

## Rhetorical Questions in Glorious Qur'an and their realizations in English

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### Abstract

Rhetorical questions are one of the techniques used almost in all languages. Many studies have been made on this subject that poses some problems in translation. It is supposed that languages that are genetically unrelated ,as is the case with Arabic and English, will be conventionally not similar in realizing the same functions entirely as one -to- one equivalence concerning the same linguistic phenomena, even if they are both of the same level of development . Therefore, the present paper assumes that Arabic language, especially that of the Glorious Qur'an, will be abundant with different functions suggested by Rhetorical Questions more than that which might be realized in English as their counterparts. The paper, after going through the different functions of rhetorical questions in both concerned languages concludes that the number of functions represented by the two languages differs greatly, which means that it might create problematic area in translation as it leads to loss of meaning.

### 1.Introduction

Harris (2005:1) states that a good writing depends upon more than making a collection of statements worthy of belief. He claims that if your writing is to go through to your reader, or even to be read and considered at all, it must be interesting, clear, persuasive and memorable, so that he will pay attention to, understood, believe, and remember the ideas it .

Then, good writing must attract the reader's attention, not by using the common styles or forms of language. So, it must have an appropriate and clear thesis, sufficient arrangement, and reason supporting the thesis, a logical and progressive arrangement, and importantly the effective style.

The effective style can be achieved through many common and traditional rhetorical devices, one of the most effective of them is the **Rhetorical Question**, which the recent study will concern with.

The study will investigate and explore the issue of Rhetorical Questions in both languages, i.e. English and Arabic to see if there is any difference between them, i.e. the different functions of the Rhetorical Questions.

As we know, conventionally, the purpose of a real question is to elicit information. Real questions do not usually cause problems for translators. Rhetorical questions, on the other hand , are not real questions. They are question forms used with a purpose other than to ask for information (Larson, 1984:234). Then, it is possible to employ interrogatives for

purposes other than seeking information. Wilson and Sperber (1988:91) argue that there are counterexamples to view that those questions are requests for information. There are rhetorical questions, contrary to the standard speech act account of interrogatives, none of them are request for information. So the view of the connection between form and function is not perfect (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002:854). The use of interrogatives as directives and rhetorical questions is well known as the following examples taken from (Downing and Locke, 2003:191) show:

Would you mind singing here?

Do you expect me to wait here all day?

## 2. The Notion of Rhetorical Question

(Siemund, 2001:pp 1015), states that "Arguably, rhetorical questions can be found in all languages of the world, and they also appear to be functioning in a comparable manner." However, Nida (1964:209) notes that rhetorical questions are non-existent in a number of languages. He also states that a rhetorical question is a forceful statement which has the form of a question, but which does not expect an answer. For example, "what difference does it make?" which may function like the statement, "It makes no difference."

On the other hand, Harris (2005:17) claims that a rhetorical question differs from **hypophora**, which is another rhetorical device, in that it is not to be answered by the writer, because its answer is obvious or obviously desired. It is used for effect, emphasis or provocation, or for drawing a conclusionary statement from the facts at hand. For example, "It is justice then to be considered merely a word?"

He adds that when we are thinking about rhetorical questions ,we have to avoid sinking to absurdity. So, the use of this device allows your reader to think ,query, and conclude along with you. But if your question become ridiculous, your essay may become wastepaper (weak).

While Larson in his book titled " Meaning based Translation" states" The label, rhetorical questions, has often been used to indicate interrogative grammatical forms which are used with a nonquestion meaning", he adds that the speaker uses a grammatical form which in its primary usage would indicate a question, but the speaker's purpose is to command or to make a statement. He concludes, "when this kind of skewing occurs, the question form is called a rhetorical question" (Larson.1984: 234)

As the present study tackles the nature of rhetorical questions or how they work or function on one hand, and with regard to translation , theory and practice on the other hand, it is appropriate to go briefly through the notion of meaning, its types in the given sentences( including questions).

