Disability Terms in Indonesian Translation of the Qur'an

Mahalli

1 Center for Disability Studies and Services, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia; Australia-Indonesia Disability Research and Advocacy Network (AIDRAN)

Abstract This paper explores how terms of disability represented by Indonesian translation of the Qur'an. By selecting several words listed through the Mu'jamul Mufahras and other corpora, I explore the verses of the Qur'an, and then compare them with the Indonesia translation which has become the most authoritative source in Indonesia, produced by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. I suggest, through the Social Model of Disability, some terms used in the translation should be contextually reviewed with appropriate terms.

Keywords: Disability, Translation, Qur'an, Terminology

1. Research Background

Around July 2019, a WhatsApp group consisting of several activists with disabilities discussed a possibility of proposing a revision of Indonesian Translation of the Qur'an undertaken by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. The idea came after the Directorate General of Tashhih Al-Qur'an invited one of the group members to be involved in a focus group discussion on revising the translation. The Ministry of Religion responded it by initiating other FGD to specifically discuss about disability term which should be used in the next edition of Indonesian Translation of the Qur'an. Therefore, the people of the Center for Disability Study and Services Universitas Brawijaya compiled a policy brief reliably related to the revised translation.

I write this paper as a consideration for answering questions relating to the terms that would arise, especially those related to the terms of "disability". The key objective is to change dictions or words which have been used by the Ministry’s version of the Qur'an. The translation by Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia becomes most recognized translation of the Qur'an by Islamic community in Indonesia. All of Al-Qur'an translations on the market, either published by the Indonesian government or private companies, have gone through a review process by the Ministry of Religion. In addition to the printed version, the Ministry of Religion also publishes Al-Qur'an and Its Indonesian Translation in digital versions, i.e. the website Qur'an Kemenag (https://quran.kemenag.go.id/) and Android-based application Qur'an Ministry of Religion, https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.quran.kemenag&hl=in).

The translation of the Qur'an into Indonesian and several local languages such as Javanese and Sundanese has a very long
history, with diverse versions, results, the influence of regime and political power, and
criticism (Federspiel, 1994) (Ichwan, 2009). History of the Qur'an translation process was
also overwhelmed with the context of epoch that prevailed when the translation took place,
outside the debate whether translating the Qur'an is permitted by Islamic tenet or not.
During that time, the translation progression brought the mindset of institutions, translators,
and social context targeted by the Muslim or state intellectual authority that facilitated it
(Tareen, 2017). Thus, in the form of translation or even interpretation, the Qur'an as a reference
for Muslims is not utter precepts.

Indonesian translation of the Qur'an has
had broad influence on Indonesian Muslims. It
is not only in the form of religious understanding, but also how they have
knowledge of certain discourses in everyday life (Ichwan, 2009), including terms which tend
to be linked with "disability". These words have a meaning that in everyday understanding
can be understood as disability, namely shummun
(mute), bukmun (deaf), 'umyun (blind), akmah
(blind since birth), da'if (weak), safih (fool),
abras (leper), and a'raj (stumbling) (Miles,
2002). In the form of Indonesian translation, the
meaning of them are simplified without
contextual description. For example, all
summun are translated as tuli (deaf) without any
further notes that they mean “spiritually deaf". The similarity in the choice of words of this
translation has a tendency to be misconstrued and perpetuate uncooperative stigma to persons
with disabilities.

2. Qur'an and Disability: Literature Review

Al-Qur'an is the first reference of Muslims. In addition to the Qur'an, within the
framework of the Ahlu as-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah school in Indonesia, the second to fourth
references are the hadith, consensus of ulama
(ijma’), and analogy (qiyas) respectively. As the
first and foremost inspiration, the Qur'an should
be easily comprehended by Indonesian Muslims. This is the reason why its translation
into Indonesian and several local languages in
Indonesia is essential.

