الظن - supposition in Arabic:

الظن - supposition in Arabic is mostly defined as a state of leaned hesitation, so to speak, between two points of indefinite belief (Abadi, 2008: 1038). Thus, it is a state of knowledge that it is above doubt and below certainty:



It is also defined as a definite or certainty - like belief with the possibility of having something opposite to it (Ahlu - Al - Tafseer Meeting, 2011). That's to say, in اليقين - certainty we have only one strong and definite possibility, and in الشك - doubt we have two (Equal) possibilities without giving preference to or preponderance over any of them. As for الظن - supposition, we also have two possibilities but they are (Not) equal and we therefore prefer one of them over the other. So it is a state of in between, mostly in the heart rather than in the mind: if it is in the mind, then, we believe, it will be certainty. So depending on the context where it is used, الظن - supposition is basically used in Arabic either to mean اليقين - certainty or الشك - doubt, whether literally or figuratively, especially in the Glorious Qur'an and poetry. Some other rare

meanings of الظن - supposition are:

- 1— التهمة - accusation (Abdul Hameed and Al - Sabki (1934:322).
- 2— الوهم - illusion (Ahlu Al - Tafseer Meeting, 2011).
- 3— الحسبان - consideration (Ibid).
- 4— الاعتقاد الخاطئ - wrong belief (Ibid).

Suffice it to say that the four meanings just mentioned above are all framed, so to speak, by الشك - doubt in that they are further dimensions of it or refer to the wide semantic area of it. Therefore, we may plausibly deal with them as being broad or sometimes near synonyms of الشك - doubt.

5. Ali's Translation of the Meanings of الظن - supposition:

As a matter of fact, الظن - supposition is mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an about 60 times as a noun and verb. Since it is implausible to list them all along with their translations in a small paper like this, we will then pick up some of them randomly resting on the assumption that they are revealing and enough for our aim herein. As we mentioned in our procedure, the books of interpretations listed in footnote number 1 state, explicitly or implicitly, that if الظن - supposition is linked with a believer or mentioned in a context of praise, then it is mostly taken to be as اليقين - certainty. On the other hand, if الظن - supposition is linked with a disbeliever or mentioned in a context of lampoonery, then it is mostly taken to be as الشك - doubt. Bearing in mind these two points, we will try to suggest only one translation depending on the context, for الظن - supposition if it means اليقين - certainty and one translation for it if it means الشك - doubt. The two suggested translations, as we said before, are “know for certain” and “suppose” respectively which will be practically tested as it is thoroughly explained below:

1. ﴿الَّذِينَ يُظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ﴾ - البقرة/46

“who bear in mind the certainty that they are to meet their Lord”

Al Baqrah/46

Here the context tells us that the reference is to people who are definite of meeting their Almighty Allah. As such, we suggest to replace “bear in mind

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the certainty” by “know for certain” which doesn’t violate the authentic intended meaning.

2. ﴿ وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ﴾ - يوسف/42

“ And of the two, to that one whom he considered about to be saved, he said: “Mention me to thy lord”.....” Yusuf/42

Here we can replace “consider about” by “know for certain” too because the prophet of God Yusuf (May the blessing and peace of Allah be upon him) is definitely an utmost and true believer and he told the man that he will survive. So الظن - supposition here is يقين - certainty rather than شك - doubt and our suggested translation works here too. Therefore consistency will be met if we keep on using the same translation.

3. ﴿ وَظَنَّ أَهْلُهَا أَنَّهُمْ قَدِرُونَ عَلَيْهَا ﴾ - يونس/24

“.....the people to whom it belongs think they have all powers of disposal over it....” Yunus/24

Here the reference is to people who were in doubt. Thus we suggest that we replace “think” by “suppose” since the first meaning of “think” is “يفكر - to use mind - to consider something or to form ideas”, while the first meaning of “suppose” is “يظن to show that you are not certain about” (Oxford Word Power, 2003:754 - 778).

4. ﴿ فَقَالَ لَهُ فِرْعَوْنُ إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا مَوْسَىٰ مَسْحُورًا ﴾ - الإسراء/101

“..... pharaoh said to him: O Moses ! I consider thee, indeed, to have been worked upon by sorcery” AL - Isra/101

5. ﴿ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا فِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُورًا ﴾ - الإسراء/102

“..... and I consider thee, Indeed, O pharaoh, to be one doomed to destruction” Al - Isra/102

Now we move to an interesting area that makes our point quite clear. When الظن - supposition is linked to pharaoh, most interpreters take it to be الشك - doubt since pharaoh is a strong disbeliever who announced himself as

a god and we thus suggest using “suppose” instead of “consider”. But later when the prophet of God Moses (May blessing and peace of Allah be upon him) uses الظن - supposition, the interpreters take it to be اليقين - certainty which is perfectly logical and true. We thus suggest using “know for certain” instead of “consider”. To our best knowledge using “consider” in both contexts is rejected since the semantic implication of each is quite different.

6. ﴿وَوَظَنَّ دَاوُدُ أَنَّمَا فَتَنَّاهُ﴾ - ص/24

“.... And David gathered that we had tried him...” Sad/24

Once again we meet الظن - supposition uttered by a prophet of Allah which is a context where all الظنون - suppositions are definitely, يقين - certainty and there is no question about that. Consequently, we can once more replace “gathered that” by “know for certain” which quietly fits here.