Each language has a great variety of ways where the form, i.e.

surface structure expresses meaning. People usually think of meaning as something that a word or a sentence refers to. This kind of meaning is called **Referential Meaning** because the word refers to a certain thing, event, attribution, or relation, which a person can perceive or imagine. A sentence has meaning because it refers to something that happened or may happen, or is imagined as happening (Larson, 1984:9).

It is only when a form is being used in its **primary** meaning or function, there is a one-to-one correlation between form and meaning. The other meanings are **secondary** meanings or **figurative** meanings. Words have these extended meanings and in the same way, grammatical forms have such extended usages (secondary and figurative functions). (ibid: 9)

Thus, the whole sentences may also have several functions. A question form may be used for non-question. For example, "Mary, why don't you wash the dishes?" has the form of question, and may in some context be asking for information. But it is often used in English with the meaning of command or suggestion, rather than a real question. Larson (1984:9) claims that This characteristic of the diversity or the lack of one-to-one correlation between form and meaning is the basic reason behind that translation is a complicated task.

### 3. The Communication Situation

One helpful way to look at the distinction between meaning and form ( between deep and surface), is the way used by Grimes, who states that" ...it is desirable to make a distinction between those things in language over which the speaker can exercise choice and over which no choice is available to him. The former reflects meaning; as many linguists have pointed out, meaning is possible only when a speaker could choose to say something else instead" (Grimes, 1975:114)

By doing this, Grimes refers to the rhetorical devices as he adds that " ...The latter are the more mechanical components of language, the implementation process by which the results of that permits communication with someone else" (ibid:114)

The speaker ( or writer), basing his choices on many factors in the communication situation, chooses what he wishes to communicate. Once he has determined the meaning, he is limited to use the forms (grammatical, lexical, phonological) of the language in which he wishes to communicate that meaning. He may choose one form over another in order to give a certain **emotive meaning** in addition to the information ( Larson,1984:32).

By choosing one form over another one, he may want to make some part more prominent than another, or to add some focus to that part of the message. For example , a mother who is angry with her son for not doing

his part of the family chores, may desire to tell him to( empty the garbage). She has told him to do it before, so he knows it is his duty . She will want to convey all of this meaning - the **command** to empty the garbage and the emotion she feels about it. To do so, she might not use a surface structure ( command form) but rather a question, e.g. a **when-question** " when are you going to empty the garbage?" . If he had never been told to do it before, and if she were not angry or exasperated, she would have probably used a command form such as " please empty the garbage for me.". Here, because of the emotive meaning being communicated, we have a skewing of form and meaning in that a question form signals a command. Many languages do not use questions in this way, so a different form will be used in the translation. However, whichever form being chosen, it should communicate both the information and the emotion of the source language text (ibid).

Despite the fact that both Arabic and English have such a skewing of form and meaning , but it is expected to find that they differ in the number and functions used by each to exploit such phenomenon, Arabic is expected to be more abundant of functions performed by rhetorical questions than English. This will be shown through the following pages of the recent research.

#### 4. Rhetorical Questions in Arabic

Interrogations might depart its real function, where the speaker asks or inquires about something already known; yet, he does that for purposes other than getting information, context is sufficient to explain them.

Rhetorical questions in Arabic are tackled under the umbrella of "meaning's science" which is one of three general headings of RHETORIC. Arab linguists study rhetorical questions as the departure of interrogatives from what is normally expected for considerations interpreted by the context, linguistic or non-linguistic ( AL-Mazani,1999:5).