Considering the Qur'an as a revelation from God, some scholars have refused to
translate it into languages other than Arabic. For this reason, some Muslim groups in
Indonesia lean to avoid the use of its translation, but attempt to grasp it through
comprehensive interpretation, approached from the history of verse (ashab an-nuzul), how to
understand it literally, to the collection of verses categorized thematically. Since this
digital era, after quran.kemenag.go.id was published, an explanation of the interpretation
of each verse followed. The option to display
the interpretation or explanation can be
retrieved directly in option buttons of each
paragraph. Thus, Muslims in Indonesia who
have an attentiveness in understanding the
verses of the Qur'an can read the translation
frankly as well as a more thorough explanation.

Although in the Qur'an some words associated with impairments such as summun,
bukmun, and ‘umyun, the concept of disability
in a conventional sense is not found (Bazna &
Hatab, 2008). These words are not correlated
with disability as the understanding conveyed
by the inclusion movement towards persons
with disabilities. Nevertheless, according to
Bazna and Hatab (Bazna & Hatab, 2008), the
Qur'an contains wisdoms about responsibility to
disadvantaged individuals, both socially,
economically, and physical attributes:

“… Rather, the Qur'an concentrates on the
notion of disadvantage that is created by society
and imposed on those individuals who might
not possess the social, economic, or physical
attributes that people happen to value at a
certain time and place. The Qur'an places
the responsibility of rectifying this inequity on
the shoulder of society by its constant exhortation
to Muslims to recognize the plight of the
disadvantaged and to improve their condition
and status.”

Based on the history of movements that
demand equality and equity of the rights of
persons with disabilities, this view is relatively
similar to the view of the charity model. Charity
model in disability issues places a person with
disabilities as an object. On the one hand, it is
identical with medical models in different areas.
Both are against the social model of disability
which positioned people with disabilities as
subjects of empowerment.

Differently on charity, medical, and
social model of disability bring indispensable
sense in the use of terms. "The disability
terminology debate is about seeing people as

Cite this as:
persons first, rather than focusing on their medical conditions" (Shakespeare, 2018). The impact of using these terms reflects how we think and have viewpoints about inclusion for people with disabilities.

These terms historically change as views cultivate. In the 1980s, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined disability as a personal attribute, "In the context of health experience, a disability is any restriction or lack of ability (resulting from an impairment) to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being" (WHO, 1980). In its current development, WHO calls it context-dependent, "Disability is not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives" (WHO, 2017). The label transformation has slightly changed the community’s behavior of disability conditions (King, 2019).

In the social model of disability, the use of the term accentuates the subjectivity of individuals with disabilities. Tom Shakespeare provides an illustration of the use of appropriate and commonly used terms today, namely “people with disabilities”, “people with chronic illness”, “people with learning difficulties”, “persons with cerebral palsy”, “Deaf” or “hard of hearing persons”, “people with mental health conditions”, “service user”, “persons with schizophrenia” (Shakespeare, 2018). In the Indonesian context, the use of these terms is exemplified in Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities. The terms used in the act are "persons with physical disabilities", "persons with intellectual disabilities", "persons with mental disabilities", and "persons with sensory disabilities".

In everyday life, what has been known as deaf is preferably termed Deaf, with large D. Deaf people acknowledge themselves as sign language users rather than individuals who have imperfect communication ability. In the law, a Deaf person is categorized as a person with sensory disabilities along with blind and person with speech difficulties. The terms chosen in the law differ from what is known in the culture of persons with disabilities' organization or movement because it is a legal result that has purpose of policy formulation and technical implementation, both in the form of services and empowerment.

This paper will use more specific terms with consideration to bridge them in the law and the terms recognized by movements or disability organizations. The terms are including “persons with disabilities”, “Deaf”, “persons with visual impairments”, “persons with speech disabilities”, “persons with mental disabilities”, “persons with intellectual disabilities”, and “people affected by leprosy”. Word "leper" is also included here based on WHO explanation (WHO, 2017) that leprosy is one of the causes of permanent disability.

