

Illustrating and Designing Quranic Imagery

Dr. Lubna Almenoar

British University in Egypt

Abstract

Selected verses from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English language translation of the meaning of the Quran have been used as a literary text to teach both descriptive and figurative imagery (including similes, metaphors and symbols) to students at the undergraduate level in an Islamic institution. The technique-Illustrating and Designing for teaching imagery has been selected to accommodate the text. The group of students was taught imagery using one technique covering 2 class sessions. Assignments were given to derive data for the evaluation of the level of understanding of the lessons on imagery. An analysis of the data from the assignments shows a high level of understanding of the lessons on imagery by the students.

Illustrating and Designing Quranic Imagery

The Quran contains an abundance of imagery, Many Quranic images are conveyed literally. These constitute descriptive imagery whereby they clarify or give a vivid picture of something. Then, there is figurative imagery, which are conveyed by figurative language, such as in metaphors, similes, symbols, etc. The figurative language used in the Quran, its metaphors, similes, symbols, etc., can certainly be looked at in more detail. Translators of the English language translations of the Quran, in striving to put across the closest meaning they can of the original Quran, do not neglect to use figurative language effectively.

Muhammad Asad explains the need for the use of imagery in the Quran.

This being so, it is not enough for man to be told, "If you behave righteously in this world, you will attain to happiness in the happiness in the life to come", or alternatively, "If you do wrong in this world, you will suffer for it in the hereafter". Such statements would be far too general and abstract to appeal to man's imagination and, thus, to influence his behaviour. What is needed is a more direct appeal to the intellect, resulting in a kind of "visualization" of the consequences of one's conscious acts and omissions and such an appeal can be effectively produced by means of metaphors, allegories and parables, each of them stressing, on the one hand, the absolute dissimilarity of all that man will experience after resurrection from whatever he did or could experience in this world; and, on the other hand, establishing means of comparison between these two categories of experience (Asad, 1980:990).

A judgment sample of verses was taken from a few different surah. Two index categorization books were used for this selection: Tafsil Ayat AlQuran AlHakim by Jol Labom (Labom,1963) and AlMustadrak by Edward Montet (Montet,1963). Both these books were translated by Mohamed Fouad Abdul Baqui and have a systematic listing of Quranic verses according to topics (eg. Heaven, Hell, Justice, etc.). Under Heaven, there are altogether 258 verses mentioned in 58 *surah* (chapters of the Quran). Under Hell, there are altogether 144 verses mentioned in 35 surah. The verses to be dealt with in this paper are:

XXXVII Surah As-Saffat (Those Ranged in Ranks), verses 62-68, 74 from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English language translation of the meaning of the Quran. This paper first provides a brief explanation and discussion of each verse to familiarize the reader with the basic meaning of the verse. The technique and the exemplary Quranic images (text) will then be presented in this paper:

Technique: Illustrating and Designing

Source: Pictures for Language Learning by Andrew Wright (Wright,1989)

Text: Verses 62-68, 74 of Surah As-Saffat

Source: The Holy Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Abdullah,1983)

The Discussion of Selected Quranic Images

Verses 62-62 of Surah As-Saffat tell us what awaits the wrongdoers:

- 62. Is that the better entertainment
Or the Tree of Zaqquq?**
- 63. For We have truly
Made it (as) a trial
For the wrong-doers**
- 64. For it is a tree
That springs out
Of the bottom of Hell-fire:**
- 65. The shoots of its fruit-stalks
Are like the heads of devils:**
- 66. Truly they will eat thereof
And fill their bellies therewith**
- 67. Then on top of that
They will be given
A mixture made of
Boiling water**
- 68. Then shall their return
Be to the (Blazing) Fire.**

Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains about the Tree of Zaqquq which exists only in Hell: "this bitter tree of Hell is a symbol of contrast with the beautiful Garden of Heaven with its delicious fruits" (1199).

A truly horrid picture of Hell is given by the chain of torture that revolves around the Tree of Zaqqum.

Verse 64 tells the readers that it is a tree that grows at the bottom of Hell. “Springs out” gives one the feeling that it is a thing unwanted and unpleasant, in a milder sense, like weeds in a garden. In contrast, one can picture the difference between the lively greenery in the garden and the bitter tree in Hell.

Verses 65-66 further describe this evil tree. The ugly fruits of this tree in Hell are described through a simile, “like the heads of devils”. This image strongly contrasts the lovely fruits in Heaven, or even the fruits that one is familiar with on earth. What horrid-looking fruits are in Hell and how bitter they must taste, too.

Verses 67-68 tell that after the sinners eat these bitter fruits of Zaqqum, they will be given a mixture of boiling water to drink as a further punishment. The readers can feel this humiliating and painful ordeal after which they return to the fire again. This makes one feel the chain of calamities of steps of horrors that the sinners have to go through. It seems unending.

The senses affected are visual, tactile and gustatory.

The 2 lines in Verse 74 of Surah As-Saffat tell us that all shall suffer.....

