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# **TTAIS**

## **International Journal of Textual and Translation Analysis in Islamic Studies**

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The Influence of the Translator's Religious Background**

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Elham Yazdanmehr; Mahbobe Sqab Gandomabadi

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International Journal of Textual and Translation Analysis in Islamic Studies (TTAIS) is a double-blind peer reviewed electronic quarterly publication concerned with appropriate aspects of Islamic terminology. TTAIS is an open access publication, which publishes of original research papers, review papers, case reports, and short communications across the fields of Islamic terminology.

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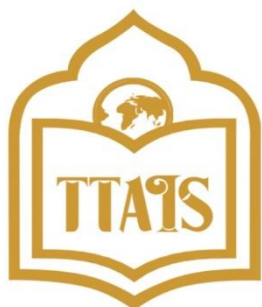
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- Critique of translations of Islamic texts;
- Investigating Interdisciplinary Islamic references and educational texts;
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- Methodology of translating Islamic texts and terms;
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## Translation Strategies in English Renditions of End-Time Saviour Verses in the Qur'ān: The Influence of the Translator's Religious Background

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the translation strategies used in the English renditions of the end-of-the-world saviourship verses of the Holy Qur'ān, from the perspective of the translators' religious backgrounds. For this purpose, the English translations by three translators, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish (namely, Saffarzadeh (2001), Arberry (1957), and Dawood (1956), respectively), on the topic of saviourship in the Holy Qur'ān were collected and examined. To identify the translation strategy or strategies and to support the analysis of the translations and the ideologies underlying them, Newmark's (1988) translation strategies, as well as a revised model of Larson's (1998) TQA proposed by Rahimi (2004) (including accuracy, clarity, and naturalness), were employed as theoretical frameworks. Additionally, two Qur'ānic exegeses by Gulam Malik Farid and *Tafsir al-Mizan* by Allameh Tabataba'i, alongside selected authentic traditions or Hadiths, were consulted to provide a deeper understanding of the Qur'ānic interpretations. The results of the study indicated that ideological factors played a significant role in the choice of translation procedures, the translator's intentions, and the academic and exegetical references used in each translation. More specifically, the Muslim translator tended toward a more meaning-oriented approach, placing greater emphasis on conveying meaning than the Jewish and Christian translators. Saffarzadeh also made more deliberate efforts to avoid manipulation and distortion compared to the other two translators.

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of a bright future for humanity through the intervention of a savior is a theme found in nearly all religions. Many faiths anticipate the coming of an end-of-the-world savior who will deliver humanity from injustice. In addition to Muslims, followers of other religions—such as Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism—also await a figure who will bring peace and justice to the world. Belief in the eventual arrival of a future messiah is a fundamental aspect of Christianity. The messiah is regarded as a great, charismatic leader who is well-versed in the religious laws and teachings of the faith. Muslims agree that al-Mahdi will appear first, followed by Isa (Jesus). Isa will recognize and affirm al-Mahdi as the leader of the Islamic community. Unlike the Bible, the Holy Qur’ān denies the crucifixion of Jesus, stating that he was neither killed nor crucified (Qur’ān 4:157). The Qur’ān also clearly distinguishes between Allah and the Messiah:

Those who say that Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary, are unbelievers. The Messiah said: ‘O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’... Unbelievers too are those who say that Allah is the third of three... The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a Messenger; other Messengers had passed away before him (Qur’ān 5:72–77).

Given that different translators may apply varying ideological perspectives to the same text, examining the role of religious ideology in the translation of the Holy Qur’ān presents one of the most complex challenges in translation studies and warrants careful consideration. In this context, the concept of saviourship in Islam has been emphasized in both Shi’ite and Sunni traditions. This study investigates several verses in the Holy Qur’ān that affirm the existence and presence of a savior. These verses are analyzed from a translational perspective, with particular attention to the ideological influences stemming from the translators’ religious backgrounds. Accordingly, three English translations of the Holy Qur’ān—by A.J. Arberry (1957), N.J. Dawood (1956), and Tahereh Saffarzadeh (2001)—are compared and contrasted to uncover similarities and differences in the translation strategies employed, and to reveal how religious ideology is represented in each translation.

This study examines how translators’ religious backgrounds influence their English translations of Qur’ānic verses concerning the savior. The primary objective is to investigate and demonstrate the extent to which the religious and ideological backgrounds of translators affect their interpretation—and consequently, their translation—of the Holy Qur’ān on the topic of saviourship. Additionally, the study aims to describe and evaluate selected verses of the Holy Qur’ān in relation to the ideological influence of each translator. This is achieved through a comparison between the source text and its translated versions, focusing on identifying and explaining the differences and similarities among the translations. The analysis emphasizes three key criteria: accuracy, clarity, and naturalness, all examined in light of the translators’ respective religious affiliations. In line with these objectives, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

- How do translators’ religious beliefs influence their lexical and syntactic choices in rendering verses about saviourship?
- To what extent do ideological factors affect the accuracy, clarity and naturalness of these translations?

Investigating ideological stances of translators in relation to their religion and ideology, especially when it affects their translation practice and is traceable in particular features of

target text, will be of prime importance. In particular, this will be more crucial when the source text is the Holy Qur'ān.

## Review of Literature

### 2.1. Religious discourse

According to Wittgenstein (2008), the limits of an individual's language are the limits of their world. Language plays a crucial role in shaping a person's perception of reality, or at the very least, their awareness of the external world. In other words, the way we use language—whether in speech or writing—reflects not only our knowledge of the world but also our attitude toward it. In the context of religious language, linguistic variations become even more impactful and can, at times, be particularly striking. As Keane (1997, p. 47) notes, in religious discourse, “the sources of words, as well as the identity, agency, authority, and even the very presence of participants in an interaction, can be especially problematic.” Religious language is deeply intertwined with underlying preconceptions about both human subjects and divine beings.

Larson's (1998) theoretical approach to translation proposes three main features for translation quality assessment: accuracy, clarity, and naturalness. Accuracy refers to the correct representation of the source message and the precise transfer of its meaning into the receptor language. According to Larson (1998), conveying the meaning of the original text accurately and using natural, idiomatic expressions in the receptor language are the primary goals of a translator. Clarity means choosing a form of expression that communicates the message in the clearest way—one that ordinary people can easily understand. Larson (1998) argues that a translation may be accurate yet still fail to communicate effectively to its intended audience if it lacks clarity. Naturalness involves using the natural form of the receptor language to ensure the translation is both effective and acceptable. As Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) explain, naturalness refers to the extent to which a translation is expressed in clear, unforced terms in the target language, closely resembling the way native speakers typically express themselves.

### 2.2. Ideology and translation

According to Van Dijk (2006), ideologies form the foundation of belief systems or social representations shared by specific groups. As special forms of social cognition, ideologies underpin the social practices and representations of group members, including their discourse—which simultaneously functions as a means of ideological production, reproduction, and resistance (Van Dijk, 1998). When ideology intersects with society, political power, and dominance, it takes on a more complex and nuanced meaning.

In political science, such ideologies are often referred to as belief systems or social representations. These are not individual beliefs, but collective beliefs shared by social groups—much like grammars, sociocultural knowledge, group attitudes, norms, and values. Thus, ideologies are seen as the cognitive frameworks that shape and sustain the belief systems of particular communities (Van Dijk, 2006).

When it comes to ideology in translation, many scholars have examined the influence of the translator's ideological stance and personal attitudes on their work. Hatim and Mason (1997, p. 144) define ideology as “the tacit assumptions, beliefs, and value systems which are shared collectively by social groups.” This clear and insightful definition aligns well

with the focus of the present study, particularly given that in the context of the Holy Qur'ān, religious beliefs permeate all aspects of Muslim life—including dogma, doctrine, legislation, and moral ethics.

Moreover, Hatim and Mason (1997) specifically explore the intersection of ideology and translation, distinguishing between the ideology of translating and the translation of ideology. They argue that translation is inherently an ideological activity shaped by its social context, wherein the translator acts as both a communicator and a representative of ideology. Through their translational choices, translators engage with and convey ideological perspectives, especially when handling ideologically charged content.

Lefevère (1992) insists on the presence of ideology in the field of translation:

Translation is, of course, rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever-increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation process of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (p. 85)

The scope of translation surpasses the limits of linguistic and literary norms and is determined by the ideology of governments and other institutions. In this respect, Venuti (1998) says:

Norms may be in the first instance linguistic or literary, but they will also include a diverse range of domestic values, beliefs and social representations which carry ideological force in serving the interest of specific groups. And they are always housed in the social institutions where translations are produced and enlisted in cultural and political agendas. (p. 153)

In light of the quotation above, Venuti helps us understand that translation is not merely a linguistic act involving knowledge of the source and target languages, but also a cultural and ideological process. Translation is influenced by the values of the target culture, shaped by the ideologies of those who receive, sponsor, or censor the translated text—such as governments, publishing houses, or editorial boards. Venuti emphasizes the role of socio-cultural and ideological factors in translation, a perspective that directly relates to the central concern of this study.

## **1. Methodology**

### *1.1. Materials and corpus*

In this comparative-descriptive study, 19 verses of the Holy Qur'ān, along with their English translations by three translators of different religious backgrounds—Muslim (Saffarzadeh), Christian (Arberry), and Jewish (Dawood)—were examined. The selected verses contain ideological themes related to end-of-the-world saviourship and eschatological

Armageddon, the ultimate salvation of believers and the pious, the promise of a universal Islamic state, the victory of Truth over Untruth, the triumph of the belief in the oneness of God over polytheism, the victory of justice over injustice, and the continuation of the leadership and guardianship of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). These verses were analyzed to extract and organize relevant data accordingly. Additionally, selected authentic Hadiths related to the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān were consulted, drawing on two key sources of Qur'ānic interpretation: *The Holy Qur'ān* by the exegete Gulam Farid, and *Tafsir al-Mizan* by Allameh Tabataba'i (1972).

### 1.2. Data collection and analysis procedures

Regarding the issue of saviourship, data were gathered based on several categories: verses whose exegeses explicitly address saviourship (e.g., 9:33); verses related to saviourship according to the exegesis of specific narratives (e.g., 14:5); verses whose central meaning or paraphrase is somewhat connected to saviourship (e.g., 42:1); and verses linked to saviourship through related traditions or Hadiths (e.g., 2:249).

Based on these categories, the selected Qur'ānic verses encompassed themes such as end-of-the-world saviourship and eschatological Armageddon, the ultimate salvation of believers and the pious, the promise of a universal Islamic state, the victory of Truth over Untruth, the triumph of the belief in the oneness of God over polytheism, the victory of justice over injustice, and the continuation of the leadership and guardianship of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). To analyze these verses in terms of their ideological and sensitive content, two authoritative Qur'ānic exegeses were employed: *The Holy Qur'ān* by the exegete Gulam Farid and *Tafsir al-Mizan* by Allameh Tabataba'i (1972). These sources helped identify ideological elements that may have been manipulated or (mis)translated in the target texts.

In the analysis of the translations, Newmark's (1988) translation procedures were used as a framework. Each verse was tabulated separately to clearly illustrate which translation procedures were applied by each translator. The analysis went beyond mere description and explanation, involving a comparative approach that examined the translations against one another and against the original Qur'ānic text. This approach aimed to uncover differences and similarities among the translations as well as their faithfulness to the source meaning.

### 1.3. Translation frameworks

Rahimi's (2004) revision of Larson's (1998) TQA model was used to evaluate translation quality based on three key criteria:

- Accuracy: The precise and detailed transfer of the source message. A translation is inaccurate if it omits, adds, or misinterprets information (p. 55).
- Clarity: The translation must communicate clearly to its intended audience, using language easily understood by target readers (p. 56).
- Naturalness: The translation should use natural target language forms, avoiding foreign-sounding constructions or strict word-for-word correspondence. Translators may freely adapt the text to fit the target audience, favoring communicative over semantic translation (Rahimi, 2004, p. 58; Tytler, 1797; Nida & Taber, 1969; Newmark, 1988).

Newmark's model, suitable for religious texts, categorizes translation strategies into:

- Direct strategies:
  - *Literal translation*: Word-for-word translation.
  - *Through-translation (loan translation)*: Literal translation of collocations or compounds, maintaining formal structure.
  - *Naturalization*: Adapting source language words to target language pronunciation and morphology.
- Indirect strategies:
  - *Equivalence*: Prioritizing equivalent meaning for the target reader, sometimes sacrificing formal similarity.
  - *Cultural equivalence*: Replacing culturally specific terms with approximate cultural equivalents.
  - *Functional equivalence*: Using a target language term with the same function or meaning.
  - *Descriptive equivalence*: Explaining a source concept through description.
  - *Synonymy*: Using near-equivalent words in the target language.
  - *Paraphrase*: Amplifying or explaining meaning.
  - *Shifts*: Changes in grammar or word class (transposition, modulation).
  - *Componential analysis*: Breaking down complex lexical units for cultural terms.
  - *Compensation*: Recovering lost meaning or effects elsewhere in the text.
- Other strategies:
  - *Recognized translation*: Using established translations for institutional terms.
  - *Translation label*: Provisional translations for terms lacking standard equivalents (Newmark, 1988, pp. 81–93).

## 2. Findings

Regarding the method of the research, the analysis of the corpus comprised the comparison between translations of the selected verses in the Holy Qur'ān and finding the applicability of Newmark's (1988) procedures used by the translators with different religious background. Thus, some examples of each procedure together with the qualitative analysis of the procedures for different translators are presented. More comprehensive data are presented in Appendix A.

### Example 1 (Surah Al-Anfal: 39):

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

A.J. Arberry: Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is God's entirely; then if they give over, surely God sees the things they do;

N.J. Dawood: Make war on them until idolatry is no more and Allah's religions supreme. If they desist Allah is cognizant of all their actions.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And (O, Muslims!) fight them until there is no more disbelief or tumult And the Religion of Allah prevails Entirely throughout the earth, but if they desist, then certainly Allah is the Seer of what they do.

According to Qur'ānic exegesis, the original term “فِتْنَةٌ” (fitnah) refers not only to disbelief but also to any form of oppression or coercion imposed by idolaters upon Muslims. Saffarzadeh highlights this point by adding explanatory elements and selecting the terms *disbelief* and *tumult* to more accurately convey the source meaning. In contrast, Dawood's translation does not fully capture the message embedded in the original term. His approach results in ambiguity, as it fails to communicate the complete context of the source text to the reader. Arberry, on the other hand, offers a literal translation, adhering closely to lexical equivalence. According to Islamic tradition, the full and final realization of this verse will occur with the advent of Imam Mahdi (AS). The verse emphasizes that fighting is sanctioned only as long as persecution continues and people are denied the freedom to practice the religion of their choice. If the opponents of Islam cease hostilities, Muslims are also commanded to stop fighting. Islam permits combat solely for self-defense and to uphold freedom of belief. The statement “Allah is Watchful” serves as a reassurance to Muslims: they need not fear that disbelievers might feign peace only to launch another attack when the opportunity arises. God is fully aware of all actions, and He will surely support the believers if others act deceitfully.

### Example 2 (Surah As-Saf: 13):

وَأُخْرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَا نَصْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ وَبَشِيرٌ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

A.J. Arberry: And other things you love help from God and a nigh victory. Give thou good tidings to the believers!

N.J. Dawood: And He will bestow upon you other blessing which you desire: help from Allah and a speedy victory. Proclaim the good tidings to the faithful.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And also, you will have another gain which you are anxious to attain: Allah's aid and a near victory, so (O, messenger) give glad things to the believers!

This verse of the Holy Qur'ān has been translated using literal translation and lexical equivalence by all three translators, A.J. Arberry, N.J. Dawood, and T. Saffarzadeh. According to Qur'ānic exegesis, their rendering of the key phrase “فَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ” as “near victory” or “speedy victory” is acceptable and aligns with the intended meaning. In this context, the use of literal translation and lexical equivalence proves effective, as it preserves the source meaning without deviation. The term “فَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ” is traditionally interpreted as referring to the future universal conquest led by Imam Mahdi (AS).



**Example 3 (Surah Al-Anbya: 105):**

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ

A.J. Arberry: For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, “The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants”.

N.J. Dawood: We wrote in the Psalms after the Torah had been given: “The righteous among My servants shall inherit the earth”.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And We wrote in the Psalms which came after Taurat: “my righteous believers shall eventually inherit the earth”.

In their translations of the above verse N.J. Dawood and T. Saffarzadeh use paraphrasing and apply cultural equivalents to convey the meaning of the original term “الذِّكْرُ”, which they render as “Taurat” and “Torah”. This approach explains the source meaning while contextualizing it within the target audience’s cultural and religious framework. Saffarzadeh, as a Muslim translator, reflects her ideological stance by identifying the Torah as one of the revealed scriptures acknowledged in Islamic belief. However, it is important to note that the understanding of the Torah from a Muslim perspective may differ from Jewish or Christian interpretations, particularly in relation to its theological and doctrinal content. In contrast, A.J. Arberry adopts a literal translation, which lacks the explanatory nuance needed to communicate the deeper Qur’ānic connotation of “الذِّكْرُ” to the reader. His rendering, while lexically accurate, may not fully capture the intended religious and historical implications embedded in the term. The phrase “الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْأَرْضَ” (those who will inherit the land) is also significant. According to the exegete Tabarsi, citing Imam al-Baqir (AS), it refers to the righteous companions of Imam Mahdi (AS) in the final phase of history before the Day of Judgment (*Majma’ al-Bayan*, Vol. 5, p. 64). Moreover, the term “الْأَرْضُ” (the land) is interpreted in Islamic tradition as the land of Palestine.

Interestingly, Christian commentators have also interpreted the phrase “inherit the land” or “inherit the earth”, as found in the Psalms, to mean the inheritance of Canaan, understood as a fulfillment of God’s covenant. This is supported by notes in the *Commentary on the Old Testament* published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (London), specifically in reference to Psalm 37:3. The term “الذِّكْرُ”, therefore, may indeed refer to the Torah, the Book of Moses, highlighting a shared Abrahamic reference, though nuanced by differing theological interpretations.

**Example 4 (Surah An-Nur: 55):**

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

A.J. Arberry: God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land, even as He made those who were before them successors, and that He will surely establish their religion for them that He has approved for them, and will give them in exchange, after their fear, security: ‘They shall serve Me, not associating with Me anything.’ Whoso disbelieves after that, those -- they are the ungodly.

N.J. Dawood: Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good works to make them masters in the land as He had made their ancestors before them, to strengthen the Faith He chose for them, and to change their fears to safety. Let them worship Me and serve no other gods besides Me. Wicked indeed are they who after this deny Me.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Allah has promised to those of you mankind who believe and do good that he will appoint them the rulers in the world as he appointed those before them; and will establish in authority their religion which he is pleased with it; and he will replace security for their fears; (and Allah states:) “They should worship me only and should not consider any partner for me; so those who disbelieve after this, they are indeed transgressors”.

A.J. Arberry demonstrates an awareness of the structural nuances necessary for conveying meaning. In translating the phrase “اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ” as “to them successors”, he mirrors the syntactic structure of the original Arabic, preserving its semantic intent. This choice makes the underlying meaning more explicit to the target audience, maintaining the Qur’ānic emphasis on divine succession. All three translators—Arberry, Dawood, and Saffarzadeh—employ literal translation and lexical equivalence in their renderings of this verse from Surah *Al-Nur* (The Light), verse 55. However, while Arberry retains the original structure, he does not fully clarify the layered meaning of “اسْتَخْلَفَ”, which conveys the idea of divinely appointed succession or vicegerency. Dawood and Saffarzadeh, in contrast, use the conjunction “as” to avoid direct mention of phrases like “masters and rulers”. This choice, though perhaps stylistically simpler, overlooks the rhetorical repetition in the source text—a device that serves to stress the gravity and divine origin of the concept of succession.

Tabarsi, in his exegetical work *Majma’ al-Bayan*, affirms that this verse was revealed in reference to Imam Mahdi (AS), son of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The verse encapsulates a foundational principle in Islamic theology and governance. It provides a comprehensive vision of the Islamic future, encompassing moral, social, and political dimensions. Specifically, it lays out the concept of caliphate (khilāfah), highlighting the importance of obedience to Allah and His Messenger as a prerequisite for its realization.

This emphasis suggests the elevated status of the Caliph in Islam, portraying him as the Prophet’s legitimate successor, who must be obeyed without question. The verse also includes a divine promise that Muslims will eventually be granted both spiritual authority and worldly governance. Although this promise is addressed to the Muslim community as a whole, its fulfillment is expected to manifest through specific individuals who will act as successors to the Prophet and representatives of the Ummah. However, the fulfillment of this promise is conditional: Muslims must perform ṣalāh (prayer), give zakāt (alms), and obey the Prophet in all religious and worldly matters. The verse ultimately forecasts the global triumph of Islam, where Tawḥīd (the Oneness of God)—the core objective of the Islamic mission—will be firmly established across the world.

#### Example 5 (Surah An-Naml: 62):

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ إِلَهَ مَعَ اللَّهِ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ

A.J. Arberry: He who answers the constrained, when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil and appoints you to be successors in the earth. Is there a god with God? Little indeed do you remember.

N.J. Dawood: Surly worthier is He who answers the oppressed when they cry out to Him and relieves their affliction. It is He who has given you the earth to inherit. Another god besides Allah? How little you reflect!

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: (are those whom you consider partners for Allah better) or He who answers supplication when one calls Him desperately and removes the disaster from Him; and the one who will make you governors on the earth? Is there another god (who does these for you) apart from Allah, the almighty? (No! there is not) but you people receive admonition very little.

The use of literal translation by A.J. Arberry and N.J. Dawood in their rendering of the verse may lead to confusion or misinterpretation for the target audience, as it lacks contextual clarification. Their approach remains close to the source text in form, but it does not account for deeper exegetical meanings, potentially leaving key theological implications obscure.

In contrast, T. Saffarzadeh employs a more interpretive and explanatory method. While she also begins with a literal translation, she enhances it through paraphrasing and the addition of exegetical elements, helping to resolve ambiguities and illuminate the intended message. Her approach often results in a translation that is longer than the original Arabic, but it offers a more comprehensive and accessible interpretation, particularly for readers unfamiliar with the Qur'ānic and theological background.

According to the exegete Tabarsi, Imam Sadiq (AS) stated that Imam Mahdi (AS) is the distressed one mentioned in this verse—*the one who prays at the position of Prophet Ibrahim (AS), and whose plea is answered by God*. In this context, God not only relieves his suffering but also appoints him as His vicegerent on earth (Majma' al-Bayan, Vol. 5).