While a rhetorical question is defined in terms of Al-Mazani (1999:414) as "any question asked for a purpose other than obtaining the information the question asks"( Wahba & Al-Muhandis ,1984:478 ;Mu'auadh, 2008:52). Rhetorical questions are referred to as a questions that expected no answer ,Abbas(1989:199) adds that they require a mental response rather than an explicit answer. The feature that the rhetorical question(erotesis) needs no answer is either because it is known or obvious (or obviously desired), and it is used for effect, emphasis, or provocation, or for drawing a conclusionary statement from the facts at hand.(Harris,2005:17). The different functions manifested by rhetorical questions in Arabic illustrated with examples are represented as follows:-

### 1. Negation:

هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ (الرحمن: ٦٠)

“Is there any reward for the good other than good?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 2. Affirmation:

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (الشرح: ١)

“Have We not opened your breast for you?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 3. Wishing:

فَهَلْ لَنَا مِنْ شُفَعَاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنَا (الاعراف: ٥٣)

“Now, are there any intercessors for us that they might intercede on our behalf?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 4. Exclamation:

وَقَالُوا مَالِ هَذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ (الفرقان: ٧)

They said “How comes this Messenger eats the food and walks in the markets?” (Rashad)

### 5. Aggrandizement:

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ (البقرة: ٢٥٥)

“Who is he that can intercede with it in except with His permission?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 6. Disdain:

أَهَذَا الَّذِي بَعَثَ اللَّهُ رَسُولًا (الفرقان: ٤١)

“Is this the one whom Allah has sent as a Messenger?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 7. Desperation:

مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ (البقرة: ٢١٤)

“When (will come) the Help of Allah?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 8. Improbability:

أَنَّى لَهُمُ الذِّكْرَى وَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مُبِينٌ (الدخان: ١٣)

“How will they be reminded?” (Maulana)

### 9. Intimacy:

وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَا مُوسَى (طه: ١٧)

“And what is that in your right hand, O Musa (Moses)?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 10. Sarcasm:

أَصَلَاتُكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ نَتْرُكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ (هود: ٨٧)

“Does your prayer command that we leave off what our fathers used to worship? or that we leave off doing what we like with our property?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 11. Suspense:

هَلْ أَذِلُّكُمْ عَلَى تِجَارَةٍ تُنْجِيكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ (الصف: ١٠)

“Shall I guide you to a commerce that will save you from a painful torment?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 12. Equality:

هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (الزمر: ٩)

“Is one who is obedient to Allah, prostrating himself or standing (in prayer) during the hours of the night, fearing the Hereafter and hoping the Mercy of His Lord (like one who disbelieves?) ” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 13. Threatening:

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ الْأَوَّلِينَ (المرسلات: ١٦)

“Did We not destroy the former generations?” (Maulana)

### 14. Magnifying:

وَكَمْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا فَجَاءَهَا بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا أَوْ هُمْ قَائِلُونَ (الأعراف: ٤)

“And how many a town have WE destroyed ? So, Our punishment came to it by night or while they slept at midday” (Maulana)

### 15. Urging:

قَوْمٌ فِرْعَوْنَ أَلَا يَنْقُوتَ (الشعراء: ١١)

“Will they not fear of Allah and become righteous?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 16. Afflicting:

مَالِ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا (الكهف: ٤٩)

“Woe to us. How come this book leaves nothing, small or large, without counting it?” (Rashad)

### 17. Rebuke:

أَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمِّيَ إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ (المائدة: ١١٦)

“Did you say to men: ‘Worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?’” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

### 18. Counseling:

أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ (البقرة: ٣٠)

“Will You place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**19. Perceptivity:**

أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (البقرة: ٣١)

“Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**20. Offering:**

أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ (النور: ٢٢)

“Do you not love that Allah should forgive you?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**21. Denial:**

أَغْيَرَ اللَّهُ تَدْعُونَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (الأنعام: ٤٠)

“Has then your lord preferred for you sons, and for Himself taken daughters from among the angels?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**22. Disbelieve:**

أَفَأَصْفَاكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنَاثًا (الاسراء: ٤٠)

“Would you then call upon any one other than Allah? (Reply) if you are truthful?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**23. Command:**

فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ (المائدة: ٩١)