**74. Except the sincere (and devoted)
Servants of God.**

There are only two lines that tell us what the believers will not go through. These two lines manage succinctly to give one a sense of relief and satisfaction that doing good on earth will indeed pay off in the end. As Abdullah Yusuf Ali puts it, “unrighteousness and wrong-doing never prosper in the long run” (1200).

The Introductory Lesson on Imagery

There is a need for an introductory lesson on imagery since there are certain aspects of imagery that the students need to know and understand before they can fully participate in class discussions or attempt any of the written assignments. A teacher can devise his/her own introductory lesson on imagery according to the level of language competence of his/her group of students.

Thus, for this case study, it must be kept in mind that the group of participants is of the preintermediate English proficiency level. Careful selection of a suitable technique and level of difficulty of the text must be done. Consequently, activities that help to enhance the four language skills are also thought of.

A suggested written assignment after an introductory lesson on imagery is: Make sentences using the three literary devices and explain how and why the simile, metaphor and symbol are used. State the senses that are affected by each image.

The written assignment will be used as basis for gauging whether or not the students have understood the lesson.

Lesson Plan on Imagery

Technique: Illustrating and Designing

Text: Verses 62-68,74 of Surah As-Saffat

Level: PreIntermediate (undergraduate)

Duration: One Hour

Objectives: Develop in students the ability to:

- 1) Identify and/or locate the images in the verses.
- 2) Recognize and distinguish between the 2 types of imagery :
 - i) Descriptive imagery
 - ii) Figurative imagery and the literary devices used
- 3) State which senses are affected .
- 4) Draw/sketch the images.
- 5) Use the four skills:
 - i) Speaking : Not done.
 - ii) Listening : Done in listening to the verses read by the teacher.
 - iii) Writing : Not done.
 - iv) Reading : Not done.

The teacher can start the lesson by recapitulating the (previous) introductory lesson on imagery. Allow 15 minutes for this.

In the technique, Illustrating and Designing, the students are allowed to express themselves imaginatively not in verbal or written work or by reading but by listening and then drawing, sketching and colouring their interpretation of what is read to them. The students are told beforehand to bring coloured pencils.

The level of suitability for this technique would be elementary level English language class students (undergraduate) at an Islamic institutions.

The original text used for this technique was replaced with Quranic images of Heaven and Hell selected from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English language translation of the meaning of the Quran: Verses 62-68, 74 of Surah As-Saffat. The teacher begins by distributing the copies of the verses. The teacher then informs the students that these verses that they are about to study are from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English language translation of the meaning of the Quran, specifically, Verses 62-68 of Surah As-Saffat. The teacher tells the students that these verses are about Hell. The teacher reads these verses:

- 62. Is that the better entertainment
Or the Tree of Zaqqum?**
- 63. For We have truly
Made it (as) a trial
For the wrong-doers**
- 64. For it is a tree
That springs out
Of the bottom of Hell-fire:**
- 65. The shoots of its fruit-stalks**

- Are like the heads of devils:**
- 66. Truly they will eat thereof
And fill their bellies therewith**
- 67. Then on top of that
They will be given
A mixture made of
Boiling water**
- 68. Then shall their return
Be to the (Blazing) Fire.**

The teacher will now ask the students to focus on the several images that are projected in these verses.

Verse 64 line 1-3: **For it is a tree
That springs out
Of the bottom of Hell-fire**

What type of imagery? Descriptive imagery.

This image gives a vivid description of the location of the tree of Zaqqum and compares its growth process to that of weeds.

Senses: visual.

One can also imagine seeing this horrid tree in Hell.

Verse 65, lines 1-3: **The shoots of its fruit-stalks
Are like the heads
Of devils**

What type of imagery? Figurative Imagery using the literary device: simile.

The word "like" tells one that a simile is being used to compare the shoots to devils' heads.

Senses: visual.

This image gives a vivid picture in our minds of how evil-looking fruits of this tree in Hell are.

Verse 66, lines 1-2: **Truly they will eat thereof
And fill their bellies therewith**

What type of Imagery? Descriptive imagery.

This image tells one that the sinners will eat these disgusting fruits until they are full.

Senses : visual, gustatory.

One can picture the sinners eating these fruits and imagine how foul these fruits must taste, too.

Verse 67, lines 1-4: **Then on top of that
They will be given
A mixture made of
Boiling water**

What type of imagery? Descriptive imagery.

This image tells one that after eating these dreadful fruits, the sinners will drink a mixture of boiling water.

Senses: visual, gustatory, tactile.

One can picture this painful ordeal, having to taste, drink and feel the heat of the mixture of boiling water.

Verse 68, lines 1-2: **Then shall their return
Be to the (Blazing) Fire**

What type of Imagery? Descriptive imagery.

One is told that after eating these atrocious fruits and drinking the mixture of boiling water, the sinners will return to the "(Blazing Fire)" again to be tortured.

Senses: visual, tactile.

One can picture and imagine feeling the heat of the Fire.