The verse offers a theological argument for the existence, omnipotence, and oneness of God. It asserts that divine power is not only reflected in the physical laws of nature but also revealed through the human experience of prayer—especially when uttered in desperation. The phrase “Who answers the distressed when he calls upon Him” serves as a profound example of divine responsiveness and compassion, central to all Abrahamic faiths. Historically, this can be seen in the experience of early Muslims, who, under persecution and hardship, cried out to God and were ultimately granted deliverance and support.

The subsequent clause—“and makes you successors in the earth”—supports this view, acting as both a historical reference and a prophetic promise: those who once suffered oppression would eventually attain leadership and security in the same land where they faced adversity. This verse thus encapsulates both a universal truth about divine mercy and a specific eschatological promise, with layered meaning that is more fully conveyed through interpretive translation strategies like those employed by Saffarzadeh.

#### Example 6 (Surah Taha: 135)

قُلْ كُلٌّ مُرْتَظٌّ فَتَرْتَضُوا فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ أَصْحَابُ الصِّرَاطِ السَّوِيِّ وَمَنِ اهْتَدَى

A.J. Arberry: Say: ‘Everyone is waiting; so wait, and assuredly you shall know who are the travellers on the even path, and who is guided’.

N.J. Dawood: Say: “All are waiting: so wait if you will. You shall know who has followed the right path and who has been rightly guided”.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Say (O, Messenger!): “All of us are waiting (for Allah's promises to be fulfilled for or against) so you wait and soon you will know who are on the straight path and have received guidance.”

All three translators, A.J. Arberry, N.J. Dawood, and T. Saffarzadeh, demonstrate a clear awareness of the importance of conveying the intended meaning in the verse. They exhibit a commitment to faithfulness to the original text, particularly in distinguishing between those who are rightly guided and those who follow the correct path. In this instance, literal translation proves effective in preserving the original Qur’ānic message, as it clearly conveys the notion of divine guidance and human accountability. While Arberry and Dawood adhere to literal translation, Saffarzadeh adopts a more interpretive approach, going beyond the literal by paraphrasing and elaborating on the source meaning. Her additions serve to enhance clarity and accessibility for the target audience, especially those who may not be familiar with the underlying theological context. The verse conveys a powerful message: believers are instructed to wait patiently, and disbelievers are told to do the same, for time itself will ultimately reveal the truth. It will demonstrate who achieves success and who faces failure and regret. This expression of divine justice and temporal unfolding highlights the Qur’ān’s emphasis on patience, faith, and the eventual triumph of truth.

#### **Example 7: (Surah Al-Qasas: 5)**

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ

A.J. Arberry: Yet We desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors.

N.J. Dawood: But it was Our will to favour those who were oppressed and to make them leaders of mankind, to bestow on them a noble heritage and to give them power in the land.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: But we willed to bestow our favour on the oppressed children of Israil and make them governors and make them the heirs of the oppressors.

Arberry and Dawood rely on lexical equivalence and literal translation without any omission or addition. In contrast, Saffarzadeh translates “اسْتُضِعُوا” as “children of Israel” in order to convey the Qur’ānic exegesis of this verse more explicitly. Thus, she employs paraphrasing and descriptive translation to reflect the deeper source meaning of the term “اسْتُضِعُوا”. With regard to this verse, Sheikh Toosi quotes from Amir al-Momenin (AS), stating that the depressed and defenseless people mentioned are the descendants of Prophet Mohammad (Ale Mohammad). According to this interpretation, God will raise Imam Mahdi (AS), who is from the same family, to support them after their religious struggles and to degrade their enemies. The use of a plural pronoun in this verse emphasizes the magnificence and glory of God. It also indicates that the leadership of the oppressed is not accidental, but a divinely ordained event—an expression of God’s Will, which brings about all things in accordance with their nature and capacity.

**Example 8: (Surah Al-Isra: 81)**

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا

A.J. Arberry: And say: ‘The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished away; surely falsehood is ever certain to vanish’.

N.J. Dawood: Say: “Truth has come and Falsehood has been overthrown. Falsehood was bound to be discomfited”.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And say (proclaiming:) “Truth succeeded and falsehood perished, surely falsehood is ever bound to vanish”.

According to Qur’ānic exegesis, while a literal translation may convey the source meaning, it often fails to preserve the poetic rhythm and cadence of the original Arabic text. In the case of this vers, all three translators, A.J. Arberry, N.J. Dawood, and T. Saffarzadeh, employ **literal translation**. However, Saffarzadeh goes beyond the surface meaning by clarifying the verb *ja’a* to convey its sense of inevitability to the target reader. Aware of the ideological implications of the verse, she renders “جاء” in the simple past tense as “succeeded”. This lexical choice reflects an exegetical approach, one that contextualizes the meaning through surrounding linguistic and thematic elements. This verse subtly alludes to the growing influence of the Holy Prophet following his migration to Medina and the gradual decline of his enemies, culminating in the conquest of Mecca and the eradication of idolatry throughout Arabia. The Arabic term “زَهَقَ” translated as “has vanished away,” does more than denote disappearance—it captures a process of gradual weakening that leads to total extinction. This word choice exemplifies the Qur’ān’s precise diction, where vocabulary is carefully selected to illustrate the unfolding of divine outcomes. Unlike “هلك” (perished) or “بطل” (became useless or ineffective), *zahaqa* encapsulates both a prophetic declaration and its eventual fulfillment—the slow but certain demise of falsehood, particularly idolatry. Furthermore, the verse demonstrates the Qur’ān’s distinctive style: while not poetic in the conventional sense, it retains the rhythm and cadence of verse, crucial for expressing deep emotions such as spiritual triumph and divine justice. Based on the collected data, a descriptive analysis of all selected verses was conducted to determine the frequency of translation strategies employed. This analysis also sought to identify ideological and religious perspectives embedded in the concept of saviorship. The overall frequency and percentage of these strategies are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the most frequently used strategy is literal translation, accounting for 61.1% of the total instances. This is followed by paraphrasing through explanation of the source meaning at 20.9%. Three other strategies—cultural equivalence, omission, and transference (via borrowing and transliteration)—were employed less frequently, with 9%, 6%, and 3%, respectively. Indeed, literal translation was applied 41 times, making it the most commonly used translation procedure across the analyzed data.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of all strategies

Translator	Translation strategy									
	Literal		Paraphrase by explaining source meaning		Cultural equivalent		Omission		Transference by borrowing and transliteration	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
A.J. Arberry	17	25.4	1	1.5	1	1.5	1	1.5	0	0
N.J. Dawood	15	22.4	3	4.5	4	6	2	3	0	0
T. Saffarzadeh	9	13.4	10	15	1	1.5	1	1.5	2	3
Total	41	61.1	14	20.9	6	9	4	6	2	3

The frequency and percentage of the use of literal translation among the translators reveal interesting patterns. A.J. Arberry employs literal translation 17 times, accounting for 25.4% of his translations; N.J. Dawood uses it 15 times, representing 22.4%; while T. Saffarzadeh applies literal translation only 9 times, making up 13.4% of her translations. Altogether, literal translation constitutes 41 instances, or 61.1% of the total translation strategies observed. This data indicates that literal translation is the most frequently employed strategy by the two non-Muslim translators, Arberry and Dawood. Their consistent preference for this approach suggests a tendency to render verbatim meanings, which, while preserving the surface form, may not fully capture the broader contextual and theological nuances integral to Qur'ānic texts. In contrast, Saffarzadeh, the Muslim translator, uses literal translation less often, favoring other strategies better suited to conveying the deeper meanings embedded within the source text. The widespread use of literal translation does not necessarily guarantee an accurate transmission of the Qur'ānic message. From an ideological standpoint, it can sometimes lead to distortion or oversimplification of culturally and religiously significant concepts by detaching them from their contextual richness. Following literal translation, the second most frequently used strategy is paraphrasing through explanation of the source meaning, which occurs 14 times in total. This method is predominantly employed by Saffarzadeh, reflecting her commitment to presenting Qur'ānic meanings within their proper interpretive and exegetical frameworks.

Paraphrasing by explaining the source meaning is another significant translation strategy, as evidenced by its frequency across translators. Saffarzadeh leads in the use of this approach, employing it 10 times (15%), while N.J. Dawood uses it 3 times (4.5%) and A.J. Arberry only once (1.5%). Altogether, paraphrasing accounts for 14 instances, or 20.9% of the total strategies employed.

This predominance of paraphrasing by Saffarzadeh aligns closely with her translation philosophy, as seen in her work *The Holy Qur'ān: Translation with Commentary*. Her approach reflects an ideological stance that the Qur'ān's meanings are best conveyed through detailed exegesis, emphasizing that the text's complexity often resists straightforward translation. Consequently, she relies on explanatory paraphrasing and



commentary to faithfully communicate the Qur'ān's message. This method also proves effective in presenting positive images of the source culture. In contrast, the use of cultural equivalents is relatively limited, occurring only six times. This modest frequency likely stems from shared religious and cultural backgrounds among the translators, including common references to the names of prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān, reducing the necessity for extensive use of cultural equivalents.

The use of cultural equivalents, although relatively infrequent, sheds light on both the shared and differing aspects among Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Across the translators, cultural equivalents appear only six times in total—once (1.5%) in both A.J. Arberry's and T. Saffarzadeh's translations, and four times (6%) in N.J. Dawood's work. This strategy often involves adapting the names of prophets such as Musa, Ibrahim, Ismail, and Ishaq to forms more familiar within the target language's religious and cultural context. By doing so, the translators facilitate intercultural communication and emphasize common ground among these Abrahamic faiths, despite variations in spelling and pronunciation.

The procedure of omission appears sparingly in the analyzed translations, with only four instances in total. Specifically, A.J. Arberry and T. Saffarzadeh each omit once (1.5%), while N.J. Dawood omits twice (3%), making omission account for 6% of the overall strategies. It is important to note that omission here does not necessarily imply leaving out redundant or meaningless content; some omissions may reflect nuanced interpretive decisions within the target text.

Following omission, transference through borrowing and transliteration emerges as the least frequently used strategy, employed exclusively by Saffarzadeh, with two instances (3%) recorded. Neither Arberry nor Dawood use this procedure. In Saffarzadeh's translations, she consistently borrows and transliterates key Qur'ānic elements, such as the term Allah and the names of certain prophets, adhering to the English graphic system. By retaining Allah instead of substituting it with the English equivalent God, she deliberately signals that there is no exact counterpart in the target language or culture. This choice reflects her ideological stance, emphasizing the doctrinal and dogmatic distinctions between the Islamic concept of Allah and the Christian understanding of God.

Similarly, when translating prophet names, Saffarzadeh often avoids using culturally adapted equivalents that appear in non-Muslim translations and the Bible, even though these equivalents exist within the target cultures. Exceptions are made only for those names widely recognized across both Islamic and Christian traditions. This practice underscores the translator's ideological orientation and highlights how borrowing and transliteration serve as tools to preserve the source culture's unique religious identity within the translation.

## **5. Conclusions**

The first research question concerns how English translators of the Holy Qur'ān apply strategies in translating verses related to the issue of saviorship. Overall, it was found that the three translators employed five of Newmark's (1988) proposed strategies: literal translation, paraphrase by explaining source meaning, use of cultural equivalents, omission, and transference through borrowing and transliteration.

The second research question examines the role of translators' differing religious backgrounds as an ideological factor influencing the accuracy, clarity, and naturalness of English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Given the sensitive and contentious nature of the

issue of saviorship, mistranslation can easily lead to distortion or misinterpretation. Analyzing the target texts reveals differences in the translations produced by translators of different faiths. The findings show that each translator's religious beliefs are reflected in their work, as evidenced by the presence of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives in various instances. The Jewish translator Dawood reveals his faith through the inclusion of non-original information in his introduction. Similarly, the Christian translator Arberry's beliefs are apparent in his footnotes, which reference Christian interpretations of Qur'ānic content. In contrast, the Muslim translator Saffarzadeh's interpretation is shaped by her Shi'ite Islamic beliefs, and she refrains from relying on non-Islamic doctrines or comparing the Qur'ān to other religious scriptures.

Furthermore, the analysis of the target examples revealed that non-Muslim translators often paid little attention to certain linguistic features of the Arabic Qur'ān and their impact on meaning. This oversight has sometimes led to distortions of source elements in their translations. However, while the translator's religious background may influence translation choices as an ideological factor, it appears to have less impact on the overall quality of the translation. This study highlights the need for further research on the ideological factors in Qur'ān translation, especially by exploring additional sensitive and contested issues. It is particularly important to examine topics shared across Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—such as the stories of the prophets—where differing interpretations could reflect ideological nuances in target versions.

A limitation of this study was the lack of prior research on the specific topic under investigation. Another limitation involved the reliance on relevant exegeses to clarify certain issues, which may have influenced the analysis of some particular examples. Additionally, the subjective and holistic nature of assessing translation quality throughout the study posed another constraint.

For future research, it would be valuable to analyze and compare translations by Muslim translators from different sects—such as Sunni, Shia, and Sufi—to explore how the Qur'ānic exegesis of each doctrine affects Qur'ān translation and Islamic practice. It would also be worthwhile to examine older translations, which may reveal more ideological influence than those studied here, providing deeper insight into ideological representation. Furthermore, exploring other models or frameworks that illuminate the impact of translators' ideology on their target texts could pave the way for further descriptive and ideological studies in translation scholarship.

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## Appendix A:

Qur'ānic verses on the issue of end-of-the-world savoiurship and eschalotological Argameddon along with the translation procedures used by three Arberry, Dawood, and Saffarzadeh.

### *Surah At-Tawbah: 33*

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

A.J. Arberry: It is He who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may uplift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse.

N.J. Dawood: It is He who has sent forth His apostle with guidance and the true faith to make it triumphant over all religions, how every much the idolaters may dislike it.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Allah is the One Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and The Religion of Truth though the polytheists May dislike it.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Repentance” (Al-Tauba), Verse 33.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A. J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation, Cultural equivalence
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation

### *Surah Al-Anfal: 39*

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

A.J. Arberry: Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is God's entirely; then if they give over, surely God sees the things they do;

N.J. Dawood: Make war on them until idolatry is no more and Allah's religions supreme. If they desist Allah is cognizant of all their actions.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And (O, Muslims!) fight them until there is no more disbelief or tumult And the Religion of Allah prevails Entirely throughout the earth, but if they desist, then certainly Allah is the Seer of what they do.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “Spoil” (Al-Enfal), Verse 39.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation, Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

### *Surah Ibrahim: 5*

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا أَنْ أَخْرِجْ قَوْمَكَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَذَكِّرْهُمْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ

A.J. Arberry: And We sent Moses with Our signs --'Bring forth thy people from the shadows to the light and remind thou them of the Days of God.' Surely in that are signs for every man enduring, thankful!

N.J. Dawood: We sent forth Moses with Our signs, saying: "Lead your people out of the darkness into the light, and remind them of Allah's favours." Surly in this there are signs for every steadfast, thankful man.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: We sent Mussa with Our Sign and miracles (stating to him :) bring out your folk from the darkness (of ignorance and polytheism) into the light of Faith and remind them of the Day of Allah.

Translation procedures used in the Surah "Abraham" (Ebrahim), Verse 5.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation, Cultural Equivalent
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation, Omission

### **Surah As-Saf: 13**

وَأُخْرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَا نَصْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

A.J. Arberry: And other things you love help from God and a nigh victory. Give thou good tidings to the believers!

N.J. Dawood: And He will bestow upon you other blessing which you desire: help from Allah and a speedy victory. Proclaim the good tidings to the faithful.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And also you will have another gain which you are anxious to attain: Allah's aid and a near victory, so (O, messenger) give glad things to the believers!

Translation procedures used in the Surah "The Battle" (Al-Saff), Verse 13.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation

### **Surah Al-Fath: 28**

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

A.J. Arberry: It is He who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may uplift it above every religion. God suffices as a witness.

N.J. Dawood: It is He that has sent forth His apostle with guidance and the true faith, so that he may exalt it above all religions. Allah is the all-sufficient Witness.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Allah is the one who has sent his messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to outshine all religions, and Allah is sufficient as a witness (over this truth).

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Victory” (Al-fath), Verse 28.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation

### **Surah Al-Anbya: 105**

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ

A.J. Arberry: For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, 'The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants.'

N.J. Dawood: We wrote in the Psalms after the Torah had been given: "The righteous among My servants shall inherit the earth."

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And We wrote in the Psalms which came after Taurat: "my righteous believers shall eventually inherit the earth."

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Prophets” (Al-Anbiya), Verse 105.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning and Cultural equivalent
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning and Cultural equivalent

### **Surah An-Nur: 55**

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

A.J. Arberry: God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land, even as He made those who were before them successors, and that He will surely establish their religion for them that He has approved for them, and will give them in exchange, after their fear, security: 'They shall serve Me, not associating with Me anything.' Whoso disbelieves after that, those -- they are the ungodly.

N.J. Dawood: Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good works to make them masters in the land as He had made their ancestors before them, to strengthen the Faith He chose for them, and to change their fears to safety. Let them worship Me and serve no other gods besides Me. Wicked indeed are they who after this deny Me.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Allah has promised to those of you mankind who believe and do good that he will appoint them the rulers in the world as he appointed those before them; and will establish in authority their religion which he is pleased with it; and he will replace security for their fears; (and Allah states:) "They should worship me only and should not consider any partner for me; so those who disbelieve after this, they are indeed transgressors."



Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Light” (Al-Noor), Verse 55.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation and omission
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation and omission

### **Surah Muhammad: 18**

فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا السَّاعَةَ أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ بَغْتَةً فَقَدْ جَاءَ أَشْرَاطُهَا فَأَنَّى لَهُمْ إِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ ذِكْرَاهُمْ

A.J. Arberry: Are they looking for aught but the hour, that it shall come upon them suddenly? Already its tokens have come; so, when it has come to them, how shall they have their Reminder?

N.J. Dawood: Are they waiting for the Hour of Doom to overtake them unawares? Its portents have already come. But how will they be warned when it overtakes them?

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Do they wait for anything but the Hour of resurrection that should come upon them suddenly? But when its signs appear, they cannot benefit from admonition.

Translation procedures used in Surah “Mohammad”, Verse 18.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation, Paraphrase by explaining source meaning
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation, Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

### **Surah Al-Baqarah: 133**

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَالَّهِ آبَائُكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهُهَا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

A.J. Arberry: Why, were you witnesses, when death came to Jacob? When he said to his sons, 'What will you serve after me?' They said, 'We will serve thy God and the God of thy fathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, One God; to Him we surrender.'

N.J. Dawood: Were you present when death came to Jacob? He said to his children: "what will you worship when I am gone?" they replied: "we will worship your God and the God of your forefathers Abraham and Ismael and Isaac: the One God. To Him we will surrender ourselves."

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Were you witnesses when death approached Ya'qub? He said to his sons: "what will you worship after me?" they said: "we shall worship your creator and nurturer, the creator and nurturer of your fathers, Ibrahim, Ismail and Isshaq, who is the one, and to him do we submit."

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Cow” (Al-Baqara), Verse 133.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Cultural equivalent
N.J. Dawood	Cultural equivalent
T. Saffarzadeh	Transference by borrowing and transliteration

### **Surah An-Naml: 62**

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ إِلَهًا مَعَ اللَّهِ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ

A.J. Arberry: He who answers the constrained, when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil and appoints you to be successors in the earth. Is there a god with God? Little indeed do you remember.

N.J. Dawood: Surly worthier is He who answers the oppressed when they cry out to Him and relieves their affliction. It is He who has given you the earth to inherit. Another god besides Allah? How little you reflect!

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: (are those whom you consider partners for Allah better) or He who answers supplication when one calls Him desperately and removes the disaster from Him; and the one who will make you governors on the earth? Is there another god (who does these for you) apart from Allah, the almighty? (No! there is not) but you people receive admonition very little.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Ant” (Al-Naml), Verse 62.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

### **Surah Al-Hajj: 39**

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَنْ يَصْرَفَهُمْ وَلَاقِدِيرُ

A.J. Arberry: Leave is given to those who fight because they were wronged -- surely God is able to help them.

N.J. Dawood: Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged. Allah has power to grant them victory.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Permission to fight is issued for those believers who were wronged and oppressed by the disbelievers and certainly Allah is powerful to aid the oppressed believers.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Pilgrimage” (Al-Hajj), Verse 39.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Paraphrase by explaining a different meaning
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

Surah Al-Ma'idah: 54

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

A.J. Arberry: O believers, whosoever of you turns from his religion, God will assuredly bring a people He loves, and who love Him, humble towards the believers, disdainful towards the unbelievers, men who struggle in the path of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher. That is God's bounty; He gives it unto whom He will; and God is All-embracing, All-knowing.

N.J. Dawood: Believers, if any of you renounce the faith, Allah will replace them by other who loved by Him, humble towards the faithful and stern towards the unbelievers, zealous for Allah's cause and fearless of man's censure. Such is the grace of Allah: He bestows it on whom He will. He is munificent and all-knowing.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: O, you who believe! If any of you turns from his religion, should know that Allah will bring a people whom Allah is affectionate towards them and they love Allah (above all). Humble (they are) towards the believers, stern towards the disbelievers; they are men who struggle in the path of Allah, and do not fear the reproach of any reproacher. That is the grace of Allah, he gives it to whom He wills and Allah is the knowing grace-increaser.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Table” (Al-Ma'ida), Verse 54.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Omission
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

**Surah Taha: 135**

قُلْ كُلُّ مُتَرَبِّصٍ فَتَرَبِّصُوا فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ أَصْحَابُ الصِّرَاطِ السَّوِيِّ وَمَنِ اهْتَدَى

A.J. Arberry: Say: 'Everyone is waiting; so wait, and assuredly you shall know who are the travellers on the even path, and who is guided.'

N.J. Dawood: Say: "All are waiting: so wait if you will. You shall know who has followed the right path and who has been rightly guided."

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: Say (O, Messenger!): "All of us are waiting (for Allah's promises to be fulfilled for or against) so you wait and soon you will know who are on the straight path and have received guidance."

## Translation procedures used in the Surah “Taha”, Verse 135.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

## Surah Al-Qasas: 5

وَرِيدُ أَنْ تَمَنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتَظَعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ

A.J. Arberry: Yet We desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors.