3. Exploring the Verses

Al-Qur’an and Its Indonesian Translation is a translation of the Mushaf Utsmani commonly used in Southeast Asian. The composition consisted of 30 chapters and 114 surahs, began with Al-Fatihah and completed with An-Nas. History of translation of the Qur'an in Indonesia through a protracted history covering the colonial era to contemporary day. During that time, the translation of the Qur'an was crammed with numerous versions, translated by individuals, rulers in the colonial era, until accommodated by the government under the Ministry of Religion (Ichwan, 2009) (Federspiel, 1994). From the Qur'an and Its Indonesian Translation in the Utsmani version, I find seven words related to disability terms in 36 different surahs.

As mentioned above, the terminologies are bukmun (mute), summun (deaf), umyun (blind), akmuh (blind since birth), a’raj (stumbling), safih (fool), and dlfun (weak). These terms have different interpretations. By categorizing various kinds of disabilities, I look for the words in the Al-Qur'an translations and corpora such as Mu'jamul Mufaihars and corpus.quran.com. I also refer to the other papers on the Qur'an and disability, such as the writings of Maysaa S. Bazna & Tarek A. Hatab (2005), M. Mills (2002), Mohammed Ghaly (2019) and Staffan Bengtsson (2018).

In the following step, I scrutinize the explanations of each verse in Tafsir Jualalain, Tafsir Shawi, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, and The Study of the Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary. It provides critical interpretations, such as whether the verse contains "disability"
in the physical framework or spiritual insensibility. With this step, I would like to give a suggestion in line with the point of view of the social model of disability. It places the terms so that they are not in an equal position as the verse which contains teaching about spiritual insensibility.

4. Disability Term in Indonesian Translated Verses

In the *Al-Qur’an and Its Indonesian Translation*, quran.kemenag.go.id and the printed version circulating widely in Indonesian Muslim nowadays, the meaning of all the words is relatively identical without distinguishing between verses which contain physical attribute and spiritual insensibility. Those words need to be reconsidered as the translation becomes more appropriate and in line with the spirit of inclusion for persons with disabilities.

In the following paragraphs, I will portray in detail the words above based on their triliteral root. This method is to make them easy to be found in their surahs.

**Sād Mīm Mīm**

The triliteral root لام ميم ميم (sād mīm mīm) occurred 15 times in the Quran in three derived forms. It is twice as the form I verb ُساس (عَسَسَ), once as the form IV verb ُساس (عَسَسَ) (تَسَسَ), 12 times as the noun ُساس (عَسَسَ) in fourteen different verses (Nasr, Lumbard, Dagli, Dakake, & Rustom, 2017).

In the detailed explanation, all triliteral root لام ميم ميم (sād mīm mīm) mean “deaf” from the call to religious truth and belief, heart deafness, or deafness proposed as an analogy to polytheism (Al-Mahalli & Jalaluddin As-Suyuthi, 2001) (Shihab, 2005a). In Indonesian Translation of the Qur’an, this word is converted as tuli (deaf), without obvious account that the deaf implied to is not physically deaf.

**Bā Kāf Mīm**

The triliteral root ب كاف ميم (bā kāf mīm) occurred six times in the Quran in three derived forms as the noun ُبوكم (عَبْكَمْ), ُبكم (عَبْكَمْ), and ُبوكم (عَبْكَمْ) in six difference verses (11). It also means spiritually mute, with several meanings such as "not caring about religious truth" and "not thinking" (Al-Mahalli & Jalaluddin As-Suyuthi, 2001) (Shihab, 2005a) (Shihab, 2005c).

In the Qur’an and Its Indonesian Translation, all triliteral root بَكَافَمَمْ (ب كاف ميم) is translated as bisu (mute). One of the six words is explained in parentheses, namely in Surat Al-Anfal (8): 22 about God's view of people who do not want to understand the appeal to the truth.