“So, will you noy then abstain?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**24. Informing:**

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا (الأنسان: ١)

“Was there not been over man a period of time , when he was nothing to be mentioned?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**25. Admonition:**

أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَى بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ (البقرة: ٦١)

“Would you exchange that which is better for that which is lower?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

**26. Mitigation:**

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُّذَكِّرٍ (القمر: ١٧)

“And certainly We have made the Qur'an easy to remember, but is there any one who will mind?” (Maulana)

**27. Asking advice:**

فَهَلْ إِلَى خُرُوجٍ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ (غافر: ١١)

“Now we confess our sins, then is there any way to get out ( of the Fire)?” (Al-Hilali and Khan)

## 5. Rhetorical Questions in English :

Barthes, (1970:52) states that from Aristotle up until the advent of modern social psychology, the discipline of rhetoric was considered to be the art of persuasion. As for rhetorical questions, they occur when an expression deviates from expectation, the expression is not rejected as nonsensical or faulty, the deviation occurs at the level of form rather than content.(McQuarrie & Mick,1996:426). Two different modes of figuration are distinguished: schemes and tropes. Schemes deviate by means of excessive regularity. Tropes deviate by means of irregular usage (McQuarrie & Mick,1999:39). It is clear from its inversion of regular sentence order, a rhetorical question is identified as a tropic figure (Gorrell & Laird,1967:322).

Different definitions of rhetorical questions are available in the literature. Quirk et al.(1985:825) states that rhetorical questions have been described as "strong assertion",and they are regarded as a means of "expressing intensive conviction of a certain view". According to Jacobs (2000:271), they convey a commitment that the acceptability of the proposition as obvious is not rational; therefore, the audience are expected to be "convinced of the entire implied statement". See the following :

- If God be for us, who can be against us?
- Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust?

## 6- The Functions of Rhetorical Questions in English:

A question form may be used for a non-question .For example, the question "Mary, why don't you wash the dishes? " has the form of a question, and may in some context be asking for information, but it is often used with the meaning of **command**(or **suggestion**), rather than a real question. It is then a rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions are used to indicate negative emotions such as **rebuke** or **ridicule**. Therefore, a statement with proper thematic markings would be substituted for the rhetorical question. A question "Who made you better than anyone else?" means- You were not made any better than anyone else (Larson, 1984:413).

The label, rhetorical questions, has often been used to indicate interrogative grammatical forms which are used with a nonquestion meaning. The speaker uses a grammatical form which in its primary usage would indicate a question, but the speaker's purpose is to command or to make a statement. When this kind of skewing occurs, the question form is called a rhetorical question.

The purpose of real question is to ask for information, but, rhetorical question, on the other hand, are not real questions. They are question forms used with a purpose other than to ask for information.



They may look real questions, since the form is the same , but the meaning is not that of a question, for example, the question: Mary, why don't you wash the dishes? Has the form of a question, and it might in some contexts be asking for information; that is, it might be used in its primary function. But this question in English is often used as a way of making a friendly suggestion. It is not as strong as an imperative form, ( Mary, wash the dishes), but neither is it a question. It is a suggestion. (ibid:235)

So, rhetorical questions aim at performing functions other than obtaining answers. The following are the secondary functions of interrogative sentences( functions of rhetorical questions):-

**1. Communicate a suggestion or command:**

- \_ Mary, why don't you wash the dishes?  
( Mary, wash the dishes.)

**2. Indicate doubt or uncertainty:**

- \_ Someone might say " What are we going to eat?" as away of expressing concern or uncertainty about the high cost of food.

**3 . Introduce a new topic or new aspect of topic:**

- \_ The speaker might say " Why is there so much unemployment these days?" and then, not waiting for an answer, he begins to tell the audience about the reasons for unemployment.

**4. Show surprise:**

- \_ A housewife who is preparing the dinner for some guests, sees them suddenly coming up the path and says " Are they here so soon?" which means, ( I'm surprised they are here so soon.)