N.J. Dawood: But it was Our will to favour those who were oppressed and to make them leaders of mankind, to bestow on them a noble heritage and to give them power in the land.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: But we willed to bestow our favour on the oppressed children of Israil and make them governors and make them the heirs of the oppressors.

## Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Story” (Al-Ghesas), Verse 5.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning

**Surah Al-Anfal: 7-8:**

وَإِذْ يَعِدُكُمُ اللَّهُ إِحْدَى الطَّائِفَتَيْنِ أَنَّهَا لَكُمْ وَتَوَدُّونَ أَنَّ غَيْرَ ذَاتِ الشُّوْكَةِ تَكُونُ لَكُمْ وَيُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُحَقِّقَ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَيَقْطَعَ دَابِرَ الْكَافِرِينَ (٧) لِيُحَقِّقَ الْحَقَّ وَيَنْهَطِلَ الْبَاطِلَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُجْرِمُونَ (٨)

A.J. Arberry: And when God promised you one of the two parties should be yours, and you were wishing that the one not accoutered should be yours; but God was desiring to verify the truth by His words, and to cut off the unbelievers to the last remnant, and that He might verify the truth and prove untrue the untrue, though the sinners were averse to it.

N.J. Dawood: Allah promised to grant you victory over one of the two bands, but you wished to fight the one that was unarmed. He sought to fulfill His promise and to annihilate the unbelievers, so that Truth should triumph and falsehood be discomfited, though the wrongdoers wished otherwise.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And (remember) when Allah promised you, (Muslims) one of the two caravans of the enemy, it should be yours: you desire that the unarmed and richly laden one (without any trouble) should be yours: but Allah willed to justify the truth by his word of command and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers, that He might prove the truth by what was false, though it be dislike by the guilty ones.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Spoils” (Al-Anfal), Verses 7-8.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Paraphrased by explaining a different meaning
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation, Transference by borrowing

### ***Surah Al-Isra: 81***

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا

A.J. Arberry: And say: 'The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished away; surely falsehood is ever certain to vanish.'

N.J. Dawood: Say: "Truth has come and Falsehood has been overthrown. Falsehood was bound to be discomfited."

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And say (proclaiming :) "Truth succeeded and falsehood perished, surely falsehood is ever bound to vanish."

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Night Journey” (Al-Asra'a), Verse 81.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation

### ***Surah Al-‘Ankabut: 10:***

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ فَإِذَا أُوذِيَ فِي اللَّهِ جَعَلَ فِتْنَةَ النَّاسِ كَعَذَابِ اللَّهِ وَلَئِن جَاءَ نَصْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا مَعَكُمْ أَوَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُدُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ

A.J. Arberry: Some men there are who say, 'We believe in God,' but when such a man is hurt in God's cause, he makes the persecution of men as it were God's chastisement; then if help comes from thy Lord, he will say 'We were with you.' What, does not God know very well what is in the breasts of all beings?

N.J. Dawood: Some profess to believe in Allah, yet when they suffer in his cause they confound the persecution of man with the punishment of Allah. But if your Lord gives you victory, they say: " we were on your side." Does Allah not know the thoughts of men?

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And they are some men who say: " we believe in Allah" but as soon as they encounter with some annoyance from the enemies of Allah in the path of religion, they take it as the wrath of Allah (and start complaining) but if aid and victory come to you from your creator and nurturer they will say: "we have been with you" (so they claim for their share of the victory.) is not Allah the supreme knower of humankind's intentions and secrets of their hearts.

Translation procedures used in the surah “The Spider” (Al-Ankaboot), Verse 10.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation and paraphrase by explaining source meaning

**Surah Ar-Ra'd: 7:**

وَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ

A.J. Arberry: The unbelievers say, 'Why has a sign not been sent down upon him from his Lord?' Thou art only a warner, and a guide to every people.

N.J. Dawood: The unbelievers ask: " why has no sign been given him by his Lord? But your mission is only to give warning. Every nation has its mentor.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: And the disbelievers say: "why a miracle is not sent down to him from his creator and nurturer?" you are only a warner and to every nation there is a guide. (they are not supposed to bring a miracle).

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Thunder” (Al-Ra'd), Verse 7.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Literal translation

**Surah Al-Qadr: 4**

تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ

A.J. Arberry: In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, upon every command.

N.J. Dawood: On that night the angels and the Sprit by their Lord's leave come down with His decrees.

Tahereh Saffarzadeh: The angle and the Holy Spirit will descend therein by their creator's command (to the savior Imam-e-Zaman (AS)) to proclaim the ordainments about everything.

Translation procedures used in the Surah “The Power” (Al-Qadr), Verse 4.

Translator	Procedure(s)
A.J. Arberry	Literal translation
N.J. Dawood	Literal translation
T. Saffarzadeh	Paraphrase by explaining source meaning



## Examining the Translation of Munajat Sha'baniyah Based on House's Model and Using Translations of the Holy Qur'ān

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### ABSTRACT

Despite extensive scholarship on texts such as Munajat Sha'baniyah, a systematic translation into a widely spoken international language remains absent. This study seeks to provide an accurate translation of key phrases, particularly those that parallel expressions found in the Holy Qur'ān. Employing a qualitative analytical-documentary approach, the research evaluates existing translations using Juliane House's (1997) theoretical model for translation quality. The original Munajat Sha'baniyah is analyzed within House's framework, alongside a potentially machine-generated translation, with particular attention to the dimensions of field, mode, and tenor. Based on this analysis, the researcher produces a new translation, informed by various Qur'ānic renditions, which is subsequently assessed using the same criteria. The findings highlight significant discrepancies in field, mode, and tenor between the machine translation and the researcher's version, emphasizing the limitations of current machine translation technologies in handling complex religious texts.

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## 1. Introduction

The Holy Qur'ān is a divine message intended for the guidance of humanity and is unique among religious scriptures in that it has remained free from distortion for many centuries. Imam Ali (peace be upon him), as evidenced by both his words and actions, is a manifestation of the divine names and attributes, as well as the living embodiment of the truth contained within the Holy Qur'ān. This divine reality is clearly reflected in his speech and conduct. *Munajat Sha'baniyah* is one of the supplications attributed to Imam Ali (peace be upon him). Due to his profound connection with the Holy Qur'ān, this supplication is deeply inspired by Qur'ānic language and themes, making its words particularly powerful and spiritually resonant. Shi'a Muslims recite *Munajat Sha'baniyah* during the month of Sha'ban, as it was recommended by Imam Ali and other Imams (peace be upon them). This supplication has the potential to significantly influence personal conduct and societal values, as it encompasses numerous ethical and spiritual teachings.

However, many Shi'a believers around the world merely recite this supplication without understanding its meaning, as they do not speak Arabic. As a result, they are deprived of its profound spiritual insights and the behavioral guidance it offers. The supplication of *Munajat Sha'baniyah*, attributed to Imam Ali (peace be upon him), holds a special place in Shi'a tradition and has been transmitted by all the Imams. It is referenced by several prominent scholars, including Sayyid Ibn Tawus in *al-Iqbal*, Allamah Majlisi in *Bihar al-Anwar*, Samahiji in *Sahifat al-Alawiyyah*, and Shaykh Abbas Qummi in *Mafatih al-Jinan*.

The late Imam Khomeini repeatedly emphasized the significance of *Munajat Sha'baniyah* in his speeches and writings. He noted that although many profound prayers and poems can be found in the Qur'ān and the whispered supplications of the Imams, *Munajat Sha'baniyah* is unique. Philosophers and mystics may understand some aspects of its meanings, but those who truly comprehend it have reached a high level of closeness to Allah and have experienced the spiritual essence of the text.

Imam Khomeini further asserted that a spiritual seeker—someone journeying toward Allah—who has attained some degree of the spiritual realities described in the supplication can begin to grasp its concepts. However, these deeper meanings often remain inaccessible to beginners in philosophy and mysticism. He maintained that *Munajat Sha'baniyah* is an exceptional supplication; if one pays close attention, reflects deeply, and follows its spiritual advice, one can achieve remarkable levels of spiritual perfection.

This underscores the critical role that translation plays in religious contexts. Translating religious texts—such as the Holy Qur'ān and *Nahj al-Balagha*—requires not only linguistic expertise but also deep cultural and theological understanding. Many translators have endeavored to find accurate equivalents in order to convey the intended meaning as faithfully as possible. Translation, therefore, is not merely a linguistic act; it is also a cross-cultural communicative process. This concept was emphasized in the 1960s by Eugene Nida, a pioneer in translation studies. Nida (1964) recognized translation as a key mechanism for shaping perceptions of other cultures, noting that translation necessarily involves both linguistic and cultural elements, which are inseparable. In today's globalized and digitally interconnected world, translation has gained increased importance due to the demand for efficient and accessible information dissemination. Despite the immense value of *Munajat Sha'baniyah*, there has been no reliable English translation available for non-Arabic speakers to truly benefit from its spiritual insights.



The aim of this research is to produce a faithful translation of the words, phrases, and expressions found in *Munajat Sha'baniyah*, particularly by drawing on equivalent expressions in the Holy Qur'ān. The translation was evaluated using Juliane House's theoretical model (1997), which examines three key dimensions of textual analysis: field (subject matter), mode (form of communication), and tenor (relationship between speaker and audience).

To guide this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. Based on a comparison of tenor (who is speaking and to whom) in the source text (ST) and the target text (TT), how accurate is the translation?
2. Based on a comparison of field (what is being discussed) in the ST and TT, how accurate is the translation?
3. Based on a comparison of mode (the medium or form of communication) in the ST and TT, how accurate is the translation?

## 2. Literature Review

Evaluating translation quality has long been a central concern in the field of translation studies. From the outset, translators have faced significant challenges in rendering religious content into other languages. To overcome these difficulties, they have consistently engaged in critical analysis and continuous assessment of their work to enhance both accuracy and quality.

Translating Qur'ānic terminology has proven particularly complex and remains a topic of ongoing debate among scholars. In response to these challenges, Raisi Sattari (1401/2022) conducted a study aimed at evaluating the quality of English translations of five specific Qur'ānic terms. The research critically assessed the work of seventeen prominent translators of the Holy Qur'ān. Drawing upon Schleiermacher's dual translation principles (1970) and Waddington's translation quality assessment (TQA) criteria (2001), the study categorized and rated the translations. It ultimately identified both strengths and weaknesses in existing translations and offered simplified, reader-friendly alternatives—especially for younger audiences.

Azarakhsh (1398/2019) examined English translations of the Holy Qur'ān with a particular focus on metaphorical expressions. The Qur'ān is rich in literary devices, including irony and metaphor, which require careful handling in translation. In this study, four prominent English translations—by Arberry, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and Irving—were analyzed using a comparative-analytical method. The researcher initially identified 89 metaphorical expressions, referencing classical commentaries such as Zamakhshari's and Ibn Ashur's *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, analyzing translations through the lens of major Shi'a and Sunni exegeses. Findings revealed that the translators generally favored literal renderings, often neglecting the underlying irony and figurative meanings. Among them, Irving and Pickthall demonstrated slightly greater sensitivity to metaphorical nuances, with Irving successfully conveying 16 expressions and Pickthall 15, out of the 89 examined. The study concluded that literal approaches often fail to preserve the conceptual richness of Qur'ānic metaphors.

Beyond the Qur'ān, other key Islamic texts have also been subject to translation analysis. Alizadeh Khoob (1396/2017) explored three English translations of letters 40 to 60 from *Nahj al-Balagha*, using Nida's (1964) translation theory as the analytical framework. The study sought to determine whether the translations effectively conveyed meaning and whether significant differences existed among the versions. The results indicated considerable variation: Jafari's translation was based on dynamic equivalence, while those by Sayyid Alireza and Motahari adhered more closely to formal equivalence. These findings are particularly valuable for scholars examining the translation of religious texts.

Another seminal work subjected to translation analysis is *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*, a revered collection of supplications attributed to the fourth infallible Imam of the Shi'a tradition. The book is considered the third most authoritative source in Islamic culture and features an array of literary elements, such as proverbs, allegories, and metaphors. Gholami (1393/2015) studied the translation of metaphors in English versions of *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah* using Jakobson's (1980) paradigmatic and syntagmatic framework. Fifty-six metaphors were extracted from the text, and the translations by Chittick (2008) and Mohani (1984) were compared. Chittick's approach emphasized linguistic fidelity, maintaining the literary style of the original, while Mohani prioritized semantic clarity, occasionally altering form to enhance meaning. The study highlighted the ongoing tension between preserving the form and conveying the deeper spiritual content of religious texts—an equilibrium that remains difficult to achieve.

From this body of research, it becomes evident that achieving translational balance—particularly in religious texts—is a relative endeavor. Absolute equivalence between form and meaning is unattainable; instead, the translator must make deliberate adjustments based on the nature of the text. These adjustments vary across linguistic, structural, lexical, semantic, and stylistic levels. For instance, the strategies used in translating journalistic or poetic texts differ significantly from those required for religious texts. While journalistic texts prioritize the reader's comprehension, religious texts, especially those like the Qur'ān, maintain a fixed speaker–listener relationship, which deeply influences the translator's role and responsibilities.

Despite numerous studies on religious translation, *Munajat Sha'baniyah* remains relatively underexplored. No reliable English translation has been critically assessed through established theoretical models. This gap in the literature underscores the need for focused scholarly attention on the accurate and meaningful translation of *Munajat Sha'baniyah*, using robust frameworks for evaluating translation quality.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Corpus

The present study has chosen a descriptive-analytical approach and in the qualitative design, examining the relationship between the characteristics of vocabulary in terms of meaning. Subsequently, half of the verses of the *Munajat Sha'baniyah* from the first to “مُتَوَيْلٌ بِكَرَمِكَ إِلَيْكَ” by using House's theoretical framework for translation analysis, the ST and the TT will be compared across dimensions such as field, mode, and tenor to evaluate the accuracy and faithfulness of the translation.

### 3.2. Procedures

In the initial phase of the study, the researcher analyzed half of the ST and compared it with its existing English translation to identify inconsistencies. This qualitative case study adopted Juliane House's TQA model (1997) as the primary analytical framework for evaluating the TT. The research process followed a structured sequence of steps:

1. **Register Analysis** – to establish a detailed profile of the ST;
2. **Genre Identification** – determining the genre as manifested through the text's register;
3. **Functional Statement Formulation** – focusing on both ideational and interpersonal meanings within the ST;
4. **Parallel Analysis of the TT** – applying the same analytical method to the TT as to the ST;
5. **Comparative Analysis** – comparing the textual profiles of the ST and TT to formulate a statement of "mismatches" or "inequivalence," categorized by genre and register-related situational variables;
6. **Quality Assessment** – producing a comprehensive evaluation of the translation outcome.

Additionally, the researcher incorporated 18 English translations of the Holy Qur'ān—sourced from [www.tanzil.net](http://www.tanzil.net)—to translate commonly recurring phrases from *Munajat Sha'baniyah* in parallel with Qur'ānic expressions. Each relevant phrase was compared across all 18 translations, and the most accurate and widely agreed-upon rendering was selected based on majority consensus. The researcher's translation was then evaluated using House's TQA model (1997), and a comparative analysis of the finalized machine-generated and researcher-generated translations was conducted to highlight key differences and derive critical insights. The research uses a qualitative evaluation method to compare the ST with translations (TTs) to identify discrepancies that undermine translation quality. House's translation assessment approach (1997) is used, examining key features like register characteristics and lexical, syntactic, and textual elements. Mismatches and errors are identified at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. A statement reflecting translation quality is derived, focusing on the researcher's own translation.

TQA plays a crucial role in certain translation theories. The TQA model proposed by House (1997), based on Hallidayan systemic-functional theory (1975), draws inspiration from ideas rooted in the Prague school, speech act theory, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and corpus-based distinctions between spoken and written language. This model involves the analysis of three key aspects of the ST and its translation when assessing quality: language/text, register (field, tenor, and mode), and genre. According to House (2001), the field pertains to the subject matter and type of social action, while tenor reflects the social attitude (e.g., formal or informal style) between the author and the audience. Mode refers to the communication channel (spoken or written) and the nature of interaction between the addresser and addressee (e.g., monologue or dialogue) as described by Munday (2016). Additionally, genre allows each text to be categorized according to the type of text it aligns with based on its general purpose. Halliday (1975) identifies three types of meanings:

textual, ideational, and interpersonal. Ideational meanings correspond to the field by describing participants, processes, and circumstances. Interpersonal meanings align with tenor, reflecting how communication is conducted between individuals. Textual meanings relate to mode, focusing on cohesion analysis. As explained by House (1997), mismatches between the ST and the TT are considered errors. These are further classified into two categories. Covertly erroneous errors occur due to dimensional mismatches, such as failing to reflect features like field, mode, or tenor in translation. Overtly erroneous errors, on the other hand, involve mismatches in denotative meanings or violations of the TT's structure and conventions.

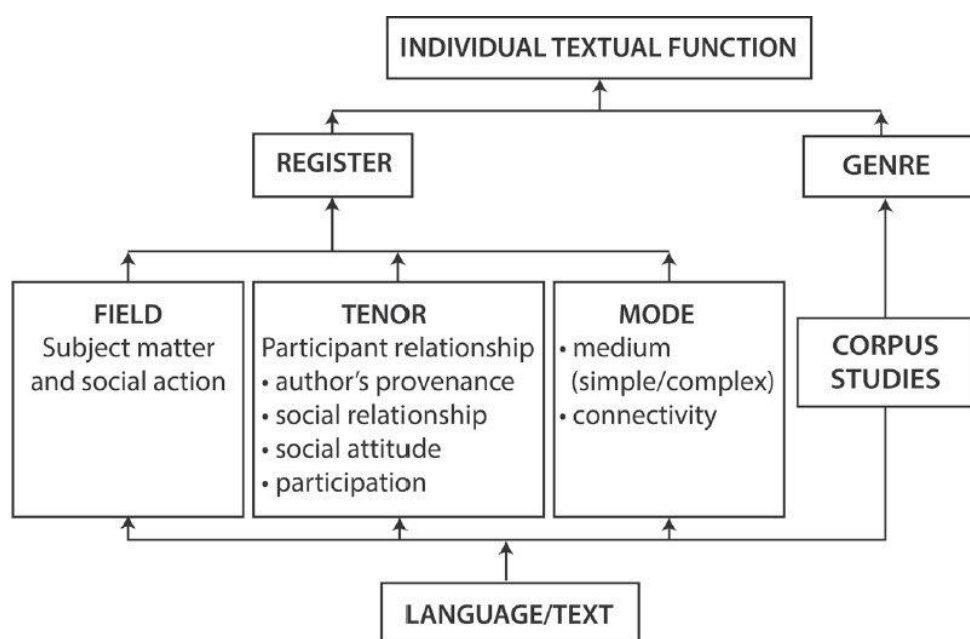


Figure 1: House's scheme for analyzing and comparing STs and TTs (House 1997:108)

## 4. Results and discussions

Given the limitations of academic publications, including a detailed discussion of all the data would make this paper overly lengthy. As a result, a representative sample is provided below.

### 4.1. Analysis of ST

This section analyzes the ST profile of Munajat Sha'baniyah based on House's model of TQA (1997). The ST profile includes an examination of register, which is broken down into three components: field, tenor, and mode. Each of these components is further analyzed in terms of lexical, syntactic, and textual elements. Following this, the genre of the ST is identified, and finally, a statement of its function is provided.

#### 4.1.1. Field

Munajat Sha'baniyah—attributed to Amir al-Mu'minin, Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) and recited by the Holy Imams (peace be upon them) during the month of Sha'ban—is a renowned and deeply eloquent prayer. Narrated by Sayyid ibn Tawoos from Ibn Khalawiyah, it is rich in spiritual insight and serves as a guide for those seeking a meaningful

connection with Allah. This Munajat teaches us how to approach Allah with humility, seek His forgiveness, and maintain hope in His mercy. It emphasizes closeness to the Divine, a proximity attainable only through spiritual insight, discovery, and heartfelt intuition. Munajat Sha'baniyah is distinguished by its profound expression of both human need and the joy of nearness to Allah. One of its remarkable features is the way it responds to divine interrogation about sin—not with despair, but with a hopeful plea for mercy, embodying the teachings of the Imams. Structurally unique, it begins with a plea for Allah to draw near, followed by a silence that invites divine response and reflection.

Key themes include the etiquette of prayer, repentance, and cultivating an intimate, spiritual bond with Allah. Among its notable concepts are:

- Divine Knowledge: “تَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي” — “You do know what is in my inner self”.
- The Sovereignty of Divine Decree: “وَقَدْ جَرَتْ مَقَادِيرُكَ عَلَيَّ” — “All that You have decreed for me has come to pass”.
- Reliance on Divine Grace: “إِلَهِي إِنْ حَرَمْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُنِي” — “My God, if You deprive me (of Your sustenance), then who is there who can provide for me?”

Munajat Sha'baniyah remains a spiritual masterpiece—an intimate dialogue with the Divine that continues to inspire and guide seekers on the path of nearness to Allah.

#### 4.1.1.1. Lexical means

The lexical elements employed in the field primarily consisted of common examples of nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Throughout the Munajat, the use of interjections and familiar vocabulary is evident, creating an appropriate setting for worshippers to offer prayers to Allah.

Example:

إِلَهِي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ غَضَبِكَ وَ حُلُولِ سَخَطِكَ

My God, I do seek Your protection against Your wrath

#### 4.1.1.2. Syntactic means

Munajat typically consists of short, straightforward clauses and sentences with simple structures. However, there were several occurrences of longer sentences. These longer sentences were formed by linking multiple short sentences using the word “and” or “و”. Despite their length, they lacked syntactic complexity.

Example:

إِلَهِي لَا تَرُدَّ حَاجَتِي وَلَا تُخَيِّبْ طَمَعِي وَلَا تَقْطَعْ مِنْكَ رَجَائِي وَأَمَلِي

(My God, (please) do not reject my request, do not fail my big hope for You, and do not disappoint my desire and expectation for You.)