7. ﴿وَوُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِآسِرَةٍ ﴿٢٤﴾ تَظُنُّ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ﴾ - القيامة/24 - 25

“...Some faces, that Day, will be sad and dismal (24) in the thought that some back breaking calamity was about to be inflicted on them.....” Al Qiyamah/24 - 25

As for this Ayah, the reference is to the Day of AL Qiyamah (doomsday) as (Jalal and Jalal, 1970: 578) said. There is no doubt nor suspicion there in that all mankind are in a state of certainty and everything is clear: it is the Day of Judgment. Therefore “In the thought” should be replaced by “they know for certain” which is much better, expressive, revealing and realistic so long as الظن - supposition here is اليقين - certainty.

8. ﴿إِنَّهُ ظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ يَحُورَ﴾ - الانشقاق/14

“..... Truly did he think that he would not have to return to Us....” Al InshiQaQ/14

Here the Glorious Qur’an tells us something about someone (mostly disbeliever) who wrongly believes that he will not return to Allah after he died and that there is no other life after death motivated by a fatal doubt cherished in his mind and heart: enjoy yourself, we are mortal! As such, we can replace again “think” by “suppose” as we did before without affecting the Quranic meaning even slightly.

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9. ﴿وَذَلِكُمْ ظَنُّكُمُ الَّذِي ظَنَنْتُمْ بِرَبِّكُمْ أَرَدْتُمْ بِهِ﴾ - فصلت/23

“.....But this thought of yours which ye did entertain concerning your lord, hath brought you to destruction.....” Sad/23

The choice of “entertain” is a little bit vague here. The most widely used meaning of this word is “to amuse” as in “Her stories entertained us for hours.” Another second in rank meaning of it is “to receive and give food, etc. to guests” as in: “They entertained us to dinner”. And it is sometimes used to mean “to hold in mind” which is probably not familiar to many people as in: “She entertained the hope that she would one day be Prime Minister”. So we suggest replacing “entertain” by “suppose” which doesn’t lead us to lose or gain any sense of the Quranic meaning. Yet we stress the fact that replacing one translation by another doesn’t mean that the first translation is wrong but we have a specific aim and we are trying to reach it objectively which is to reduce the numerous translations of الظن - supposition into two only.

10. ﴿وَلَقَدْ ظَنَّكَ الْمَسْئُورَ وَالْمَسْئُورَ وَالْمَسْئُورَ﴾ - الفتح/12

“..... Ye conceived on evil thought, for ye are a people lost (in wickedness)” Al - Fath/12

It is quite clear that the content is of lampoonery and the reference is to disbelievers. Then we can safely replace “conceive” by “suppose” as we did many times before which is more suitable since “conceive” firstly means to hold an idea or something in mind or to imagine, and the idea or the thing imagined could be right or wrong or good and bad. So it is somehow a neutral word here which therefore doesn’t precisely express the meaning of الظن - supposition in the context under discussion.

So far, we have applied our two suggested translations to ten contexts in the Glorious Qur’an and they worked perfectly well in that they did not change the meaning and no gain or loss of meaning were met. We therefore assume that they will work perfectly well with the rest of the contexts since we have a specific procedure to be followed and the door is left open for others to test that: either to confirm or falsify it. Once again we stress the fact that suggesting some two alternative translations does not mean that the translations given by Master AbduAlluh Yousif Ali were wrong. We just aimed at reducing them into two.

6. Conclusion:

In the light of what had been said before, the following conclusions could be stated:

الظن - supposition is related to heart rather than the mind. If it is related to mind, then it will either doubt or certainty and not الظن - supposition.

الظن - supposition is a sort of feeling which is above الشك - doubt and beyond اليقين - certainty.

If الظن - supposition is linked with a believer in the Glorious Qur'an or mentioned in a context of praise, then it is يقين - certainty. But when it is linked with a disbeliever or mentioned in a context of lampoonery, then it is شك – doubt.

Other minor meanings of الظن - supposition in Arabic such as التهمة - accusation, الوهم - illusion, etc. are broad or near synonyms of الشك - doubt.

Since الظن - supposition in the Glorious Qur'an basically means اليقين - certainty and الشك - doubt, then two English translations of it are enough and consistency will be met if we do so. Choosing numerous translations is confusing, distracting and not revealing or expressive.

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ملخص البحث

تتناول الدراسة الحالية في جوهرها ترجمة معاني «الظن» في القرآن الكريم الى الانكليزية. وهي بالتحديد محاولة لاختزال التراجم الانكليزية المتعددة لمفردة «الظن» في القرآن والتي اقترحها «عبدالله يوسف علي» في ترجمته لمعاني القرآن الكريم الى اثنتين فقط وذلك بالاعتماد على سياق استخدام المفردة قيد البحث في القرآن الكريم. وقبل ذلك سيتم تناول معاني «الظن» في اللغة العربية مع بعض النقاط ذات الصلة بالموضوع. واطهرت النتائج ان اختزال التراجم المتعددة الى اثنتين فقط هو امر ممكن ومعقول ومقنع اذا ما ربطنا النقاش بسياق استخدام مفردة الظن في القرآن الكريم.