In the Indonesian translation, 30 triliteral root of ُايم ميم يام (أَيْمُ ميمْ يام) did not mean “physically blind”. Three of them had been acceptable linguistically, three translated suitably, and six explained with further descriptions in parentheses. The three verses which have been translated correctly are Hud (11): 28, Al-Qashash (28): 66, Fushilat (41): 44. The three other words are translated as "darkness" and "disguise". For the three ُايم ميم يام, in Indonesian translation of the Qur’an they should be replaced by “penyandang disabilitas netra” as a more appropriate term.

**Kāf Mīm Hā**

The fourth is akin to the previous word, namely triliteral root ُكاف ميم هام (كاف ميم هام) which means “blind since birth”. It occurred twice in the Quran as the noun ُأكم (عَكَمْ) in two difference verses. Those are related to the story of the miracles given by God to Jesus, who was able to cure people with leprosy, make blind-since-birth people see and raised the dead from the grave. The words are in Ali ‘Imran (2): 49 and Al-Maidah (5): 110 (al-Baqi, 1364H). The word ُأكم (عَكَمْ), both literally and contextually, means...

In its translation, this word is translated as buta (blind). In the Indonesian context, and also related to the context of the verse, the word in these two verses need to be changed to "persons with visual disabilities since birth". An added use of the explanation "from birth" is to distinguish it from 'amiya which could mean physically blind not since birth.

‘Ayn Rā ḫim

The triliteral root ‘ayn rā ḫim (ع ر خ) occurred nine times in the Qur’an in three derived forms. It is five times as the form I verb ya’rūj (ي ر خ) twice as the noun a’raj (ار خ), twice as the noun ma’ārij (م ر خ) in two different verses, An-Nur (24): 61 and Al-Fath (48): 17 (al-Baqi, 1364H). Among nine of its derived forms, only the word a’raj is associated with disability term, which means “lame”. The other seven words mean “ascend”.

The word a’raj in the Qur’an and Its Indonesia Translation is translated as "lame people". Because this word is not proposed as a metaphor, the translation needs to be improved to "people with physical disabilities". In Surat An-Nur (24): 61, it even contains appeals relating to social inclusion in the family circle (Al-Mahalli & Jalaluddin As-Suyuthi, 2001).

Ḍāḏ ‘Ayn Fā

The triliteral root ḍāḏ ‘ayn fā (ض ع ف) occurred 52 times in the Quran in 11 derived forms. It is twice as the form I verb da’ifa (ذ ع ف) (مضعف), nine times as the form III verb yudā’u (ذ ع) eight times as the form X verb is’tad’u (ذ ع) (مضعف), twice as the noun ad’af (ذ ع) (مضعف), eight times as the form X verb is’tad’u (ذ ع) as the noun da’īf (ذ ع) (مضعف). Eleven times as the nominal di’īf (ذ ع) (مضعف), four times as the noun da’īf (ذ ع) (مضعف), eight times as the nominal da’īf (ذ ع) (مضعف), once as the adjective mudā’afat (ذ ع) (مضعف), once as the form III verbal noun di’āf (ذ ع) (مضعف), once as the form IV active participle mud‘īfūn (ذ ع) (مضعف), five times as the form X passive participle mus’tad’afūn (ذ ع) (مضعف). These words are in forty-five different verses (al-Baqi, 1364H).

The word rooted from the triliteral ḍāḏ ‘ayn fā (ض ع ف) in the Qur’an has three different kinds of meaning, namely “weak” (including disadvantaged and oppressed) and “multiplication”. These two different notions must be carefully categorized. In the 11 forms above, da’ifa (ذ ع ف) (مضعف), is’tad’u (ذ ع) (مضعف), da’īf (ذ ع) (مضعف), di’āf (ذ ع) (مضعف), and mus’tad’afūn (ذ ع) (مضعف) mean “weak”, whereas yudā’u (ذ ع) (مضعف), ad’af (ذ ع) (مضعف), di’īf (ذ ع) (مضعف), mudā’afat (ذ ع) (مضعف), and mud‘īfūn (ذ ع) (مضعف) are “multiplication”.