#### 4.1.1.3. Textual means

Textual cohesion ensures that the content is easily understandable for individuals with varying levels of knowledge and comprehension. This is achieved through various techniques, including thematic dynamics such as the repetition of the word “إِلَهِيَّ”, which enhances focus and unity. Iconic linkages also play a significant role, as evidenced by the parallel structures like “إِلَهِيَّ فَلَكَ الْحَمْدُ أَبَدًا أَبَدًا دَائِمًا سَرْمَدًا يَزِيدُ وَلَا يَنْقُصُ كَمَا تُحِبُّ وَتَرْضَى”. Additionally, clausal linkage is created using the word “و”, for instance, in “وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُبَدِّلَ بِهِ مِنْ مَنَاطِقِي وَتَقْوَةٍ”. These elements collectively enhance coherence and readability, making the text both expressive and accessible.

#### 4.1.2. Tenor

##### 4.1.2.1. Author's temporal, geographical and social provenance

Munajat Sha'baniyah is a well-regarded Shiite supplication recited during the month of Sha'ban. It has been attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam of the Shiites. Imam Ali, peace be upon him also known as Amir al-Mu'minin, was born ten years before the Prophetic Mission on the 13th of Rajab, in the Kaaba. He was the cousin and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet Muhammad the husband of Fatima bint Muhammad, and the father of Imam Hasan and Imam Hussein, peace be upon them. Imam Ali, peace be upon him, was the first man to embrace Islam, standing by the Prophet as his unwavering companion and ally. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, by divine instruction, designated Imam Ali, peace be upon him, as his successor and took allegiance for him from the people. However, after the Prophet's death in 11 AH, some disregarded this directive and pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr as the caliph of the Muslims. Because of this, Imam Ali, peace be upon him, only assumed the caliphate in 35 AH. Tragically, in 40 AH, at the age of 63, he was martyred by a member of the Khawarij sect named ibn Muljam al-Muradi, may Allah damn him.

The transmission of Munajat Sha'baniyah is linked to Hussain ibn Khalawiyah and, possibly, Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Khalawiyah. Abu Abdallah Hussain ibn Ahmad ibn Khalawiyah, who passed away in 370 AH, was an Iranian scholar from Hamadan with expertise in Arabic grammar and affiliation with Shiite beliefs. In 314 AH, he moved to Baghdad to further his education and study different disciplines under a variety of scholars. From there, he traveled to Syria and then to Aleppo, where his reputation for knowledge and eloquence flourished. Scholars from various regions migrated to Aleppo to benefit from his teachings. He died in Aleppo in 370 AH and was buried there.

There is limited information about Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Khalawiyah. It appears that he was also known as Ibn Khalawiyah and narrated Munajat Sha'baniyah based on a chain of transmission from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, peace be upon him, who attributed it to Imam Ali, peace be upon him. Given the profound mystical nature of this supplication, it is considered highly unlikely to have originated from anyone outside the infallible members of the Prophet's household. The depth and spiritual richness embedded in its content strongly affirm its attribution to the family of revelation and divine mission.

##### 4.1.2.2. Author's personal (emotional and intellectual) stance

Imam Ali, peace be upon him, and the author both conveyed supplication, lamentation, and hope in their appeals to Allah.

#### 4.1.2.3. Lexical means

Participants retain the names “إِلَهِي” and “عَبْدُكَ”, emphasizing a detached tone that underscores the humble position of the person compared to the exalted status of the Lord.

Example:

إِلَهِي وَ أَنَا عَبْدُكَ وَ ابْنُ عَبْدِكَ

My God, (please) do not reject my request, do not fail my big hope for You, and do not disappoint my desire and expectation for You.

#### 4.1.2.4. Syntactic means

The addressee is spoken to directly. Sentences are concise and straightforward. Personal pronouns and possessive adjectives are frequently used. Words and phrases are repeated monotonously to create a stronger effect.

Example:

إِلَهِي قَدْ جُرْتُ عَلَى نَفْسِي فِي النَّظَرِ لَهَا فَلَهَا الْوَيْلُ إِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَهَا

My God, I have wronged myself when I allowed myself to behave unrestrainedly; therefore, woe will betide me if You do not forgive.

إِلَهِي لَمْ يَزَلْ بِرُكَ عَلَيَّ أَيَّامَ حَيَاتِي فَلَا تَقْطَعْ بِرُكَ عَنِّي فِي مَمَاتِي

My God, You have never ceased Your favors from me all over my lifetime; so, (please) do not stop Your favors from

#### 4.1.2.5. Social role relationship

This supplication highlights the connection between a servant and Allah, emphasizing a deeply intimate and sincere bond. Within this relationship, the servant expresses their wishes to Allah, through heartfelt prayer. The author takes on the role of the servant speaking directly to Allah, skillfully drawing readers into the text by naturally employing the first-person singular pronoun without appearing forced.

#### 4.1.2.6. Social attitude

The conversational style of Munajat shapes its nature as deliberative and interactive, emphasizing communication. This minimizes the social distance between writer and reader.

### 4.1.3. Mode

#### 4.1.3.1. Participation

Simple: A monologue directly addressing the audience or another character, but without expecting or engaging in any form of response or interaction from the addressee.

#### 4.1.3.2. Medium

Medium refers to the channels of communication, whether spoken or written, and is typically categorized into two types:

1. Simple: Texts crafted specifically for reading, where the writer directly addresses readers.

2. Complex: Texts designed to mimic speech, giving the impression they were never written down.

In terms of mode, the medium in question was complex, as the text was intended to be read aloud. This approach creates an effect where listeners perceive the content as if it is being spontaneously generated during the act of reading. In essence, it simulates the qualities of real-life, impromptu spoken language.

#### 4.1.3.3. Lexical means

Excessive use of abstract, emotional, and pleading language.

Example:

وَأَسْمِعْ دُعَائِي إِذَا دَعَوْتُكَ

And listen to my prayer whenever I pray You

وَأَقْبِلْ عَلَيَّ إِذَا نَاجَيْتُكَ

And accept from me whenever I confidentially whisper to You

#### 4.1.3.4. Syntactic means

The frequent use of simple structures, connected in an additive manner, makes them highly effective for oral delivery, as they are easily processed by the human mind.

#### 4.1.3.5. Textual means

Munajat Sha'baniyah is crafted to make readers or listeners feel as though the words are their own, fostering a deep sense of personal connection. The extensive use of direct speech encourages active engagement with Allah, creating an interactive experience. Frequent lexical repetition and grammatical parallelism enhance the text's rhetorical power, emotional resonance, and cohesion.

(a) Lexical repetition:

وَأَسْمِعْ دُعَائِي إِذَا دَعَوْتُكَ وَ أَسْمِعْ نِدَائِي إِذَا نَادَيْتُكَ

Listen to my prayer whenever I pray You, listen to my call whenever I call upon you

(b) Parallelism of prepositional phrases:



إِلَهِي قَدْ سَتَرْتَ عَلَيَّ ذُنُوبًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ أَنَا أَحْوَجُ إِلَى سِتْرِهَا عَلَيَّ مِنْكَ فِي الْآخِرَى

My God, you have concealed my sins in my worldly life, but I need Your concealment more urgently in the Next Life.

(c) Grammatical parallelism:

إِلَهِي لَا تَرُدَّ حَاجَتِي وَلَا تُخَيِّبْ طَمَعِي وَلَا تَقْطَعْ مِنْكَ رَجَائِي وَ أَمَلِي

My God, (please) do not reject my request, do not fail my big hope for You, and do not disappoint my desire and expectation for You.

#### 4.1.4. Genre

Munajat Sha'baniyah is a spiritual and religious text crafted for diverse individuals. It represents inner dialogue that illuminates the heart, reflecting the bond between a servant and Allah, like a drop to the sea, darkness to light, weakness to strength, and imperfection to perfection. Combining subtleties, knowledge, and secrets, it radiates spirituality, touching the soul of the seeker and refining the heart.

#### 4.1.5. Statement of function

The Munajat Sha'baniyah consists of both ideational and interpersonal elements. It weaves together fear and hope, as the reader experiences profound despair in imagining divine punishment, yet simultaneously clings to hope in Allah's boundless mercy and forgiveness. The language is simple and accessible, relying on common Arabic words—everyday nouns, adjectives, verbs—and frequent interjections. Straightforward sentence structures make the text universally approachable. Cohesion is maintained through techniques such as repetition, parallelism, and clausal linkages. Attributed to Imam Ali, peace be upon him, the supplication expresses a deeply personal and intimate relationship between the servant and Allah. It encourages readers to openly share their fears, hopes, and desires through a conversational tone, marked by first-person pronouns and a consultative style. Though it is a monologue intended for recitation, its simplicity fosters deep engagement. The use of personal pronouns, short coordinated clauses connected by “and,” and conjunctions like “so” reflect features of spoken language. Direct address enhances the sense of interaction with Allah, while repetition and parallel structures reinforce both cohesion and emotional impact.

#### 4.2. ST and first TT comparison

This section highlights the comparison and contrast between the ST in Arabic and its machine-translated English version. The analysis reveals discrepancies across various aspects of field, tenor, and mode.

##### 4.2.1. Field

The comparison between the ST and the TT reveals that the translation is fairly close to the original. However, the differences indicate room for refinement to better align with the source and effectively convey its positive tone to the reader.

#### 4.2.1.1. Lexical mismatches

In some sections, the translation deviates from the original, with lexical mismatches identified between the two texts. Notable examples of these discrepancies are presented below:

وَتَعْرِفْ صَمِيرِي

And recognize my hidden affairs

In the above sentence the word “صمير” translated into “hidden affairs”. This translation word has a little negative meaning.

وَلَا يَخْفَى عَلَيْكَ أَمْرٌ مُتَقَلِّبِي وَ مَثْوَايَ

And all my moves and stillness are known by You.

In the above sentence the word “لا يخفى” translated with different point of view and with indirect strategy into “are known”.

وَأَرْجُوهُ لِعَاقِبَتِي

And all the expectation that I hope for my future.

In the above sentence the word “عاقبت” does not mean “future” it means “the end of”.

إِلَهِي لَمْ يَزَلْ بِرُكَ عَلَيَّ أَيَّامَ حَيَاتِي فَلَا تَقْطَعْ بِرُكَ عَنِّي فِي مَمَاتِي

O my God, You have never ceased Your favors from me all over my lifetime; so, (please) do not stop Your favors from

In the above sentence “لم يزل” is a positive phrase but it translated with opposite point of view “have never ceased”. The translator adds an extra word “please” but it is not necessary because this text is a friendly one between Allah, and its servant. According to The Holy Qur’ān translations “do not stop” is not a suitable equivalent for “لا تقطع”; other phrases such as “wipe out” or “to cut” can be better choices.

#### 4.2.1.2. Syntactic mismatches

Due to syntactic mismatches, it is evident that the translation is flawed. For instance, while the ST lacks punctuation marks, the translated version includes an excessive use of them. Additionally, some verbs are rendered in the incorrect tense. Below are several examples showcasing these syntactic inconsistencies:

وَأَسْمِعْ دُعَائِي إِذَا دَعَوْتُكَ وَ أَسْمِعْ نِدَائِي إِذَا نَادَيْتُكَ

And listen to my prayer whenever I pray You, listen to my call whenever I call upon you,

In the above sentence, the ST has no punctuation mark but the translator adds comma in the TT.

وَإِنْ كَانَ قَدْ دَنَا أَجَلِي وَلَمْ يُدَيِّنِي (يَدْنُ) مِنْكَ عَمَلِي فَقَدْ جَعَلْتُ الْإِفْرَارَ بِالدَّنْبِ إِلَيْكَ وَسِيلَتِي

If my time of death is approaching while my deeds are still too short to approach me to You, I am then considering my confession of being guilty to be my means towards You.

In the above sentence “قد دنا” must translate into present perfect tense like “has approached”.

إِلَهِي قَدْ سَتَرْتَ عَلَيَّ ذُنُوبًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَأَنَا أَحْوَجُ إِلَى سِتْرِهَا عَلَيَّ مِنْكَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ

O my God, You have concealed my sins in my worldly life, but I need Your concealment more urgently in the Next Life.

In above sentence the word “أَحْوَجُ” is a comparative adjective so it must translate into “needier”.

(إِلَهِي قَدْ أَحْسَنْتَ إِلَيَّ) إِذْ لَمْ تُظْهِرْهَا لِأَحَدٍ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ

(You have thus not disclosed my sins before any of Your righteous servants;)

In Arabic “لم” plus present tense verb makes negative past tense so this translation is incorrect; it must be “you did not disclose my sins”.

#### 4.2.1.3. Textual mismatches

There are a few inconsistencies in the textual elements. For instance, certain identifiers remain untranslated:

إِلَهِي مَا أَطْلُكَ تَرَدُّدِي فِي حَاجَةٍ قَدْ أَفْنَيْتُ عُمْرِي فِي طَلِبِهَا مِنْكَ

O my God, I do not expect You to reject my request that I spent my whole lifetime asking.

In the above sentence the word “مِنْكَ” does not translated. Therefore, the deictic of person of “كَ” is omitted.

#### 4.2.2. Tenor

Mismatches were noted in tenor factors but are likely insignificant. The ST image in the TT, along with some structural elements, was adjusted, while roles and relationships were completely preserved.

##### 4.2.2.1. Author’s personal (emotional and intellectual) stance

The translator successfully conveyed the author's personal tone but failed to accurately deliver the content to the reader. Overall, the mood of the text was not effectively maintained, resulting in the loss of its intended meaning. It seems the translator lacked

sufficient knowledge or research in translating religious texts, leading to word choices inconsistent with the original.

#### 4.2.2.2. Social role relationships

The relationship between Allah, and the servant undergoes some changes during translation, particularly in terms of formality. For instance:

إِلَهِي إِنْ عَفَوْتَ فَمَنْ أَوْلَى مِنْكَ بِذَلِكَ

O my God, if you pardon me, then who else is worthier than You are in pardoning.

In the above sentence the translator translates the word "أولى" into "worthier" and this word is an informal one. Its prevalent and suitable form is "more worthy".

إِلَهِي لَمْ يَزَلْ بِرُكَ عَلَيَّ أَيَّامَ حَيَاتِي فَلَا تَقْطَعْ بِرُكَ عَنِّي فِي مَمَاتِي

O my God, You have never ceased Your favors from me all over my lifetime; so, (please) do not stop Your favors from

The translator adds an extra word “please” but it is not necessary because this text is a friendly and intimate one between Allah, and its servant.

إِلَهِي إِنْ أَخَذْتَنِي بِجُرْمِي أَخَذْتُكَ بِعُفْوِكَ وَإِنْ أَخَذْتَنِي بِذُنُوبِي أَخَذْتُكَ بِمَغْفِرَتِكَ

O my God, if You punish me for my offense, I shall demand with Your pardon, if You punish me for my sins, I shall demand with Your forgiveness,

“Shall” is a little old-fashioned and more formal word so it is better to use “will” instead of this word.

#### 4.2.3. Mode

The translation contains mismatches but still conveys the overall content effectively. Like the original, it is designed for reading or speaking aloud by individuals of varying educational levels. However, lexical, syntactic, and textual inconsistencies arise as certain informal elements and cohesive links are rendered into more formal expressions in English. This shift altered the originally friendly tone of Munajat Sha'baniyah into a formal one. As House (1997) noted, informal texts often rely on implicitness and are used with those who share or are imagined to share a connection.

##### 4.2.3.1. Participation

A monologue with direct address focuses solely on speaking to the subject without expecting or receiving a response. For example:

إِلَهِي إِنْ حَرَمْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُنِي وَإِنْ خَذَلْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرُنِي

My God, if You deprive me (of Your sustenance), then who else can ever provide me with sustenance? If You disappoint me, then who else can ever back me?

In this, the servant appeals directly to Allah, but hears no reply in return.

#### 4.2.3.2. Medium

The medium is complex, designed to be read aloud as though it were never written. For instance:

إِلَهِي وَ قَدْ أَفْنَيْتُ عُمْرِي فِي شِرَّةِ السُّهُو عَنْكَ وَ أَبْلَيْتُ شَبَابِي فِي سَكْرَةِ التَّبَاعُدِ مِنْكَ

My God, I have spent my whole lifetime with the vigor of being negligent to You and I have spent my whole youth with the inebriety of being far away from You.

#### 4.2.4. Genre

The comparison of the source and the TTs reveals no difference in genre. The TT retains all the features of the ST, remaining a religious text, with no alterations to its genre.

#### 4.2.5. Statement of quality

The evaluation of the original text and its translation reveals several mismatches in terms of field, tenor, and mode. Furthermore, notable changes in interpersonal dynamics have been observed, alongside various overt errors that compromise the ideational function and disrupt the transfer of information. In terms of field, coherence is undermined due to the elimination of referential consistency and repeated elements. When it comes to tenor, the author's intended stance is altered, often resulting in the loss of the original warm and nuanced tone, which is replaced by a more sentimentalized approach. The translation also impacts the role relationship between Allah, and the servant, with instances of euphemistic expressions and omissions. Regarding mode, while the translation retains its spoken character to some extent, it involves significant manipulation of structures and lexical elements. However, no cultural filtering has been applied to the TT.

The researcher has provided a more accurate translation using reliable translations of the Holy Quran. (See the appendix.)

### 4.3. *ST and second TT comparison*

This section compares the ST in Arabic with its English translation by the researcher, highlighting mismatches in field, tenor, and mode.

#### 4.3.1. Field

The comparison between the ST and the TT reveals that the translation closely aligns with the original. Additionally, both matches and mismatches indicate that there are only minor differences between the source and the TT.

##### 4.3.1.1. Lexical mismatches

وَ أَقْبَلُ عَلَيْ إِذَا نَاجَيْتُكَ فَقَدْ هَرَبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَ وَقَفْتُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ مُسْتَكَيناً لَكَ مُتَضَرِّعاً إِلَيْكَ

And accept from me whenever I whisper privately to You, verily I have escaped to You, standing before You, full of misery and humility to You.

In the above sentence it was better to add a subject before the “standing” e.g. I am standing before you/ I stand before you

إِلَهِي كَأَنِّي بِنَفْسِي وَاقِفَةٌ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ وَقَدْ أَظَلَّهَا حُسْنُ تَوَكُّلِي عَلَيْكَ فَقُلْتَ (فَفَعَلْتَ) مَا أَنْتَ أَهْلُهُ وَتَعَمَّدْتَنِي بِعَفْوِكَ

O Allah! As if I am standing before You and my goodness trust about You has shaded on me and You have done which is deserved for you and You will sheathe me with Your forgiveness.

In the above sentence “تَعَمَّدْتَنِي” is not future tense so it is better to translate “You sheathe me with Your forgiveness”

إِلَهِي قَدْ سَتَرْتَ عَلَيَّ ذُنُوبًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَأَنَا أَحْوَجُ إِلَى سِتْرِهَا عَلَيَّ مِنْكَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ

O Allah! You have concealed my sins in this world, but I am needier to your concealment in the hereafter.

In the above sentence the no contrast between the short sentences so it is better to use “and” instead of “but”.

#### 4.3.1.2. Syntactic mismatches

The absence of punctuation in the original text could confuse readers in translation. To prevent this, the translator carefully analyzed the text and added appropriate punctuation where needed.

#### 4.3.1.3. Textual mismatches

In terms of textual elements, no inconsistencies were identified concerning theme dynamics, clausal connections, or iconic associations.

#### 4.3.2. Tenor

##### 4.3.2.1 Author's personal (emotional and intellectual) stance

The translator effectively conveyed the author's personal attitude, which was the primary goal. However, limited knowledge of religious texts posed a challenge. By referencing translations of the Holy Qur’ān, she attempted to preserve the text's tone and mood, successfully delivering the intended message.

##### 4.3.2.2 Social role relationship

The only role relationship, Allah, and the servant, has been applied in the translation as in the original text, and the degree of formality and informality of the text has been observed to a large extent.

#### 4.3.3. Mode

The content is presented in a clear and straightforward manner. Like the original, the translation is designed to be easily understood by readers of varying educational levels.

#### 4.3.3.1. Participation

A monologue that speaks directly, focusing entirely on the speaker's voice and thoughts, while avoiding interaction or acknowledgment of others.

#### 4.3.3.2. Medium

The medium is complex, designed to be read aloud in a way that feels as though it were never written down.

#### 4.3.4. Genre

The comparison between the source and the TTs shows no difference in genre. The TT retains all the features of the ST, remaining a religious text for its audience without any genre changes.

#### 4.3.5. Statement of quality

The comparison between the original text and its translation has uncovered some minor discrepancies. In terms of content, the translation closely aligns with the source, with only slight differences observed between the two versions. As for tenor and mode, the author's perspective remains consistent, and the translation maintains its conversational tone. The structure and choice of words have not been altered, nor has any cultural adaptation been applied to the TT.

### 4.4. *Comparison of the two translations*

Based on a detailed comparison of the English machine translation of Munajat Sha'baniyah and the English translation prepared by the researcher, it can be concluded that the latter demonstrates a superior choice of words. This is because the translator effectively utilized translations of the Holy Qur'ān to select more appropriate terms, thereby conveying the meaning and essence of the content with greater accuracy.

## 5. Results and discussion

Based on previous studies and the findings of the present research, it is evident that earlier analyses of religious and non-religious texts—conducted using Juliane House's model or similar TQA frameworks—have typically relied on accessible and reliable human translations. However, in the case of the current study, an important initial observation was made: Munajat Sha'baniyah, a valuable and spiritually significant text, lacked a dependable human translation. With the exception of a few machine-generated versions, no comprehensive and trustworthy English translation was available. To address this gap, the researcher not only examined and evaluated the quality of existing machine translations but also undertook the task of producing a new human translation of Munajat Sha'baniyah. This allowed for a dual analysis—assessing the quality of each translation while also identifying key differences between automated and human-generated versions. While numerous studies have previously employed House's TQA model to evaluate a wide range of texts—including religious scriptures—this study is distinct in its application of the model to a newly translated text that had not been previously explored in-depth. Additionally, many other religious texts have been analyzed using a variety of translation evaluation frameworks, each producing different insights depending on the model and the nature of the ST.

The primary objective of this research was to evaluate the quality of the English translation of *Munajat Sha'baniyah* using House's (1997) TQA model. The framework provided a structured means to compare the TT against the ST, accounting for differences in audience knowledge and cultural context. A comparative register analysis was conducted, focusing on the three components of register—field, tenor, and mode. After establishing the register profiles of both texts, the genre of the ST was identified, and mismatches between the ST and TT were analyzed. In the final stage, genre classification confirmed that, as a religious text, *Munajat Sha'baniyah* required an overt translation—consistent with House's recommendation for texts of this nature. The study revealed significant quality discrepancies in the English translation of *Munajat Sha'baniyah*. Although the translator made a considerable effort to remain faithful to the original text's features, several inconsistencies were observed—particularly in maintaining the overt translation characteristics recommended for religious texts. These inconsistencies are outlined as follows:

1. **Field:** While the overall translation quality regarding subject matter (field) was relatively consistent with the ST, lexical and syntactic issues occasionally disrupted clarity. In some cases, the translator inserted synonyms or supplementary words in an attempt to bridge lexical gaps. However, these additions sometimes resulted in misinterpretation or semantic deviation. On the syntactic level, issues such as unnecessary insertions and inaccurate rendering of verb tenses were identified.