After the explanation, the teacher reads the verses again, this time informing the students that they are to sketch, draw and colour while the teacher reads these verses on Hell. The students are to draw the images that come into their minds as they listen. While the students listen, they sketch. The teacher can walk around the class and repeat the verses until the students are about done. Allow 15-20 minutes for this.

Then the teacher reads these 2 lines on Heaven. The teacher informs the students that these 2 lines are from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English language translation of the meaning of the Quran, specifically, Verse 74 of Surah As-Saffat. The teacher starts to read :

**74. Except the sincere (and devoted)
Servants of God**

These 2 lines tell that only the sincere and devoted servants of Allah do not have to go through what the sinners have to go through in Hell (as described in the verses just above).

Now the teacher can ask the students to draw and sketch a picture of Heaven, of what they feel to be the opposite of their previous drawing or sketch of Hell. The students can refer to their previous drawing. Allow 15-20 minutes for this.

If the students are able to complete the assignment within the remainder of the class time, these assignments can be collected at the end of the period. If not, these assignments will be collected at the beginning of the next lesson. These assignments will be the basis for gauging whether or not the students have understood the lesson.

A Case Study

Two lessons were taught to a group of students at the undergraduate level in an Islamic institution. This class is an English language –PreIntermediate level class. The students were taught for one hour of the introductory lesson on imagery and one hour of the above lesson plan using the technique-Illustrating and Designing with Quranic images. Observatory comments were taken and reproduced in this paper. The breakdown of the marking scheme for the two written assignments after each lesson was taught, is dealt with.

Evaluation of Assignments

The Introductory Lesson on Imagery

Assignment: Write a simile, metaphor and symbol, stating the senses that are affected.

For simile: Total - 5 marks.

4 marks for correct answers

(-) 1 mark for spelling error, (+) 1 mark for creativity, (-) 1 mark for grammatical error

For metaphor: Total - 5 marks

4 marks for correct answers

(-) 1 mark for spelling error, (+) 1 mark for creativity, (-) 1 mark for grammatical error

For symbol: Total - 5 marks

2 marks for each part of the symbol

(-) 1 mark for spelling error, (+) 1 mark for creativity, (-) 1 mark for grammatical error

Maximum Possible Score: 15 marks

No. of Participants	2	7	3	7	2
Scores	14	13	12	11	9

Comments

Generally, this class of participating students lost points due to the fact that they had problems with grammar and word order. The students could not write their own symbols. Some wrote another metaphor for a symbol. It is also clear to see that the students have found similes and metaphors easier and symbols the most difficult.

The Lesson on Imagery using Quranic images and the technique-Illustrating and Designing.

Assignment: Draw, sketch and colour the images of Heaven and Hell.

Total marks - 30 marks (15 marks each)

For Heaven 4 marks for each image.

If the drawing contains more than 3 images: +3

For Hell 4 marks for each image.

If the drawing contains more than 3 images: +3

Maximum Possible Score: 15 marks

	For Heaven			For Hell		
No. of Participants	8	10	4	6	9	7
Scores	15	12	10	15	12	10

Comments

For both Heaven and Hell, the majority of the participating students scored 12 marks when they drew three good representations of images. Those who scored full marks drew more than three representations of images and those who scored less did not draw clear representations of images. This technique was thought to be suitable for a preintermediate level class because they did not have to express themselves by words and sentences. They were asked to draw instead. The students, however, asked me many times whether they could write some explanatory notes beside their drawing for fear that I may not be able to interpret what they had drawn. I did not allow them to do this since I thought that this would defeat the purpose of this technique-- to express themselves in the form of drawing images. I assured them that I would be able to interpret and understand what they had drawn.

Conclusion

The focus of this technique (Illustrating and Designing) is of course, the teaching of imagery. At the same time, however, the teacher can point out new vocabulary and correct grammatical mistakes. For this preintermediate group of participants, the classroom activity was task-based, drawing and colouring.

This technique, Illustrating and Designing, text of Quranic imagery and the suitable activities carried out in the classroom, each plays its own role in a teacher's successful teaching session. They are an integrative part of the whole teaching session.

Basically, the following are the main objectives of any teacher teaching a lesson on imagery:

Objectives: Develop in students the ability to:

- 1) Distinguish the 2 types of imagery :
 - i) Descriptive imagery
 - ii) Figurative imagery
- 2) Distinguish the 3 literary devices usually used in figurative imagery:
 - i) Simile
 - ii) Metaphor
 - iii) Symbol
- 3) Recognize and use the literary terms for the five senses that can be affected through imagery :
 - i) see--visual
 - ii) hear—auditory
 - iii) touch—tactile
 - iv) smell--olfactory
 - v) taste--gustatory
- 4) Write their own similes, metaphors and symbols, stating the senses that are affected.

5) Use the four skills:

i) Listening

ii) Speaking

iii) Reading

iv) Writing

With the use of Quranic images, it is possible to generate a discussion on an aspect of Islam. This is an added advantage, especially at Islamic institutions. Both descriptive and figurative imagery, in particular, metaphors, similes, symbols, can be taught through Quranic images.

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