**5. Admonish or exhort:**

- \_ A mother may say to a child, " Why are you always bothering grandfather so much? "The real meaning is ( you shouldn't bother your grandfather so much.). Notice that the form is a *why* question in the affirmative which is a critical statement in English.

**6. Express the speakers evaluation:** for example, a teacher might say to a student,

- \_ "How can I pass you, if you don't turn in your assignment?"

**7. Make indirect statement:**

- \_ Why should I tell the truth?  
( there is no reason to tell the truth.)

**8. Reestablish themes or topics:**

- \_ Are the German more industrious than others and slower to answer the call to strike? ( they are not .)

**9. Rebuke or ridicule:** Consider a mother who is angry with her son for not doing his part of the family chore, so she says to him:

— "When are you going to empty the garbage?"

**10. Intensify the reader's interest:**

— What can we expect then?

**11. As a politeness strategy:**

— What can I say?

( Nothing, it is so bad.)

**12. As a face of threatening act:** ( Consider the aggressive tone of the following question)

— Are you stupid?

**13. Persuasive design manifest in the text:**

— Do I have to tell you everything? You are a fully qualified architect.

**14. As a stylistic device:** ( for dramatic effect)

— If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

| Functions of English Rhetorical Question       |     | Functions of Arabic Rhetorical Question |     |
|--|-----|---|-----|
| Function                                       | No. | Function                                | No. |
| Communicate a suggestion or command.           | 1.  | Negation                                | 1.  |
| Indicate doubt or uncertainty.                 | 2.  | Affirmation                             | 2.  |
| Introduce a new topic or new aspect of topic.  | 3.  | Wishing                                 | 3.  |
| Show surprise.                                 | 4.  | Exclamation                             | 4.  |
| Admonish or exhort.                            | 5.  | aggrandizement                          | 5.  |
| Express the speakers evaluation.               | 6.  | Disdain                                 | 6.  |
| Make indirect statement.                       | 7.  | Desperation                             | 7.  |
| Reestablish themes or topics.                  | 8.  | Improbability                           | 8.  |
| Rebuke or ridiculus.                           | 9.  | Intimacy                                | 9.  |
| Intensify the reader's interest.               | 10. | Sarcasm                                 | 10. |
| As a politeness strategy.                      | 11. | Suspense                                | 11. |
| As a face of threatening act.                  | 12. | Equality                                | 12. |
| To persuasive design manifest in the text.     | 13. | Threatening                             | 13. |
| As a stylistic device. ( for dramatic effect). | 14. | Magnifying                              | 14. |
|  |     | Urging                                  | 15. |
|  |     | Afflicting                              | 16. |

| Functions of English Rhetorical Question |            | Functions of Arabic Rhetorical Question |            |
|--|------------|---|------------|
| <i>Function</i>                          | <i>No.</i> | <i>Function</i>                         | <i>No.</i> |
|  |            | Rebuke                                  | 17.        |
|  |            | Counseling                              | 18.        |
|  |            | Perceptivity                            | 19.        |
|  |            | Offering                                | 20.        |
|  |            | Denial                                  | 21.        |
|  |            | Disbelieve                              | 22.        |
|  |            | Command                                 | 23.        |
|  |            | Informing                               | 24.        |
|  |            | Admonition                              | 25.        |
|  |            | Mitigation                              | 26.        |
|  |            | Asking advice                           | 27.        |

( Table: 1) *Functions of Rhetorical Questions in Arabic & English.*

#### 7- Conclusion

From table:1, we can see that there are no one-to-one equivalence between Arabic and English functions concerning rhetorical questions, rather than the fact that Arabic language has greater number of these functions compared with English language. This , will certainly creat a problematic area with regard to translation. This might be due to the fact that the two languages are genetically unrelated. This is also might be due to the different systems used by these two languages concerning different linguistic phenomena, Rhetorical Questions, is merely one of them.

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