2. **Tenor:** The translation generally preserved the social roles and relationships reflected in the ST, maintaining consistency in terms of social attitude. However, some lexical choices in the TT introduced an inappropriate shift in tone. Informal expressions in the ST were occasionally translated using overly formal or elevated language, thereby altering the interpersonal dynamics intended in the original.

3. **Mode:** Although the translation largely succeeded in conveying the intended meaning and was appropriately structured for oral or recited delivery—similar to the original—discrepancies were noted at the lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. Key phrases and cohesive devices were sometimes altered or unnecessarily formalized, which affected the natural flow and accessibility of the text for diverse audiences, including those with varying levels of religious knowledge and linguistic competence.

In response to the issues identified in the existing translation, the researcher produced a revised version, which was subsequently analyzed for its strengths and areas for improvement:

1. **Field:** The revised translation remained largely faithful to the ST, with only minor discrepancies observed. One noteworthy enhancement was the incorporation of appropriate punctuation—absent in the original, as is typical of such devotional texts. This addition improved readability while preserving the integrity and meaning of the original content.

2. **Tenor:** The translator more effectively conveyed the author's personal attitude in the revised version. Despite limited prior experience with religious texts, the translator drew upon established English translations of the Holy Qur'an to maintain the intended tone and emotional resonance. The unique relational dynamic between Allah (Jalla Jalaaluh) and the supplicant was preserved, reflecting a balance of humility and reverence comparable to that in the original text.



3. **Mode:** The revised translation successfully conveyed the general content and preserved the functional purpose of the ST, particularly its suitability for oral recitation or spoken reflection. The translation was accessible to readers of varying educational backgrounds, replicating the inclusive and devotional nature of the original.

While the House model can be a practical tool for evaluating the quality of various translated works, it possesses several limitations that complicated both the present study and related research. According to Tahernejad (2012), the model is somewhat subjective in its application. Specifically, House does not offer clearly defined criteria for assessing lexical, syntactic, textual, or phonological elements. It remains ambiguous which features should be categorized under the domains of field, tenor, or mode, potentially leading to confusion during the evaluation process.

Additionally, the model does not account for certain translation issues, such as misinterpretations of meaning, typographical or dictation errors, or the use of footnotes. Another limitation lies in the model's rigid classification of translations as either overt or covert; in reality, some texts may not fit neatly into one category (Tahernejad, 2012). As Schaffner (as cited in Tahernejad, 2012) points out, functionalist models like House's consider quality as a subjective concept, influenced by the end user's perspective and evaluative criteria. This study also faced several practical limitations. First, aside from a few machine-generated versions, no reliable English translations of *Munajat Sha'baniyah* were available, compelling the researcher to work with unverified translations. Second, the study was limited to the analysis of English translations using only the House (1997) model. Third, due to time constraints, only half of *Munajat Sha'baniyah* was analyzed. These limitations, while unavoidable, should be taken into account when interpreting the findings of this research.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the investigations conducted thus far and the findings presented in this study, it has become evident that previous analyses of religious or other textual content using House's model—or comparable frameworks—have predominantly relied on accessible and relatively reliable human translations. In contrast, a key initial observation in the present research highlighted a notable gap: *Munajat Sha'baniyah*, despite its theological and literary significance, lacked a dependable, comprehensive human translation. With the exception of a few machine-generated versions, no high-quality human-rendered English translation was readily available.

As a result, this study not only critically evaluated existing machine-generated translations of *Munajat Sha'baniyah* but also undertook the task of producing a new human translation. This dual-pronged approach enabled a more robust assessment of translation quality and provided a comparative platform to analyze the differences between machine-generated and human-produced outputs. Ultimately, the research sought to identify the limitations of automated translation tools in conveying the depth and nuance of spiritually rich texts.

One of the key conclusions drawn from this study is that machine translation technologies cannot serve as a substitute for human translators when dealing with texts that demand sensitivity to tone, mood, formality, and contextual nuance. While machine translation may achieve a degree of lexical accuracy, it lacks the interpretive depth required to render the layered meanings and emotional resonance inherent in religious supplications.

Considering the existence of various other TQA models beyond House's, and given the diversity of religious texts available in translation, future studies could extend this line of inquiry. For example, further research might apply House's model to additional religious works translated by different individuals to increase the sample size and generalizability of results. Alternatively, comparative studies could evaluate a single translated text using multiple TQA frameworks to determine the relative strengths, limitations, and applicability of each model in assessing complex religious or literary texts.

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## Appendix

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful	بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
O Allah, send blessings upon Muhammad and the Household of Muhammad.	اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ
And listen to my prayer whenever I pray You, listen to my call whenever I call You	وَاسْمَعْ دُعَائِي إِذَا دَعَوْتُكَ وَاسْمَعْ نِدَائِي إِذَا نَادَيْتُكَ
And accept from me whenever I whisper privately to You, for here I am fleeing into You, standing before You, full of misery and humility to You.	وَاقْبَلْ عَلَيَّ إِذَا نَاجَيْتُكَ فَقَدْ هَرَبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَوَقَفْتُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ مُسْتَكِينًا لَكَ مُتَضَرِّعًا إِلَيْكَ
I hope for the reward near you and You know what lies in my heart and You are aware of my needs and recognize my conscience	رَاجِيًا لِمَا لَدَيْكَ ثَوَابِي وَتَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَتَخْبُرُ حَاجَتِي وَتَعْرِفُ ضَمِيرِي
And no matter is hidden from you about overturning place and lodging	وَلَا يَخْفَى عَلَيْكَ أَمْرٌ مُنْقَلَبِي وَمُنَوَايَ
And You know all utterances which I want to begin with and all requests that I want to express and all hopes that I have for my consequence.	وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُبْدِيَ بِهِ مِنْ مُنْطَلِقِي وَآتِقُوهُ بِهِ مِنْ طَلِبَتِي وَأَرْجُوهُ لِعَاقِبَتِي
Lord, Your divine providence has flowed over me up to the end of my life,	وَقَدْ جَرَتْ مَقَادِيرُكَ عَلَيَّ يَا سَيِّدِي فِيمَا يَكُونُ مِنِّي إِلَى آخِرِ عُمْرِي
Including my secret and open matters, all my excess and my dearth and all my benefits and my harms are in nobody's hands except you.	مِنْ سِرِّي وَعَلَانِيَتِي وَبَيْدِكَ لَا يَبِيدُ غَيْرُكَ زِيَادَتِي وَنَقْصِي وَنَفْعِي وَضَرِّي
O Allah! if You forbid me, then who else can ever provide me with sustenance? And if You forsake me, then who else can ever help me?	إِلَهِي إِنْ حَرَمْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَرْزُقُنِي وَإِنْ خَذَلْتَنِي فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرُنِي
O Allah! I seek refuge in You from Your wrath and Your descendant of anger.	إِلَهِي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ غَضَبِكَ وَحُلُولِ سَخَطِكَ
O Allah! If I do not deserve Your mercy, You are deserved to bestow Your abundant bounty upon me.	إِلَهِي إِنْ كُنْتُ غَيْرُ مُسْتَأْهِلٍ لِرَحْمَتِكَ فَأَنْتَ أَهْلٌ أَنْ تَجُودَ عَلَيَّ بِفَضْلِ سَعَتِكَ
O Allah! As if I am standing before You and my goodness trust about You has shaded on me and You have done which is deserved for You and You will sheathe me with Your pardon.	إِلَهِي كَأَنِّي بِنَفْسِي وَاقِفَةٌ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ وَقَدْ أَظْلَمَ حُسْنُ تَوَكُّلِي عَلَيْكَ فَقُلْتَ (فَفَعَلْتَ) مَا أَنْتَ أَهْلُهُ وَتَعَمَّدْتَنِي بِعَفْوِكَ
O Allah! if you pardon me, then who else is worthier than You for that.	إِلَهِي إِنْ عَفَوْتَ فَمَنْ أَوْلَى مِنْكَ بِذَلِكَ

If my time of death has approached while my deeds do not approach me to You, I have made my confession of being guilty to be my means towards You.	وَإِنْ كَانَ قَدْ دَنَا أَجَلِي وَ لَمْ يَدْتِنِي (يَدْنُ) مِنْكَ عَمَلِي فَقَدْ جَعَلْتُ الْإِفْرَارَ بِالذَّنْبِ إِلَيْكَ وَسِيلَتِي
O Allah! I have wronged at looking toward myself; therefore, woe is for me if You do not forgive.	إِلَهِي قَدْ جُرْتُ عَلَى نَفْسِي فِي النَّظَرِ لَهَا فَلَهَا الْوَيْلُ إِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَهَا
O Allah! All over my lifetime your blessings were upon me; so, do not stop Your blessings from.	إِلَهِي لَمْ يَزَلْ بِرُكَ عَلَيَّ أَيَّامَ حَيَاتِي فَلَا تَقْطَعْ بِرُكَ عَنِّي فِي مَمَاتِي
O Allah! how can I despair of Your fairness of favor for me after my death while You did not show me but the grace throughout my life?	إِلَهِي كَيْفَ آيَسُ مِنْ حُسْنِ ظُرْكَ لِي بَعْدَ مَمَاتِي وَ أَنْتَ لَمْ تُؤْنِ (تُؤْنِي) إِلَّا الْجَمِيلَ فِي حَيَاتِي
O Allah! accomplish my affairs in the way that befits You, and revert upon me, a sinful who is covered by his ignorance, with Your favors.	إِلَهِي تَوَلَّ مِنْ أَمْرِي مَا أَنْتَ أَهْلُهُ وَ عُدْ عَلَيَّ بِفَضْلِكَ عَلَى مُذْنِبٍ قَدْ غَمَرَهُ جَهْلُهُ
O Allah! You have concealed my sins in this world, but I am needier to Your concealment in the hereafter.	إِلَهِي قَدْ سَتَرْتَ عَلَيَّ ذُنُوبًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ أَنَا أَحْوَجُ إِلَى سِتْرِهَا عَلَيَّ مِنْكَ فِي الْآخِرَى
Thus you did not disclose my sins before any of Your righteous servants;	(إِلَهِي) قَدْ أَحْسَنْتَ إِلَيَّ إِذْ لَمْ تُظْهِرْهَا لِأَحَدٍ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ
Therefore, do not dishonor me on the Resurrection Day before all the witnesses.	فَلَا تَفْضُخْنِي يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَى رُءُوسِ الْأَشْهَادِ
O Allah! Your magnanimity expanded my hope, and Your pardon is preferable to my deeds.	إِلَهِي جُودُكَ بَسَطَ أَمَلِي وَ عَفْوُكَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ عَمَلِي
O Allah! so delight me by meeting You on the day when You shall judge between Your servants. O Allah! my apology is whose apology that is dependent upon acceptance of his excuse.	إِلَهِي فَسُرِّنِي بِلِقَائِكَ يَوْمَ تَقْضِي فِيهِ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ إِلَهِي اغْتَذَارِي إِلَيْكَ اغْتِذَارُ مَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَعِنْ عَنْ قَبُولِ عُذْرِهِ
So, accept my excuse, O the most generous whom sinners make an apology to him.	فَاقْبَلْ عُذْرِي يَا أَكْرَمَ مَنْ اغْتَذَرَ إِلَيْهِ الْمُسِيئُونَ
O Allah! do not reject my need, do not fail my wish, and do not split my desire and hope from You.	إِلَهِي لَا تَرُدَّ حَاجَتِي وَ لَا تُخَيِّبْ طَمَعِي وَ لَا تَقْطَعْ مِنْكَ رَجَائِي وَ أَمَلِي
O Allah! If You wished to humiliate me, You would not have guided me. If You wished to dishonor me, you would not have pardoned me.	إِلَهِي لَوْ أَرَدْتَ هَوَانِي لَمْ تُهْدِنِي وَ لَوْ أَرَدْتَ فَضِيحَتِي لَمْ تُعَافِي
O Allah! I do not expect You to reject my need which I spent my whole lifetime asking it from you.	إِلَهِي مَا أَطْنُكَ تَرُدُّنِي فِي حَاجَةٍ قَدْ أَقْنَيْتُ عُمْرِي فِي طَلِبِهَا مِنْكَ

O Allah! You shall be entitled to all praise, eternally, eternally, perpetually and continuously that is increasingly and imperishably, as exactly as You like and please.	إِلَهِي فَلَكَ الْحَمْدُ أَبَدًا أَبَدًا دَائِمًا سَرْمَدًا يَزِيدُ وَ لَا يَبِيدُ كَمَا تُحِبُّ وَ تَرْضَى
O Allah! If You call me to account for my crime, I will call You account for your pardon, if You call me account for my sins, I will call You account for Your forgiveness;	إِلَهِي إِنْ أَخَذْتَنِي بِجُرْمِي أَخَذْتُكَ بِعَفْوِكَ وَ إِنْ أَخَذْتَنِي بِذُنُوبِي أَخَذْتُكَ بِمَغْفِرَتِكَ
And if You admitted me to the fire, I will declare to its inhabitants that I love You.	وَ إِنْ أَدْخَلْتَنِي النَّارَ أَعْلَمْتُ أَهْلَهَا أَنِّي أُحِبُّكَ
O Allah! If my deed was too little to obedience to You, then my hope has been great to my prospect from You.	إِلَهِي إِنْ كَانَ صَغُرَ فِي جَنْبِ طَاعَتِكَ عَمَلِي فَقَدْ كَبُرَ فِي جَنْبِ رَجَائِكَ أَمَلِي
O Allah! how can I return from You disappointed and deprived while I had high opinion of Your magnanimity, that You endow me with salvation and mercy?	إِلَهِي كَيْفَ أَتَقَلَّبُ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ بِالْخَيْبَةِ مَحْزُومًا وَ قَدْ كَانَ حُسْنُ ظَنِّي بِجُودِكَ أَنْ تَقْلِبَنِي بِالنَّجَاةِ مَرْحُومًا
O Allah! I have perished my whole lifetime negligently over You and I wore out my whole youth with the inebriety of being far away from You.	إِلَهِي وَ قَدْ أَفْنَيْتُ عُمْرِي فِي شِرَّةِ السَّهْوِ عَنْكَ وَ أَبْلَيْتُ شَبَابِي فِي سَكْرَةِ التَّبَاعُدِ مِنْكَ
O Allah! Thus I have not woken up during the days which I was proud of You and I was getting on the path that ends with Your ire.	إِلَهِي فَلَمْ أَسْتَيْقِظْ أَيَّامَ اغْتِرَارِي بِكَ وَ رُكُونِي إِلَى سَبِيلِ سَخَطِكَ
O Allah! I am Your servant and the son of Your servant, standing before You and making recourse to Your generosity upon Thee.	إِلَهِي وَ أَنَا عَبْدُكَ وَ ابْنُ عَبْدِكَ فَاتِّمِّ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ مُتَوَسِّلٌ بِكَرَمِكَ إِلَيْكَ




## Consistency in Rendering Recurring Qur'ānic Structures: A Comparative Analysis of English Translations by Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem

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### ABSTRACT

Translating recurring linguistic and rhetorical structures in the Qur'ān presents a significant challenge for English translators, as inconsistencies can disrupt the text's thematic unity and stylistic coherence. This study investigates how such structures—categorized as expressions, sentences, verses, syntactic patterns, and rhetorical devices—are rendered in three English translations of the Qur'ān: Sahih International (1997), Yusuf Ali (1934), and Abdel Haleem (2004). Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the research utilizes the frameworks of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, supported by classical tafsir and Arabic syntactic sources, to evaluate translation consistency across the five categories. The findings reveal distinct translational strategies: Sahih International emphasizes formal equivalence, demonstrating high consistency in expressions and syntactic constructions; Abdel Haleem strikes a balance between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, performing notably well in the translation of verses; Yusuf Ali, on the other hand, adopts a more interpretive style, resulting in greater variability and frequent departures from tafsir-supported renderings. This inconsistency underscores the importance of uniformity in preserving the Qur'ān's integrity and enhancing clarity for readers, especially in sacred texts where repetition serves a deliberate rhetorical function. The study proposes a hybrid formal equivalence-dynamic equivalence model that prioritizes structural fidelity, such as consistent renderings of recurring phrases like “who ... except”, while incorporating naturalness to improve readability for English audiences. However, the limited sample size of three instances per category constrains the generalizability of the findings, indicating a need for broader analysis. Ultimately, this systematic approach not only promotes greater coherence in Qur'ānic translation but also offers practical guidance for translators and contributes to the broader discourse in translation studies, particularly regarding the balance between fidelity and accessibility in rendering sacred texts.

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## 1. Introduction

Translating the Qur'ān into English poses distinct challenges, particularly in preserving the integrity of its recurring linguistic and rhetorical features. These structures—including expressions, syntactic patterns, and rhetorical devices—often convey consistent meanings throughout the text, making uniformity in their translation crucial for maintaining thematic coherence. This study argues that such consistency is vital to conveying the Qur'ān's intended message to non-Arabic readers. It evaluates how three prominent English translations, Sahih International (1997), Yusuf Ali (1934), and Abdel Haleem (2004), handle these recurring features.

Achieving uniformity in Qur'ānic translation requires recognizing the shared functions of recurring structures, a task often guided by classical tafsir sources (e.g., *Al-Mīzān*, *Al-Kashshāf*) and Arabic syntax references (e.g., *I'rāb al-Qur'ān*). These resources offer essential insights into the Qur'ān's original linguistic and theological intent, helping translators maintain coherence and fidelity in rendering its message. Given the Qur'ān's status as a sacred text, its translation demands a careful balance between faithfulness to the source and accessibility for the target audience—an issue central to translation studies (Nida, 1964; Baker, 1992).

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, employing formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence as theoretical frameworks. Formal equivalence emphasizes preserving the grammatical and structural features of the source text, while dynamic equivalence prioritizes naturalness and clarity in the target language (Nida, 1964; Hatim & Mason, 1990). In conjunction with tafsir and syntactic exegesis, the study evaluates consistency across five categories: expressions, sentences, verses, syntactic structures, and rhetorical patterns. Through a comparative analysis of the translations by Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem, the study identifies their respective strengths and limitations, ultimately proposing a model for assessing the structural and semantic fidelity of Qur'ānic renderings.

Despite the critical role of consistent translation in preserving the coherence of the Qur'ān, prior studies have rarely offered a systematic analysis of how recurring structures are rendered across multiple English translations. This study addresses that gap by examining the treatment of these structures and assessing the impact of translation theories on their consistency. It is guided by the following research questions:

1. How consistently are recurring Qur'ānic structures rendered across selected English translations?
2. To what extent do principles of formal and dynamic equivalence influence translation consistency?
3. What framework can enhance consistency in translating recurring Qur'ānic structures?

This study is significant because consistent translations can bridge cultural and theological divides, facilitating interfaith dialogue and deepening scholarly engagement with the Qur'ān in English-speaking contexts. Its findings have practical implications for improving translation strategies for sacred texts and contribute to the broader literature by proposing a structured approach to balancing fidelity with readability.



## 2. Review of the literature

### 2.1. Nida's translation theories applied to the Qur'ān

Eugene Nida's concepts of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence offer a dual framework for translation, balancing fidelity to the source text's grammatical structure with naturalness and readability in the target language (Nida, 1964; Hatim & Mason, 1990). These frameworks are particularly relevant to the Qur'ān, given its complex linguistic patterns and sacred status. Jabak (2020) applies dynamic equivalence in translating *Surah al-Shams*, demonstrating effective semantic transfer but acknowledging the difficulty of preserving syntactic structure—thereby implying the complementary value of FE. This study builds on that insight through an integrated analysis that addresses both meaning and form. Simnowitz (2015), by contrast, adapts dynamic equivalence for Muslim audiences, emphasizing cultural accessibility but warning against the oversimplification that can dilute theological nuance. However, he does not adequately consider the structural benefits of formal equivalence. A key divergence between the two scholars lies in their priorities: Jabak emphasizes adaptability and semantic clarity, while Simnowitz privileges cultural resonance. Yet both overlook the need for consistency in rendering recurring Qur'ānic structures—a gap this study aims to fill. By incorporating tafsir sources such as *Al-Mizān* by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, this research seeks to reconcile formal fidelity with dynamic meaning, addressing an underexplored dimension of Nida's framework within the context of Qur'ānic translation.

### 2.2. Consistency in translating recurring expressions in sacred texts

Consistency in rendering recurring Qur'ānic phrases is vital for preserving theological coherence, as emphasized in *Surah An-Nisā'* (4:82), which underscores the Qur'ān's textual unity. Hajikhani et al. (2016), in their analysis of Persian translations, demonstrate that inconsistent grammatical renderings disrupt semantic flow. They advocate for standardized approaches—particularly in verb conjugation—that have relevance beyond Persian, aligning with challenges faced in Arabic-English translation. Similarly, Nabavi et al. (2014) argue that uniform verbal repetition enhances thematic clarity in Persian, a principle applicable to Arabic due to similar syntactic roles, though its implementation in English requires adjustment for syntactic and cultural differences.

Murah (2013) uses computational tools to identify inconsistencies in English translations, highlighting the need for systematic uniformity. However, his study lacks a theoretical foundation in formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, a gap this research addresses through theory-grounded qualitative analysis. Al-Jabari (2020) focuses on axiomatic expressions and emphasizes balancing consistency with contextual sensitivity, yet limits his analysis to a single translation. In contrast, this study adopts a comparative approach across multiple translations. Together, these studies underscore the significance of consistency in Qur'ānic translation. However, their varied methodologies call for a tailored, integrative framework—one that this research aims to develop and apply.