Triliteral roots of ḍāḏ ‘ayn fā (ض ع ف) which mean “weak” and “oppressed” generally do not refer to the concept of being physically weak. Among the 18 words containing this triliteral root which mean weak, 15 words mean “physically weak”, not spiritually. The words are in Al-Baqarah 266 and 282, An-Nisa’ 9, 75, 97, 98, and 172, Al-A’raf 137 and 150, Al-Anfal 26, Al-Taubah 91, Hud 91, Al-Qashash 4 and 5, and Ar-Rum 54. The triliteral root ḍāḏ ‘ayn fā (ض ع ف) in the verses means variably, varying in physical weakness and debilitating environmental conditions. Interestingly, Al-Baqarah 282 is related to prohibition to people with reason weakness to be involved in debt transactions. Another, Al-Taubah 91 explains that people with physical weakness are not in obligation to join war (Shihab, Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesat, dan Kesarisan Al-Qur’an, 2005a). In Indonesian translation of the Qur’an, these words were translated as lemah (weak). It does not have any negative connotations in Indonesian language or disability terms. However, people's understanding of being physically weak may automatically insinuate people with disabilities.

Bā Rā Ṣāḏ

The triliteral root bā rā ṣā’d (ب ر س) occurred twice in the Quran in two different verses as the noun abraṣ (أبرص) (al-Baqi, 1364H). As well as akmaha, the word abraṣ is in the same two verses which tell the miracles given by God to Jesus. The two verses are related to the concept of physical illness, not spiritual (Long, 2011). In the Qur'an and Its Indonesian Translations, the words are translated as "lepers". In Indonesia, there is no word to refer to "leper" as in English. Thus, the use of the translation of “people affected by leprosy” or "people with leprosy" has prioritized the existence of individual subjects as commonly used to refer to persons with disabilities in the framework of social models of disability.
Sin Fā Hā

The triliteral root șin fā hā (س ف ه) occurred 11 times in the Quran in four derived forms. It is once as the form I verb safīha (سَفِيْحَة), twice as the noun safāhat (سَفَاحَة), once as the noun safah (سَفَاة), seven times as the noun safīh (سَفِيْح) in ten different verses (al-Baqi, 1364H). The words in the Qur'an and Its Indonesian Translations are translated variously. Only one verse, in my observation, needs to be changed in its translation, namely in Surat Al-Baqarah (2): 282 which should be translated in more appropriate terms. Currently it is still translated as orang yang kurang akal (the one who lacks reason).

In the form of translation, it needs to be replaced by other appropriate words. M. Quraish Shihab explains that it can be in the form of an inability to manage ownership (Shihab, 2005a). According to Al-Mahalli and As-Syathibi (2001), it is precisely the behavior of wasting (mubaddzir) ownership. Since the verse is on the ability and maturity to manage ownership (mukallaf), it is necessary to discover other terms apposite to disability issues.

5. From Translation to Discourse Shift

As discussed above, the terms related to disability in the Al-Qur’an and Its Indonesian Translation still contain bias. Some verses are still translated with Indonesian words less appropriate in accordance with the spirit of the inclusion. In the recent discourse of disability issues in Indonesia, the adaptation of perspective from human rights approach invents some Indonesian terms in line with inclusion, for instance “penyandang disabilitas” as the Indonesian version of “people with disabilities” to replace the old term “penyandang cacat”. Social construction of disability, through alteration in terminology usage, has transformed the discourse of inclusion (Oliver, 1990). It apparently conveys positive messages which change the way people treat persons with disabilities. The terms deployed in the translation follows old definitions that require a renewal version to shift discourse.

Although there are only a few verses honestly related to persons with disabilities, the Qur’an encompasses positive message about the value of inclusion. In Indonesia, the translation of the Qur’an by following the spirit of contemporary view about social inclusion for people with disabilities will affect alterations of stereotypes to be more positive. As the first and foremost source, it positively influences the use of terms in other references such as hadith, ijma’, and qiyas. If terminology is a perceptible representation of ways of thinking, transformations will gradually affect the overall pattern structurally reflected in our social life.

Bibliography