### 2.3. Strategies and challenges in Qur'ānic translation

Translating the Qur'ān requires navigating its classical Arabic, theological depth, and cultural nuances, demanding a balance between accuracy and accessibility. Mohammed (2005) critiques English translations for linguistic and interpretive flaws, particularly in rendering divine attributes, but overlooks the consistency of recurring

structures, which this study emphasizes. Nassimi (2008) highlights thematic inconsistencies in Yusuf Ali's translation that hinder comprehension, yet does not address the uniformity of repeated phrases, a gap this analysis seeks to fill by comparing three translations. Amjad and Farahani (2013) propose strategies for translating divine names, linking consistency to theological integrity—an approach this study expands to encompass broader structural patterns. El-Khatib (2006) underscores tafsir-driven accuracy, aligning with this study's methodology, while Hashemi et al. (2024) argue that uniform Persian renderings of similar verses maintain historical coherence, offering a model adaptable to English with contextual adjustments. Collectively, these studies highlight the challenges of Qur'ānic translation, but their broad focus overlooks the specific issue of consistency in recurring structures, which this research directly addresses.

#### *2.4. Research gaps and objectives*

Prior research sheds light on Nida's theories, the role of consistency, and the broader challenges of Qur'ānic translation, yet it falls short in systematically evaluating recurring structures across multiple English translations using formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Mohammed (2005) and Nassimi (2008) offer general critiques but overlook the nuanced issue of uniformity in repeated phrases. Meanwhile, Persian studies (Hajikhani et al., 2016; Nabavi et al., 2014) provide grammatical insights but lack direct applicability to English translations without contextual adaptation. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing consistency in the translations of Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem, incorporating tafsir sources such as Ṭabāṭabāī's *Al-Mīzān* and Ibn 'Āshūr's *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* to propose a practical framework. Unlike previous works, it emphasizes the operationalization of consistency by developing a structured approach rooted in both equivalence theory and classical exegesis.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Research design*

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach within translation studies to examine consistency in the rendering of recurring Qur'ānic structures. The research design evaluates how uniformity in translation choices across three English versions—Sahih International (1997), Yusuf Ali (1934), and Abdel Haleem (2004)—contributes to preserving the Qur'ān's linguistic integrity and theological clarity for English-speaking audiences. Consistency is considered essential for several reasons: it maintains unified semantic and thematic functions across contexts (Nassimi, 2008), enhances reader comprehension by foregrounding rhetorical and conceptual patterns (Murah, 2013), and reflects the Qur'ān's stylistic use of repetition—a key feature of its expressive power (Hajikhani et al., 2016). Five categories of recurring elements were identified based on their frequency in the Qur'ān and their relevance to its linguistic, thematic, or rhetorical structure. Each category is analyzed using tafsir and grammatical exegesis to verify intended meanings and guide consistent translation.

#### *3.2. Research corpora*

The corpora for this study comprise recurring Qur'ānic elements and their renderings in three prominent English translations: Sahih International (1997), Yusuf Ali (1934), and Abdel Haleem (2004). These translations were selected for their prominence and diversity—Sahih International and Abdel Haleem representing modern approaches with differing

emphases on meaning and readability, and Yusuf Ali offering a blend of structural fidelity and poetic expression. Five categories of recurring elements were identified based on their frequency in the Qur'ān and their significance to its linguistic, thematic, or rhetorical structure. Each category is outlined below with representative examples. To assess translational consistency, at least three instances per category are analyzed—an increase from the initial two per category—to address concerns regarding limited scope. In addition, classical and modern tafsir works—including *Al-Mizān* by Ṭabāṭabāī, *Al-Tahrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* by Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Kashshāf* by Al-Zamakhsharī, and *Majma' al-Bayān* by Al-Ṭabarsī—were consulted to verify the semantic consistency of the selected elements across contexts.

### Similar Expressions and Phrases

Lexical units or idiomatic phrases that recur across verses with consistent meanings or thematic roles, often serving as theological or stylistic anchors. Examples include: “متاع الحياة” (the enjoyment of worldly life; e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:86, Al-Imran 3:14, Al-Nahl 16:117), “الدين” (the Last Day; e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:8, Al-Tawbah 9:18, Al-Ankabut 29:36), “جنات” (gardens beneath which rivers flow; e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:25, Al-Tawbah 9:100, Al-Kahf 18:31).

### Similar Sentences

Short, structurally similar statements that repeat with identical or near-identical wording, reinforcing key Qur'ānic concepts or divine attributes. Examples include: “لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون” (No fear shall be upon them, nor shall they grieve; e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:62, Al-Imran 3:170, Al-Ma'idah 5:69), “ثم استوى على العرش” (Then He established Himself above the Throne; e.g., Al-A'raf 7:54, Yunus 10:3, Al-Ra'd 13:2), “وبئس المصير” (And wretched is the destination; e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:126, Al-Imran 3:162, Al-Nisa 4:115).

### Similar Verses

Verbatim or near-verbatim repetitions of multi-phrase passages, typically spanning several lines, that convey unified messages or ethical teachings. Examples include: “فبأي آلاء ربكم تكذبان” (Then which of your Lord's favors will you deny?; e.g., Al-Rahman 55:13, 55:16, 55:18), “وان ربك لهو العزيز الرحيم” (And indeed, your Lord—He is the Mighty, the Merciful; e.g., Al-Shu'ara 26:9, 26:104, 26:122), “ولا تجزي نفس عن نفس شيئا” (Nor can a soul compensate for another soul; e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:48, Al-An'am 6:164, Al-Baqarah 2:123).

### Similar Syntactic Structures

Grammatical constructions that recur with consistent syntactic patterns and functions, such as prepositional phrases or verbal emphatics, enhancing the Qur'ān's stylistic coherence. Examples include: “رحمة من عندنا” (a mercy from Us; e.g., Al-Nahl 16:64, Al-Shura 42:28, Maryam 19:21), “نزلا من عند الله” (a hospitality from Allah; e.g., Al-Imran 3:198, Al-Nahl 16:41, Al-Zumar 39:10), “فضلا من ربك” (a favor from your Lord; e.g., Al-Insan 76:11, Al-Sharh 94:6, Al-Dukhan 44:57).

## Similar Rhetorical Patterns

Repeated rhetorical devices or question-answer structures that serve persuasive or reflective purposes, often marked by consistent phrasing or syntactic forms. Examples include: “ما لنا لا نتوكل على الله” (What is with us that we do not rely upon Allah?; e.g., Ibrahim 14:12, Al-Nahl 16:35), “ما لكم لا ترجون لله وقارا” (What is with you that you do not expect for Allah dignity?; e.g., Nuh 71:13, Al-Dukhan 44:39), “فكيف إذا توفتهم الملائكة” (So how will it be when the angels take them?; e.g., Muhammad 47:27, Al-Nisa 4:97, Al-Anfal 8:50).

### 3.3. Data collection and analysis

Data collection involved identifying Qur’ānic verses containing selected recurring elements, chosen based on their frequency and thematic significance. Significance was assessed using three criteria: (1) frequency of occurrence in the Qur’ān, (2) theological relevance as discussed in major tafsir works, and (3) rhetorical prominence in conveying core Qur’ānic concepts.

- **Similar Expressions and Phrases** were identified based on recurring idiomatic phrases or lexical units (e.g., *متاع الحياة الدنيا*) that function as theological or stylistic anchors. Variations in pronouns or grammatical forms were accepted unless they significantly altered the meaning.
- **Similar Sentences** consisted of structurally similar, independent statements (e.g., *لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون*) that reinforce key theological or ethical concepts. Significance was determined by their thematic function.
- **Similar Verses** included verbatim or near-verbatim multi-phrase passages (e.g., *فبأي ربائب* *الاء ربكنا تكذبان*) conveying unified messages. Their importance derived from ethical and doctrinal consistency across contexts.
- **Similar Syntactic Structures** focused on repeated grammatical patterns (e.g., *رحمة* *من عندنا*) that contribute to stylistic cohesion. These were analyzed for their rhetorical role, with adaptations made for target-language norms.
- **Similar Rhetorical Patterns** encompassed recurring question-answer forms or persuasive structures (e.g., *ما لنا لا نتوكل على الله*), selected for their rhetorical function and the requirement of uniform translation unless contextually constrained.

Specific verses were selected as representative examples of each category, prioritized for their frequency and prominence in tafsir literature due to their theological and rhetorical significance. A total of 15 elements—approximately three instances per category across five categories—were analyzed to ensure both depth and breadth in evaluating translational consistency. Slight variation in the number of instances per category reflects the differing levels of theological emphasis and recurrence frequency, as verified through classical tafsir and grammatical references.

The analysis follows three steps:

1. **Extraction:** Identifying the selected recurring Arabic elements and their corresponding English translations across the three versions.

2. **Comparison:** Evaluating each translation for consistency in structure, vocabulary retention, meaning, and cultural adaptation. Tafsir sources were consulted to verify intended meanings and contextual accuracy.

3. **Evaluation:** Assessing consistency in lexical choices, syntactic structures, and rhetorical effect. *Consistency* is defined as the use of identical or near-identical phrasing for recurring elements across all analyzed instances. *Inconsistency* refers to variations in wording or structure that alter the intended meaning or rhetorical tone of the Arabic source—such as rendering an exclamatory phrase in a neutral tone.

Translation approaches were categorized as structure-focused, meaning-focused, or hybrid, supporting the hypothesis that consistency in approach—regardless of emphasis—affects the preservation of the Qur’ānic message in English. Findings are presented descriptively, with illustrative examples and frequency-based quantification where applicable. The *consistency percentage* was calculated using the formula:  $\text{Consistency \%} = (\text{Number of consistent renderings} / \text{Total occurrences}) \times 100$

For instance, the phrase “متاع الحياة الدنيا” was analyzed to determine whether it was consistently translated as “*the enjoyment of the worldly life*” or varied (e.g., “the life of this world”), and whether such variations impacted its role as a theological anchor. Similarly, rhetorical patterns such as “ما لكم لا تأمنون” were assessed for consistency in preserving tone and emphasis. As the assessments were conducted by a single researcher, future studies are encouraged to incorporate inter-rater reliability measures to minimize interpretive bias and enhance objectivity.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Overview

This section presents the findings of a comparative analysis evaluating consistency in the translation of recurring Qur’ānic elements across three English versions: Sahih International (1997), Yusuf Ali (1934), and Abdel Haleem (2004). The study focuses on five distinct categories of repetition found within the Qur’ān’s linguistic and thematic structure: (1) Similar Expressions and Phrases, (2) Similar Sentences, (3) Similar Verses, (4) Similar Syntactic Structures, and (5) Similar Rhetorical Patterns. These categories reflect the Qur’ān’s frequent use of repeated linguistic units—ranging from idiomatic phrases to rhetorical constructs—designed to reinforce meaning, coherence, and persuasive effect. The primary objective is to assess the degree to which these translators render such elements consistently, thereby preserving the Qur’ān’s intended message and structural integrity in English. The analysis is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: formal equivalence, which emphasizes fidelity to the Arabic text’s structure, lexis, and syntax; and dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes conveying meaning, achieving equivalent rhetorical effect, and ensuring naturalness in the target language. Classical tafsir sources and grammatical references were consulted to verify the contextual and functional consistency of each recurring element. Each category is analyzed systematically using representative examples, selected based on their frequency and theological or rhetorical significance in the Qur’ānic text, as outlined in the Methodology.

## 4.2 Consistency in translating similar expressions and phrases

### 4.2.1. Definition and scope

Similar expressions and phrases refer to recurring lexical units or idiomatic constructs in the Qur'ān that carry consistent meanings or thematic roles across different verses. These include terms like “متاع الحياة الدنيا” (the enjoyment of worldly life), “اليوم الآخر” (the Last Day), “جنان تجري من تحتها الأنهار” (gardens beneath which rivers flow), and “الدار الآخرة” (the home of the Hereafter). Consistency in translating these phrases is crucial to maintain their semantic unity and thematic continuity for English readers.

To illustrate this category, several examples could be explored, such as “اليوم الآخر” (e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:8, Al-Tawbah 9:18) or “جنان تجري من تحتها الأنهار” (e.g., Al-Baqarah 2:25, Al-Tawbah 9:100). However, for this analysis, we focus on “متاع الحياة الدنيا” as a representative case study due to its frequent recurrence (over 30 times in the Qur'ān) and its pivotal role in contrasting worldly and eternal values. Four specific instances—Al-Baqarah 2:86, Al-Imran 3:14, Yunus 10:23, and Zukhruf 43:35—are selected to assess how consistently the three translators render this phrase, guided by formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence principles. The slightly expanded sample size ensures a more robust and representative analysis of translational consistency across occurrences.

### 4.2.2. Translation comparison

The phrase “متاع الحياة الدنيا” denotes the temporary pleasures, provisions, or enjoyments of worldly life, often juxtaposed with the permanence of the hereafter. The following table compares its rendering across the selected verses:

Table 1. Translation comparison of “متاع الحياة الدنيا” across selected verses

Verse	Arabic Text	Sahih International	Yusuf Ali	Abdel Haleem
Al-Baqarah 2:86	... وَمَا مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ	But the enjoyment of worldly life compared to the hereafter is but little.	But the good things of this life compared with the hereafter, are but little.	But the pleasures of this life, compared with the life to come, are only a little.
Al-Imran 3:14	... ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَآبِ	That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.	That is the enjoyment of this life, but Allah hath with Him the best return.	These are the pleasures of this life, but with God there is a far better return.
Yunus 10:23	... إِنَّمَا بَغْيُكُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا	[Being merely] the enjoyment of worldly life.	[Being merely] the good things of this life.	[Nothing but] the joys of this life.
Zukhruf 43:35	... وَإِنْ كُلُّ ذَلِكَ لَمَّا مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ...	But all that is not but the enjoyment of worldly life.	But all this were nothing but conveniences of the present life	Yet all that is nothing but the pleasures of this worldly life.

#### 4.2.3. Contextual consistency from Tafsir

According to Al-Mīzān, “متاع الحياة الدنيا” consistently refers to transient worldly pleasures—material or sensory—that pale in comparison to the hereafter’s rewards (Ṭabāṭabāī: 1351, Vol. 1, p. 234; Vol. 3, p. 45; Vol. 10, p. 123; Vol. 18, p. 56). Majma’ al-Bayān (Ṭabarsī: 1367, Vol. 1, p. 287; Vol. 2, p. 34; Vol. 5, p. 189; Vol. 9, p. 234) reinforces this, noting its uniform role in highlighting the fleeting nature of earthly life across these contexts. The tafsir consensus, as reflected in Table 1, supports a consistent translation to reflect this shared theological intent.

#### 4.2.4. Analysis using formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence

Sahih International: Consistency: 100%—employs “the enjoyment of worldly life” uniformly across all four verses. Formal equivalence: High fidelity—translates “متاع” as “enjoyment” (a lexically accurate noun reflecting provision or pleasure) and maintains the structure “of worldly life” in alignment with the Arabic word order. Dynamic equivalence: Achieves naturalness and conveys the intended transient effect clearly, reinforcing thematic coherence without variation. Yusuf Ali: Consistency: 50%—uses “the good things of this life” (Al-Baqarah 2:86, Yunus 10:23), “the enjoyment of this life” (Al-Imran 3:14), and “conveniences of the present life” (Zukhruf 43:35), showing notable variation. FE: Low fidelity—shifts “متاع” (enjoyment/provision), and alters structure (this life vs. present life), breaking uniformity. Dynamic equivalence: Prioritizes interpretive naturalness (e.g., conveniences for accessibility), but inconsistent renderings risk obscuring the phrase’s recurring theological weight. Abdel Haleem: Consistency: 75%—renders pleasures of this life in three verses (Al-Baqarah 2:86, Al-Imran 3:14, Zukhruf 43:35), but shifts to joys of this life in Yunus 10:23. FE: Moderate fidelity—pleasures closely approximates “متاع” (pleasure/provision), but “joys” slightly deviates, reducing lexical consistency; structure remains fairly aligned. DE: Focuses on natural English phrasing and equivalent effect, though the shift to “joys” introduces a minor inconsistency that could subtly alter reader perception. Consistency percentages were calculated based on the proportion of verses where the exact or near-identical phrasing was used (e.g., Sahih International used the same phrasing in 4 out of 4 verses, yielding 100%).

#### 4.2.5. General analysis

The comparative analysis of the phrase “متاع الحياة الدنيا” across four verses reveals distinct levels of consistency among the translators: Sahih International achieves full consistency (100%), excelling in FE’s lexical and structural fidelity and DE’s clarity, aligning with tafsir’s uniform interpretation of transience. Abdel Haleem scores 75%, balancing dynamic equivalence’s naturalness with FE’s fidelity, though the variation to “joys” slightly weakens uniformity. Yusuf Ali shows 50% consistency, leaning on DE’s adaptability but compromising FE’s adherence, resulting in thematic fragmentation and weakening the interpretive cohesion intended by the Qur’ānic repetition. Variations, as in Yusuf Ali’s case, risk disrupting the Qur’ān’s cohesive message, while Sahih International’s approach best enhances comprehension and fidelity for English readers.

### 4.3. Consistency in translating similar verses

#### 4.3.1. Scope and significance

This subsection addresses the third category of recurring Qur'ānic elements—Similar Verses—characterized by verbatim or near-verbatim repetitions of multi-phrase passages that span several lines and convey unified messages or ethical teachings. For this analysis, we focus on the identical passages in Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:5-8) and Surah Al-Ma'arij (70:29-32), which outline attributes of believers—chastity, trustworthiness, and covenant-keeping—using the exact same wording in Arabic. This case study was selected due to its verbatim repetition and its significance in defining traits of the believers, making it ideal for assessing translational uniformity. Although the methodology outlines three instances per category, only two fully identical multi-phrase verses were available for this case, and their selection prioritizes conceptual depth and analytical clarity over numerical volume.

#### 4.3.2. Translation comparison

Table 3. Translation Comparison of Similar Verses in Al-Mu'minun 23:5-8 and Al-Ma'arij 70:29-32

Verse	Arabic Text	Sahih International	Yusuf Ali	Abdel Haleem
Al-Mu'minun 23:5-8	وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَفْوَاجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مُلْؤِمِينَ فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ	And they who guard their private parts except from their wives or those their right hands possess, for indeed, they will not be blamed - But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors - And they who are to their trusts and their promises attentive	Who abstain from sex, except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess,- for (in their case) they are free from blame, but those whose desires exceed those limits are transgressors;- Those who faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants	Who guard their chastity except with their spouses or their slaves – with these they are not to blame, but anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits – who are faithful to their trusts and pledges.
Al-Ma'arij 70:29-32	وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَفْوَاجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مُلْؤِمِينَ فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ	And those who guard their private parts except from their wives or those their right hands possess, for indeed, they are not to be blamed - But whoever seeks beyond that, then they are the transgressors - And those who are to their trusts and promises attentive	And those who guard their chastity, except with their wives and the (captives) whom their right hands possess,- for (then) they are not to be blamed, but those who trespass beyond this are transgressors;- And those who respect their trusts and covenants	Who guard their chastity except with their spouses or their slaves, with these they are not to blame, but whoever seeks beyond that is exceeding the limits – who are faithful to their trusts and pledges.



The verses in Al-Mu'minun 23:5-8 and Al-Ma'arij 70:29-32 are identical in Arabic, describing believers who “guard their private parts” except with lawful partners, avoid transgression, and uphold trusts and promises. The table below compares their renderings:

#### 4.3.3. Contextual consistency from Tafsir

Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr interprets these verses as a cohesive ethical blueprint for believers, with identical wording reinforcing a timeless moral and legal standard across Surahs (Ibn 'Āshūr: 1420, Vol. 17, p. 45; Vol. 29, p. 123). Al-Mīzān concurs, noting that the repetition highlights chastity “حَافِظُونَ” and trustworthiness “رَاعُونَ” as core virtues, with no contextual variation despite differing Surah themes (Al-Mu'minun's narrative vs. Al-Ma'arij's eschatology) (Ṭabāṭabāī: 1351, Vol. 14, p. 234; Vol. 19, p. 345). The tafsir consensus, as reflected in Table 3, supports uniform translation to reflect this linguistic and thematic unity.

#### 4.3.4. Analysis using formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence

Sahih International: Consistency: 95%—nearly identical renderings in both verses (“guard their private parts,” “wives or those their right hands possess,” “transgressors,” “trusts and promises attentive”), with minor tense shifts (“will not be blamed” in 23:6 vs. “are not to be blamed” in 70:30; “those are” in 23:7 vs. “they are” in 70:31) due to stylistic adjustment (See Table 3). FE: High fidelity—retains “guard” for “حَافِظُونَ”, “transgressors” for “عَادُونَ”, and “attentive” for “رَاعُونَ”, closely mirroring Arabic lexis and structure. DE: Ensures naturalness and equivalent effect, with slight variations not disrupting the unified ethical message.

Yusuf Ali: Consistency: 70%—varies significantly between verses: “abstain from sex” (23:5) vs. “guard their chastity” (70:29), “joined in the marriage bond” (23:6) vs. “wives” (70:30), “exceed those limits” (23:7) vs. “trespass beyond this” (70:31), and “faithfully observe” (23:8) vs. “respect” (70:32) (See Table 3). FE: Low fidelity—shifts “حَافِظُونَ” to “abstain” (losing the active guarding sense), rephrases “أَزْوَاجِهِمْ” as “marriage bond,” and alters “رَاعُونَ” from “observe” to “respect,” diverging from Arabic structure and lexis. DE: Prioritizes interpretive naturalness (e.g., “abstain from sex” for accessibility), but inconsistent wording risks weakening the verses' identical impact.

Abdel Haleem: 100% consistency—identical renderings—perfectly identical renderings (“guard their chastity except with their spouses or their slaves,” “not to blame,” “exceeding the limits,” “faithful to their trusts and pledges”) in both verses (See Table 3). FE: Strong fidelity—uses “guard” for “حَافِظُونَ”, “exceeding” for “عَادُونَ” (reflecting transgression), and “faithful” for “رَاعُونَ”, preserving lexis and structure. DE: Excels in natural English phrasing and maintains equivalent effect, ensuring thematic unity without variation. Consistency percentages were calculated based on the proportion of verses where the exact or near-identical phrasing was used (e.g., Abdel Haleem used the same phrasing in 2 out of 2 verses, yielding 100%).

#### 4.3.5. General analysis

The analysis of the verbatim verses in Al-Mu'minun 23:5–8 and Al-Ma'arij 70:29–32 reveals: Abdel Haleem achieves 100% consistency, fully aligning with formal equivalence's fidelity to Arabic lexis (“guard,” “faithful”) and structure, and dynamic equivalence's consistent meaning and naturalness, best reflecting the verses' identical intent per tafsir. Sahih International scores 95%, adhering to formal equivalence's lexical and structural fidelity with minor stylistic shifts (“will not” vs. “are not”) that preserve dynamic equivalence's clarity and effect. Yusuf Ali exhibits 70% consistency, leaning on dynamic equivalence's interpretive flexibility (“abstain,” “marriage bond”) but compromising formal equivalence's adherence, introducing unnecessary variations that may dilute ethical coherence. Yusuf Ali's shifts (e.g., “abstain” vs. “guard”) lack justification and risk fragmenting the unified message, while Abdel Haleem's perfect consistency exemplifies how uniformity enhances fidelity and comprehension.

#### 4.4. Consistency in translating similar syntactic structures

##### 4.4.1. Definition and scope

This subsection examines the fourth category of recurring Qur'ānic elements—Similar Syntactic Structures—focusing on two grammatical patterns: the “Ḥāl” (circumstantial clause) and the “Maf'ūl Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī” (emphatic absolute object). The “Ḥāl” describes a subject's state or condition during an action, often expressed in Arabic as a present participle (e.g., “يَبْكُونَ” meaning “weeping” in Yusuf 12:16, indicating that the brothers returned to their father while in a state of crying). In English, this is typically translated using a participle (e.g., “weeping”) to preserve the descriptive role (Ḥasan, 1978, Vol. 2, p. 338). The “Maf'ūl Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī,” meanwhile, is a cognate noun that intensifies its verb, adding emphasis (e.g., “تَكْلِيمًا” in Al-Nisa 4:164, meaning “speech/directly,” emphasizes “كَلَّمَ” or “spoke,” highlighting that God spoke to Moses directly). In English, this can be rendered by repeating a noun (e.g., “spoke with speech”) or using an adverb (e.g., “directly”), though the latter may reduce the emphatic effect (Ḥasan, 1978, Vol. 2, p. 198). These structures recur across verses with consistent syntactic functions—adding vividness through “Ḥāl” or intensification via “Maf'ūl Muṭlaq”—and are analyzed for uniformity in Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem translations, using formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence as lenses.

##### 4.4.2. Ḥāl (circumstantial clause) analysis

The Ḥāl describes a subject's state during an action, typically a present participle in Arabic. Table 4 compares three instances:

Table 4. Translation Comparison of Hāl (Circumstantial Clause) Across Selected Verses

Verse	Arabic Text	Sahih International	Yusuf Ali	Abdel Haleem
Yusuf 12:16	وَجَاءُوا آبَاءَهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُونَ	And they came to their father at night, weeping.	Then they came to their father in the early part of the night, weeping.	They came to their father in the evening, weeping.
Al-Hijr 15:67	وَجَاءَ أَهْلُ الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ	And the people of the city came rejoicing.	The inhabitants of the city came in (mad) joy (at news of the young men).	The people of the city came, rejoicing.
Al-Qalam 68:30	فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتْلَاوُمُونَ	Then they approached one another, blaming each other.	Then they turned, one against another, in reproach.	And they turned to one another, blaming each other.

#### 4.4.3. Contextual Consistency from Tafsir and Grammar

According to Qur'ānic syntax references, the verbs “يَبْكُونَ” (weeping), “يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ” (rejoicing), and “يَتْلَاوُمُونَ” (blaming) function as circumstantial clauses (“Hāl”), uniformly depicting states during “جَاءُوا” (came), “جَاءَ” (came), and “أَقْبَلَ” (approached) (Darvīsh, 1415, Vol. 4, P. 461; Vol. 5, p. 254; Vol. 10, P. 177; Sāfi: 1411, Vol. 12, P. 394; Vol. 14, P. 295; Vol. 29, P. 39). This consistent role—enhancing vividness—, as reflected in Table 4, supports uniform participle use.

#### 4.4.4. Analysis Using formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence

Sahih International: 100% consistency—uses participles (“weeping,” “rejoicing,” “blaming each other”), mirroring Arabic structure and lexis of “يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ”, “يَبْكُونَ” and “يَتْلَاوُمُونَ” as “Hāl” with natural effect. Yusuf Ali: 33% consistency—“weeping” aligns with “يَبْكُونَ,” but “in (mad) joy” and “in reproach” shift to phrases (see Table 4), losing participle form and adding interpretive nuance for “يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ” and “يَتْلَاوُمُونَ”. Abdel Haleem: 100% consistency—participles (“weeping,” “rejoicing,” “blaming each other”) preserve structure and vividness of “يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ”, “يَبْكُونَ” and “يَتْلَاوُمُونَ”, “Hāl” uniformly (see Table 4).

#### 4.4.5. Maf'ul Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī (Emphatic absolute object) analysis

The Maf'ul Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī emphasizes a verb with a cognate noun. Table 5 compares three instances:

Table 5. Translation comparison of Maf'ul Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī (Emphatic absolute object) across selected verses

Verse	Arabic Text	Sahih International	Yusuf Ali	Abdel Haleem
Al-Nisa 4:164	وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا	And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech.	And to Moses Allah spoke direct.	God spoke directly to Moses.
Al-Waqi'ah 56:35	إِنَّا أَنْشَأْنَاهُنَّ إِنْشَاءً	Indeed, We have produced the women of Paradise in a [new] creation.	We have created (their Companions) of special creation.	We have specially created them.
At-Tariq 86:15	إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا	Indeed, they are planning a plan.	As for them, they are but plotting a scheme.	They plot and scheme.

#### 4.4.6. Contextual Consistency from Grammar

According to Arabic syntax references, the aforementioned verses all feature the syntactic role of the emphatic absolute object which intensifies “كَلَّمَ” (spoke), “أَنْشَأْنَا” (produced), and “يَكِيدُونَ” (plot) (Darvīsh, 1415, Vol. 2, P. 315; Vol. 9, p. 433; Vol. 10, P. 443; Ṣāfi: 1411, Vol. 5, P. 182; Vol. 27, P. 115; Vol. 30, P. 303). Their uniform emphatic role, as reflected in Table 5, justifies consistent noun repetition.

#### 4.4.7. Analysis

Sahih International: 67% consistency—“planning a plan” retains cognate form, but “with [direct] speech” and “in a [new] creation” add qualifiers, shifting structure. Yusuf Ali: 33% consistency—“plotting a scheme” approximates, but “spoke direct” and “of special creation” use adverbs/adjectives (see Table 5), losing noun emphasis. Abdel Haleem: 33% consistency—“plot and scheme” repeats nouns, but “directly” and “specially” simplify to adverbs (see Table 5), reducing structural fidelity.

#### 4.4.7. General Analysis

“Ḥāl” (Circumstantial Clause): Sahih International and Abdel Haleem achieve 100% consistency, using participles (e.g., “weeping” for “يَبْكُونَ”) to reflect Arabic structure and vividness, while Yusuf Ali’s 33% consistency with phrases (“in joy”) weakens uniformity and effect.

“Maf'ul Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī” (Emphatic Absolute Object): Sahih International leads with 67% consistency, partially retaining cognate nouns (e.g., “plan a plan”), though qualifiers dilute form; Yusuf Ali and Abdel Haleem (33%) favor adverbs (“directly,” “specially”), losing emphasis.

Formal Equivalence favors participle use for “Ḥāl” and noun repetition for “Maf'ul Muṭlaq,” aligning with their grammatical roles per Darvīsh. Dynamic Equivalence supports this for vividness (“Ḥāl”) and intensification (“Maf'ul Muṭlaq”), yet variations in “Maf'ul

Muṭlaq” translations suggest less adherence, diluting rhetorical force. Uniformity enhances fidelity and coherence, particularly for “Ḥāl”’s clearer syntactic pattern.

#### 4.5. Consistency in translating similar rhetorical patterns

##### 4.5.1. Definition and scope

This subsection explores the fifth category of recurring Qur’ānic elements—Similar Rhetorical Patterns—focusing on the structure “مَنْ + إِلَّا” (who + except), which combines an interrogative or relative “مَنْ” (who) with a negation and exception “إِلَّا” (except). This rhetorical pattern questions or emphasizes exclusivity, appearing in Al-Hijr 15:56 (e.g., “وَمَنْ إِلَّا الصَّالُّونَ” meaning “Who despairs of his Lord’s mercy except the astray?”) to challenge despair, and in Al-Imran 3:135 (e.g., “وَمَنْ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ” meaning “Who forgives sins except Allah?”) to affirm divine exclusivity. In English, it is often translated as “who ... except” or “who but,” though consistency depends on preserving the rhetorical intent (Ḥasan, 1978, Vol. 2, p. 256). These patterns are analyzed for uniformity in Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem translations, guided by formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence.

##### 4.5.2. Translation comparison

The “مَنْ + إِلَّا” pattern asserts a sole exception rhetorically—questioning despair in Al-Hijr and forgiveness in Al-Imran. Table 6 compares its renderings:

Table 6. Translation Comparison of «مَنْ + إِلَّا» Rhetorical Pattern Across Selected Verses

Verse	Arabic Text	Sahih International	Yusuf Ali	Abdel Haleem
Al-Hijr 15:56	قَالَ وَمَنْ يَقْنَطُ مِنْ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّهِ إِلَّا الصَّالُّونَ	He said, 'And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord except for those astray?'	He said: 'And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, but such as go astray?'	He said, 'Who but the misguided despair of their Lord's mercy?'
Al-Imran 3:135	وَمَنْ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ	Who can forgive sins except Allah?	And who can forgive sins except Allah?	Who can forgive sins but God?

##### 4.5.3. Contextual Consistency from Tafsir and Grammar

According to Qur’ānic commentaries such as that of Al-Zamakhsharī (1407), “مَنْ + إِلَّا” is interpreted as a rhetorical device asserting exclusivity: in Al-Hijr 15:56, only the astray (“الصَّالُّونَ”) despair, and in Al-Imran 3:135, only Allah (“اللَّهُ”) forgives (Vol. 2, p. 345; Vol. 1, p. 278). Its uniform function—highlighting a sole exception with persuasive force—, as reflected in Table 6, supports consistent translation to preserve this intent.

##### 4.5.4. Analysis using formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence

Sahih International: Consistency: 100%—uses “who ... except” in both (See Table 6), retaining interrogative form and exception structure with natural phrasing.

Yusuf Ali: Consistency: 100%—employs “who ... except” consistently (See Table 6), with “but” in Al-Hijr as a minor stylistic shift, still preserving rhetorical effect. Abdel Haleem: Consistency: 50%—“Who but” in Al-Hijr inverts the order, while “Who ... but” in Al-Imran aligns closer (See Table 6), adjusting for readability but varying structure.

#### 4.5.5. General Analysis

The analysis of the “*لَا + مَنْ*” structure in Al-Hijr 15:56 and Āl ‘Imrān 3:135 reveals distinct patterns of consistency across translations. Sahih International and Yusuf Ali both achieve 100% consistency, rendering “*مَنْ*” as “who” and “*لَا*” as “except” (or “but”) while maintaining the syntactic structure and rhetorical force. This aligns with the tafsir tradition, which emphasizes the pattern’s exclusivity.

Abdel Haleem, by contrast, scores 50% consistency. While his rendering prioritizes natural English (e.g., “Who but the misguided...”), the inversion of word order alters the original structure, slightly reducing syntactic fidelity.

From a theoretical standpoint, Formal Equivalence (FE) favors the “who ... except” construction to mirror the Arabic syntax, while Dynamic Equivalence (DE) supports it for its rhetorical and persuasive impact. In this regard, Sahih International and Yusuf Ali best preserve uniformity and rhetorical coherence. By contrast, Abdel Haleem’s variation, though stylistically fluent, risks weakening the structural consistency of this Qur’ānic rhetorical pattern.

This analysis underscores the importance of preserving syntactic symmetry in rhetorically charged structures, as even minor shifts in word order can affect the persuasive and theological intent embedded in the original Arabic.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Synthesis of findings

This study evaluated the consistency of translating five categories of recurring Qur’ānic elements—Similar Expressions and Phrases, Similar Sentences, Similar Verses, Similar Syntactic Structures (*Ḥāl* and *Maf’ul Muṭlaq Ta’kīdī*), and Similar Rhetorical Patterns—across the translations by Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem, drawing on insights from tafsir and grammatical exegesis to assess uniformity. The results, detailed in Table 7.

Table 7. Consistency percentages across recurring Qur’ānic structures

Category	Sahih International	Yusuf Ali	Abdel Haleem
Expressions	100%	50%	75%
Sentences	75%	50%	75%
Verses	95%	70%	100%
Syntactic Structures (Hal)	100%	33%	100%
Syntactic Structures (Maf’ul)	67%	33%	33%
Rhetorical Patterns	100%	100%	50%

The table presents a range of consistency levels across the translations: Sahih International demonstrates the highest average at 89.5%, achieving perfect consistency (100%) in the categories of Expressions, Hāl, and Rhetorical Patterns, though dipping to 67% in Maf'ul Muṭlaq Ta'kīdī due to the addition of qualifiers such as "with [direct] speech." Abdel Haleem averages 72.2%, showing strong performance in Verses and Hāl (100%), but lower consistency in Maf'ul Muṭlaq (33%) and Rhetorical Patterns (50%). Yusuf Ali scores the lowest, with an overall average of 56%, despite achieving 100% consistency in Verses and Hāl; his performance declines sharply in Maf'ul Muṭlaq (33%) and Rhetorical Patterns (50%). Rather than merely reporting these figures, the analysis highlights that Sahih International's high consistency correlates with its commitment to Formal Equivalence. This is evident in the preservation of structures such as “يَبْكُونَ” (“weeping”) and “مَنْ إِلَّا” (“who ... except”), aligning with the interpretive consistency emphasized in Al-Mīzān (Tabāṭabāī, 1351, Vol. 14, p. 234). In contrast, Yusuf Ali's inconsistency in the Hāl category—evident in renderings like “in (mad) joy” for “rejoicing”—and Abdel Haleem's 50% score in Rhetorical Patterns—shifting from “Who but” to “Who ... but”—reflect Dynamic Equivalence decisions that appear unjustified when tafsir sources confirm identical semantic and rhetorical contexts (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1420, Vol. 17, p. 45). These patterns, visualized in Figure 1: Consistency Levels Across Recurring Qur'ānic Structures, suggest potential translational weaknesses, particularly when such inconsistencies are not grounded in exegetical variation. Nonetheless, the limited sample size—three instances per category—places constraints on the generalizability of these results across the broader Qur'ānic corpus, underscoring the need for expanded future studies.

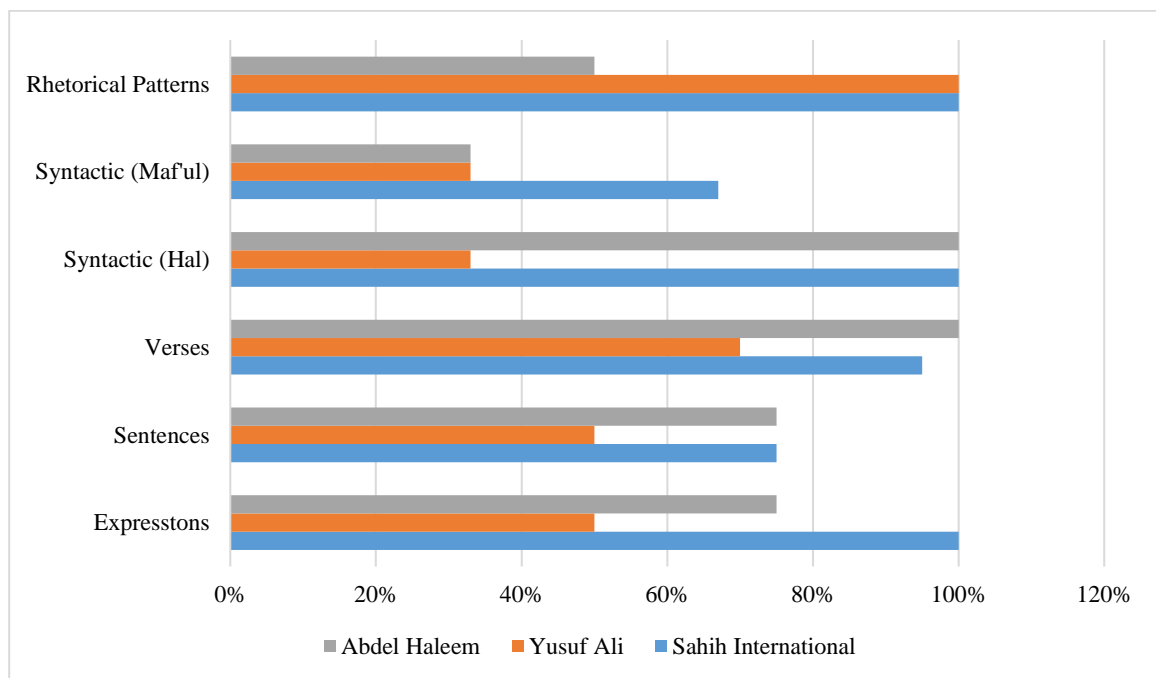


Figure 1. Consistency Levels Across Recurring Qur'ānic Structures

### 5.2. Theoretical implications

The interplay between Formal Equivalence (FE) and Dynamic Equivalence (DE) in the examined translations provides critical theoretical insight into the challenges of consistently rendering the Qur'ān's recurring elements. Sahih International, with its FE-oriented

methodology and an 89.5% consistency rate, effectively upholds the linguistic unity of the text. For instance, its consistent rendering of “حَافِظُونَ” as “guard” in Al-Mu’minun 23:5 and Al-Ma’arij 70:29 aligns with the ethical continuity emphasized in Al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr (Ibn ‘Ashūr, 1420, Vol. 17, p. 45). In contrast, Yusuf Ali’s DE-driven approach introduces unjustified variation—translating the same phrase as “abstain from sex”—which lacks support from tafsir literature and appears more as an oversight than a deliberate interpretive choice. Abdel Haleem adopts a balanced formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence strategy, achieving full consistency in the Verses and Hāl categories (100%). However, this approach proves less effective in the Rhetorical Patterns category (50%), where shifts such as “Who but” in Al-Hijr 15:56 versus “Who ... but” in Āl ‘Imrān 3:135 may improve fluency but diminish the rhetorical intensity noted by Al-Zamakhsharī (1407, Vol. 2, p. 345). This raises important questions about the trade-offs between naturalness and fidelity in sacred text translation. Overall, the findings suggest that FE is generally more effective in preserving the Qur’ān’s thematic coherence and structural integrity. Conversely, excessive reliance on DE—as seen in Yusuf Ali’s case—can undermine these qualities unless carefully justified by strong contextual or exegetical evidence. This tension between form and function underscores the need for further inquiry into optimal translation strategies that honor both the text’s precision and its communicative goals.

### 5.3. Practical implications

The practical implications of consistency in Qur’ānic translation extend to thematic coherence, rhetorical effectiveness, and pedagogical utility—each shaped by the translators’ methodological choices. Sahih International, for example, reinforces thematic continuity through consistent renderings such as “enjoyment of worldly life” across similar expressions. This uniformity enhances reader comprehension and facilitates cross-referencing in educational contexts. In contrast, Yusuf Ali introduces deviations—such as translating the same phrase as “conveniences”—which disrupt semantic coherence and risk confusing readers, especially in instructional settings. Such inconsistencies lack support from tafsir sources like Al-Mīzān (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1351, Vol. 14, p. 234), which indicate no contextual justification for these shifts, pointing to a translational weakness. Abdel Haleem demonstrates strong performance in certain areas—achieving 100% consistency in the Verses category—but exhibits diminished rhetorical impact in the Rhetorical Patterns category (50%). Variations such as “Who but” versus “Who ... but” may enhance naturalness in English but dilute the persuasive emphasis identified in classical exegesis, such as Al-Kashshāf (Al-Zamakhsharī, 1407, Vol. 2, p. 345). The data reveal a notable correlation between adherence to Formal Equivalence (FE) and higher consistency: Sahih International scores 89.5%, compared to Yusuf Ali’s 56%. This suggests that prioritizing form over excessive adaptation improves thematic and rhetorical integrity. However, given the study’s limited sample size, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Broader research involving a larger dataset is necessary to validate and expand upon these conclusions.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined the consistency of translating recurring Qur’ānic elements across five categories—Similar Expressions and Phrases, Similar Sentences, Similar Verses, Similar Syntactic Structures (specifically Hāl and Maḥ’ūl Muṭlaq Ta’kīdī), and Similar



Rhetorical Patterns—in three English translations: Sahih International (1997), Yusuf Ali (1934), and Abdel Haleem (2004). The analysis employed Formal Equivalence (FE) and Dynamic Equivalence (DE) as theoretical frameworks and drew on classical tafsir sources, including Al-Mīzān (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1973) and Al-Kashshāf (Al-Zamakhsharī, 1986), to assess translational fidelity. Sahih International generally favored a formal equivalence approach, prioritizing linguistic and rhetorical precision. In contrast, Yusuf Ali adopted a more interpretive dynamic equivalence strategy, often introducing variations unsupported by tafsir sources—for instance, translating “guard their chastity” as “abstain from sex” in Al-Mu’minun 23:5 and Al-Ma’arij 70:29, a rendering that may reflect cultural adaptation but lacks textual justification (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 2000). Abdel Haleem offered a more balanced method, blending formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence to preserve meaning and readability, though occasionally at the expense of structural fidelity—such as the shift from “Who but” to “Who ... but” in the Rhetorical Patterns category.

These findings underscore the need for methodological rigor when translating repetitive Qur’ānic forms, as inconsistent renderings can disrupt the intended textual coherence. The study suggests that a hybrid formal equivalence-dynamic equivalence model—anchored in formal equivalence to preserve fidelity, complemented by dynamic equivalence to enhance readability—offers the most effective strategy for maintaining the Qur’ān’s linguistic, syntactic, and rhetorical unity in translation. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study’s scope was restricted to three examples per category and three translations, limiting the generalizability of its conclusions. Additionally, it may not capture the full spectrum of translational approaches present in lesser-known English versions of the Qur’ān. Future research could expand the dataset, include a broader range of translations, or apply computational tools to assess consistency on a larger scale.

Beyond the field of Qur’ānic translation, this study contributes to broader translation theory by illustrating how formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence frameworks can be used to balance fidelity and accessibility in sacred texts. It also holds implications for interfaith engagement, demonstrating how translation strategies can influence the accessibility and reception of Islamic texts among diverse audiences. To inform future translation efforts, a structured hybrid framework is proposed: first, establish a Formal Equivalence baseline for uniform renderings where tafsir confirms identical functions (e.g., translating “يَبْكُونَ” consistently as “weeping”); second, refine for naturalness using Dynamic Equivalence without altering structural elements (e.g., consistently rendering “مَنْ إِلَّا” as “who ... except”); and finally, apply tailored guidelines by category—lexical fidelity for Expressions and Sentences, verbatim matching for Verses, grammatical mirroring for Structures, and rhetorical preservation for Patterns. This process is illustrated in Figure 2.

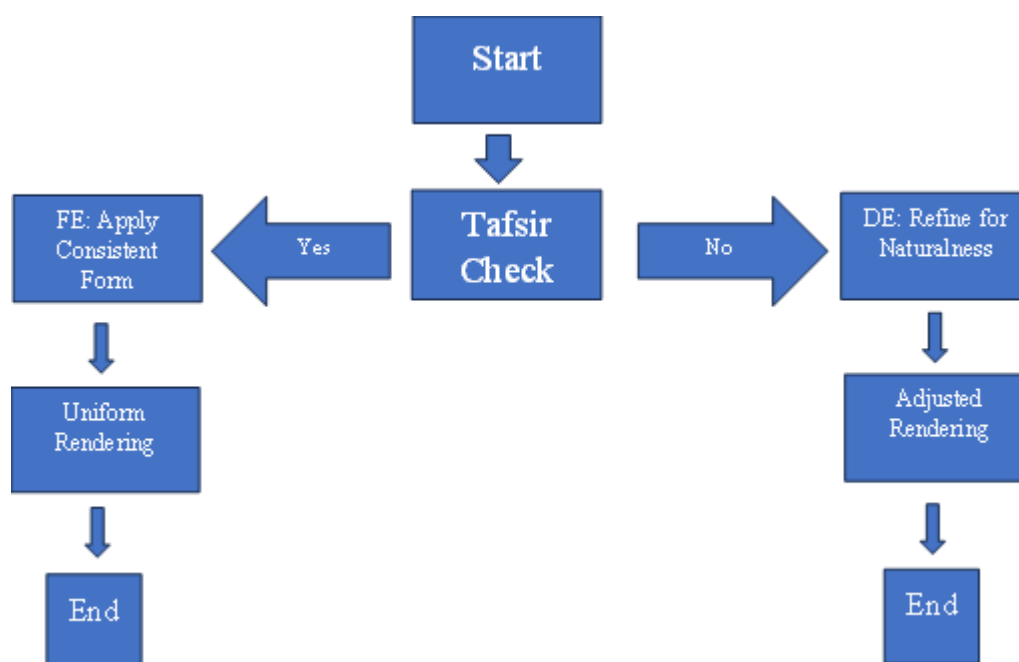


Figure 2. Proposed hybrid formal equivalence-dynamic equivalence Framework

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## **Qur'ānic Stories in Light of Structural Coherence and Theological Objectives: A Critique of the Claim of Influence from Jewish, Christian, and Global Folklore**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on library and documentary sources to conduct a comparative analysis of the Qur'ānic account of the Companions of the Cave in Surah al-Kahf alongside non-Qur'ānic narratives. The primary aim is to challenge Donner's assertion that the Qur'ānic story was influenced by popular tales. This research further examines how the motif of the Sleepers of the Cave—a recurring theme in Greek, Jewish, and Christian mythology as well as global folklore—is rendered with unique originality in the Qur'ānic narrative. The Companions of the Cave are not only integrally connected to other narratives within the surah but also harmonize with the broader thematic and theological objectives present in other Qur'ānic chapters, reflecting the historical context and prophetic biography. However, due to the extensive influence of exegetical traditions shaped by *Isra'iliyyat* (Judeo-Christian sources), some Jewish and Christian elements have permeated Islamic literature despite the Qur'ānic account's distinctive conciseness and internal coherence. A common motif among these various traditions is the exploration of life, death, and resurrection. Yet, in Surah al-Kahf, this motif is intricately intertwined with fundamental Islamic teachings—particularly monotheism (*tawhīd*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and resurrection (*ma'ād*)—as well as the central themes of the surah itself. Such thematic unity and depth are notably absent in Jewish and Christian versions of the narrative.

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## 1. Introduction

The motif of sleep is a recurring theme in world literature—and by extension, in myths, epics, theological narratives, and folk tales. It often involves an individual or group who sleep for a definite or indefinite period before returning to life. The idea that a living being spends part of their waking life in sleep or dreams for various reasons appears in diverse forms across the myths, legends, epics, and folk traditions of different cultures. This sleep frequently represents a form of temporary death, transporting the sleeper from the realm of the living to that of the dead before their eventual return. The crucial distinction lies in the transformation that occurs during this journey: the sleeper often gains new insights or a deeper understanding of themselves and the world upon awakening. In most cases, this newfound awareness stems from revelations or mystical experiences encountered through sleep and dreams.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, after the gods—angered by Ishtar’s rejected marriage proposal—condemn Enkidu to death, Gilgamesh embarks on a visionary dream journey to the underworld, where he encounters the spirits of the dead, including Enkidu. In Greek mythology, Persephone spends six months in the world of the living and six in the underworld, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and death. In Washington Irving’s tale *Rip Van Winkle*, Rip and his dog vanish into the Catskill Mountains before the American Revolution. He falls asleep and awakens twenty years later to a dramatically changed world: his wife has died, his daughter is married, and society has been transformed. Similarly, in Henrik Ibsen’s play *Peer Gynt*, the protagonist falls asleep in the Rondane Mountains and awakens to a changed reality (Act II, Scene IV). In Charles Perrault’s tale *Sleeping Beauty*, a princess is cursed into a hundred-year slumber, only to be awakened by a courageous prince who breaks through the dense forest surrounding her. In Christian tradition, the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus also explores this motif, as the sleepers awaken after a long slumber, symbolizing resurrection and spiritual renewal.

In the Qur’ān, the story of the Companions of the Cave (Surah al-Kahf) exemplifies this motif, maintaining thematic coherence with both the preceding and subsequent sections of the surah. Similarly, Surah al-Baqarah recounts the story of a man—identified in Islamic exegesis as the Prophet Uzair (Ezra)—who sleeps for a hundred years before being revived, serving as a testament to divine power and the reality of resurrection. In Islamic tradition, the Ikhwan al-Safa, a secret society of mystics and philosophers active in 4th-century Baghdad and Basra, metaphorically referred to themselves as “those sleeping in the cave of our father Adam” (Netton, 2000), further reinforcing the symbolic resonance of sleep as spiritual latency and potential awakening.

In these and numerous other examples, the sleeper typically retreats to an inaccessible location—often a cave or secluded refuge—either alone or accompanied by another person or creature. As Netton observes, “The cave is a theologeme associated with the archetype of the sleeper”. The cave frequently functions as a site of spiritual transformation. It is in the Cave of Hira that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) receives his first revelation, and in another cave that he and Abu Bakr take refuge, with a spider weaving a web at the entrance to conceal them (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:40). Netton further notes that “the history of early Islam demonstrates that the cave functioned both as a site of revelation and as a sanctuary.” He also draws a cross-cultural parallel with the story of Robert the Bruce, the medieval Scottish king who, while seeking refuge in a cave on Rathlin Island, found inspiration in the persistence of a spider.

Thus, the act of sleeping in a cave emerges as a recurring motif in myths, folk literature, and, notably, theological narratives such as the Qur'ān. This enduring symbol underscores the idea that sleep—often intertwined with themes of death and rebirth—serves as a powerful medium for transformation, revelation, and renewal across diverse cultural and religious traditions. One of the clearest expressions of this motif in the Qur'ān appears in Surah al-Kahf, which, as will be discussed, reflects roots shared with Greek, Jewish, and Christian traditions. In this surah, members of the Quraysh—prompted by Jewish scholars—approach the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with a series of probing questions: Who are the Companions of the Cave, and how long did they sleep? What is the nature of the spirit? What is the story of Dhul-Qarnayn? It is said that, due to a delay in revelation, the Prophet withholds a response for several days. Eventually, God reveals the answers through the verses of Surah al-Kahf.

Since themes of death, resurrection, and divine reward and punishment in the afterlife are among the foundational motifs of the Qur'ān, appearing in many surahs, including Surah al-Kahf, the story of the Companions of the Cave is not only consistent with the broader thematic structure of the surah but also closely interwoven with the three subsequent narratives: the parable of the two gardeners, the story of Moses and the righteous servant of God, and the account of Dhul-Qarnayn. With the rise of Biblical studies in the 19th century—particularly under the framework of "Higher Criticism"—Orientalist interest in Eastern texts, especially the Qur'ān, intensified. As a result, some scholars began to trace and analyze recurring themes, motifs, and narrative elements that appeared across the Qur'ān, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament. In doing so, they often sought to argue for the Qur'ān's dependence on earlier scriptures, particularly the Bible.

Among these scholars, several later European researchers concentrated on Qur'ānic narratives and examined their parallels with Biblical accounts. In this context, Alan Dundes, a prominent scholar in folklore studies, argued in his book *Fables of the Ancients? Folklore in the Qur'ān* (2003) that the Qur'ān not only incorporates recurring patterns characteristic of oral traditions, particularly in the form of formulaic expressions and idioms, but also draws upon folk tales widely circulated across various cultures and civilizations. Dundes contended that removing these repetitive phrases would eliminate nearly one-third of the Qur'ānic text. However, the validity of his claims remains contested. For example, the Persian translator of his book critically addresses several of Dundes' misinterpretations and inaccuracies in the footnotes (see Horri, 2020).

This article provides sufficient scope to examine the story of the Companions of the Cave—the first of the four narratives in Surah al-Kahf—in order to analyze its similarities and differences with the stories that Dundes classifies as belonging to global folktale types, particularly Type 756, titled "The Seven Sleepers," in the well-known Aarne-Thompson classification system (1961). The analysis of the other two relevant story types will be addressed in a separate context. The primary focus here is to explore how the Qur'ānic account of the Companions of the Cave aligns with or diverges from the global folktale archetype identified by Dundes. By comparing the Qur'ānic narrative with Aarne-Thompson Type 756, this study aims to highlight the unique elements of the Qur'ānic version—particularly its thematic coherence, theological depth, and integration into the broader teachings of Islam. The analysis also seeks to evaluate whether the Qur'ānic account can be meaningfully reduced to a reflection of universal folktale patterns, as Dundes suggests, or whether it exhibits distinct features that resist such classifications. The examination of the remaining story types will be reserved for future discussions.

## 2. Literature Review

The analysis of the content, meaning, and themes of Qur'ānic surahs, including their narratives has been an ongoing discussion since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the first recipient of revelation, and his companions. Many interpretations of Qur'ānic verses and stories were primarily transmitted from the Prophet through several groups, notably the Sahaba (companions), Tabi'in (successors), and Tabi' al-Tabi'in (successors of the successors). Among the Sahaba, prominent figures include Abu Hurairah (d. 59 AH), Abdullah ibn Abbas (d. 68 AH), Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As (d. 65 AH), and Abdullah ibn Salam (d. 43 AH). From the Tabi'in, key transmitters include Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 32 or 34 AH), Ubayy ibn Ka'b (whose year of death is disputed), and Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114 AH). The intellectual contributions of these figures—especially Ka'b al-Ahbar—gave rise to a tradition in Qur'ānic exegesis broadly referred to as Isra'iliyyat.

In its broadest sense, Isra'iliyyat refers to “religious and legendary literature derived from Jewish, Christian, ancient Persian, and Near Eastern cultural traditions, which serve as sources for interpreting the Qur'ān” (Aydemir 1985, 29). Muhammad Qasimi (2005) identifies two main sources of Isra'iliyyat. The first is the distorted books of the Jews and Christians, particularly the Old Testament, along with the myths and fabricated narratives introduced by newly converted People of the Book. In Jewish tradition, in addition to the Pentateuch, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the Talmud is also considered a major source. The Talmud, which comprises Jewish laws, traditions, historical accounts, and literary heritage, also contains numerous legendary tales. Qasimi argues that the fabricated stories within the Talmud became the primary source of Isra'iliyyat that eventually infiltrated Qur'ānic exegesis (p. 21).

Notably, many of these narrators, particularly from the Tabi'in and Tabi' al-Tabi'in, did not merely transmit Talmudic legends but also infused them with their own imaginative interpretations, often disseminating them in mosques during the Umayyad period (ibid). Tamim Dari (2000) notes that after the Prophet's passing and during the era of the Rashidun Caliphs, certain Jewish and Christian narrators—who outwardly professed Islam—actively spread Isra'iliyyat. These fabricators of hadith and storytellers were even granted permission by the caliphs to narrate stories an hour before the Friday prayer. In doing so, they sought to weave their personal beliefs and ideological perspectives into the form of religious tales. Over time, this practice became widespread, with these storytellers substituting authentic Islamic teachings with their own fabricated accounts, even in religious settings such as mosques (p. 51).

Beyond these comprehensive commentaries, several monographs on Qur'ānic narratives have been written in recent decades, offering fresh perspectives on the subject. These include:

1. *Al-Fann al-Qasasi fi al-Qur'ān al-Karim (The Art of Storytelling in the Noble Qur'ān)* by Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (1975);
2. *Approaches to Qur'ānic Interpretation (Ruhiyyat al-Tafsir)* by Muhammad Abed al-Jabri (2014);
3. *Understanding the Qur'ān (Fahm al-Qur'ān)* by Muhammad Abed al-Jabri (2021), which explores Qur'ānic narratives from newer critical perspectives.



These works reflect a broader shift in modern Qur'ānic studies toward more analytical and contextual approaches, distancing themselves from the uncritical adoption of *Isra'iliyyat*. Instead, they emphasize the Qur'ān's internal coherence, literary depth, and theological significance, offering fresh insights into its narratives and their relevance to contemporary Islamic thought.

Regarding the story of the Companions of the Cave, numerous sources and books have been written. Among them is Sattari (1997), who extensively examines both Islamic and Christian narratives related to the Companions of the Cave, offering a symbolic-mystical interpretation of the story. Edward Gibbon, referring to Syriac sources of the tale as recounted by James of Sarug, suggests that the Prophet may have become acquainted with this story during his journey to Syria and the Levant (p. 1330). Mustafa Njozi (2005), in his monograph on the sources of the Qur'ān, discusses the "religious illusion theory" and argues that the precise number of years the Companions of the Cave stayed (309 years) results from the calculation of lunar months, and cannot be a product of the Prophet's imagination but rather has a divine origin (p. 55). Some sources, such as Hosseini (2009), have also analyzed the term "cave" itself and explored its symbolic, allegorical, and mystical meanings. Other scholars, including Netton (2000), have examined Surah Al-Kahf from a semiotic perspective.

Several researchers have also studied the story of the Companions of the Cave. Among them is Alan Dundes, as mentioned earlier. In his book, Dundes references other scholars who have examined this story, including Brown (1983) and Roberts (1993). Hariri (2014) has analyzed the stories in Surah Al-Kahf as a genre of miracles. Additionally, Hariri (forthcoming) has investigated the story of Moses and the righteous servant, examining its connection to folk tales and exegetical traditions. The most recent article on this topic is by Sheikh (2022), who explores the concept of time and timelessness in the story of the Companions of the Cave. Sheikh argues that the ambiguity regarding time serves as a reminder of the limitations of the human mind, even in understanding simple realities such as duration and the number of years (p. 181). This temporal ambiguity is resolved by God, who precisely mentions the duration of their stay in the cave, demonstrating that everything is under God's control. Therefore, according to Sheikh, "true guidance" can only come from God, transcending the limits of human understanding.

These studies collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of the story of the Companions of the Cave, its theological depth, and its connections to broader religious and literary traditions. They also underscore the Qur'ān's unique approach to storytelling, which integrates symbolic, allegorical, and theological dimensions to convey profound spiritual truths.

Brown (1983), who is heavily influenced by Louis Massignon, in his article *Islamic Eschatology*, compares Surah Al-Kahf to the Christian Eucharist, suggesting that it alludes to the theme of the appearance of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) and the battle with Gog and Magog, which will occur at the end of time. He also views Surah Al-Kahf as a microcosm of the entire Qur'ān, characterized by its non-linear and eschatological structure, which references symbolic figures such as Khidr, the Companions of the Cave, and Dhul-Qarnayn. According to Brown, the heart of Surah Al-Kahf lies in the distinction between appearance and reality (*zahir* and *batin*) and between interpretation (*tafsir*) and esoteric exegesis (*ta'wil*) (p. 162). In this regard, Surah Al-Kahf serves as a foundation for the fundamental distinction between *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation), *tafsir ta'wili* (interpretive exegesis), inner meaning (*batin*), and exegesis (*tafsir*), as well as between prophecy

(*nubuwwah*), wisdom (*hikmah*), and transcendent wisdom (*hikmah muta'aliyah*). It also distinguishes between the Imam in Shi'a thought and the spiritual guide (*pir* or *murshid*) in mystical (*hikmi*) thought (p. 163).

Brown's analysis highlights the rich symbolic and eschatological dimensions of Surah Al-Kahf, emphasizing its role as a bridge between exoteric and esoteric interpretations of the Qur'ān. His work underscores the surah's significance in Islamic thought, particularly in shaping discussions around eschatology, spiritual guidance, and the interplay between outward and inward meanings in Qur'ānic exegesis. This perspective aligns with broader scholarly efforts to explore the Qur'ān's layered meanings and its relevance to both theological and mystical traditions within Islam.

### 3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, focusing on the analysis of relevant documents and sources related to various accounts of the Companions of the Cave, with particular emphasis on the Qur'ānic narrative. The primary objective is to highlight the distinctive features of the Qur'ānic account in response to claims that it may have been influenced by earlier or external sources. This issue is particularly significant, as some scholars have noted parallels between the Qur'ānic version and other narratives—parallels that may, in part, reflect transmitted interpretations (*tafsīr naqlī*) from the generation of the Tabi'īn (Successors of the Prophet).

However, a close reading of the Qur'ānic text reveals that, while certain similarities exist, many of which are unsurprising given the shared cultural and historical context, the Qur'ān presents a unique and inimitable rendering of the story. This article engages a range of primary and secondary sources to provide a focused, text-centered analysis of the narrative.

The study critically examines the Qur'ānic account through its textual structure, thematic coherence, and contextual significance. It also considers the historical and exegetical traditions that have influenced the reception of the story over time. Through this approach, the article aims to demonstrate the originality and theological depth of the Qur'ānic narrative, distinguishing it from its counterparts in Jewish, Christian, and folkloric traditions. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a deeper appreciation of the Qur'ān's narrative style and its capacity to convey profound spiritual and moral insights through a distinct mode of storytelling.

### 4. Discussion and Analysis

#### 4.1. The Qur'ānic Account of the Companions of the Cave

*Surah al-Kahf*, the 18th chapter of the Qur'ān, comprises 110 verses. The story of the Companions of the Cave appears early in the surah, spanning verses 9 to 26, and constitutes one of four central narratives within the chapter. According to widely cited reports concerning the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the disbelievers from the Quraysh, prompted by Jewish scholars, approached the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with a series of questions, including inquiries about the number of the Companions of the Cave and the duration of their sleep. The delayed revelation of these verses led to mockery and ridicule from the disbelievers, causing the Prophet considerable distress. In response, God revealed the relevant passages of this surah.

The chapter opens with verses 1 to 8, commonly referred to as the verses of warning (*āyāt al-indhār wa al-taḥdhīr*), which establish the surah's overarching themes. These introductory verses emphasize the clarity and integrity of the Qur'ānic message, affirming that it is free from distortion or ambiguity. They also assert God's absolute oneness, denying any notion of divine offspring, and highlight the transient nature of worldly life as a test for humankind. God's sovereign power is illustrated by His ability to transform fertile land into barren wasteland. It is against this theological and moral backdrop that the narrative of the Companions of the Cave is introduced.

The Qur'ānic account depicts a group of young believers who sought refuge in a cave to escape persecution from their disbelieving society. They earnestly prayed for God's guidance and mercy, and in response, God caused them to fall into a deep sleep that lasted for centuries. Upon awakening, the companions were unaware of how much time had passed. They sent one of their number to the city to procure food—an act that ultimately led to the revelation of their miraculous story. This narrative serves as a profound sign of God's power and imparts valuable lessons for future generations.

The Qur'ānic narrative emphasizes themes such as divine protection, the power of faith, and the concept of resurrection. It also highlights the distinctiveness of the Qur'ānic rendition, which, despite some superficial parallels with other traditions, stands apart due to its theological depth, narrative coherence, and moral teachings. This story reminds believers of God's control over time, life, and death, reinforcing central Islamic doctrines of monotheism, resurrection, and divine guidance.

By presenting the story in a concise yet profound manner, the Qur'ān distinguishes itself from versions found in Jewish, Christian, or folkloric traditions, underscoring its originality and divine origin. The narrative of the Companions of the Cave is not merely a historical or mythical account but a powerful theological story that resonates deeply with the broader themes of the Qur'ān and the prophetic mission of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

This story functions as an embedded narrative within a larger narrative framework—that of *Surah al-Kahf*, one of the 114 chapters of the Qur'ān. Within this overarching surah, the account of the Companions of the Cave contains verses that serve interpretive roles as embedded narratives themselves. The surah opens with verses 1 to 8, where God issues warnings and admonitions. Even while recounting the story of the Companions of the Cave, the Qur'ān remains focused on conveying theological aims and messages. Notably, the story employs the technique of narrative acceleration, emphasizing key events rather than providing exhaustive detail, unlike exegetical works or Qur'ānic storybooks which often elaborate extensively. This concise, condensed, and episodic storytelling is a distinctive narrative feature of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān directly addresses the central theme of the Companions of the Cave—worship of God, monotheism, and the rejection of polytheism—which are foundational teachings of Islam and other monotheistic faiths. It narrates how the companions sought refuge in the cave, the nature of their prolonged sleep and apparent death, and provides a brief description of their physical condition and the cave itself, noting how sunlight shone upon them from the right and receded from the left at sunset. The narrative then offers a concise account of their awakening and changed state, including how one of them is sent to the city to procure food, leading to subsequent developments. Finally, the story touches on the construction of a place of worship, the people's inquiries regarding the exact number of the Companions and the duration of their sleep, and concludes with an instruction to the

Prophet to faithfully convey the revelation, emphasizing the unalterable nature of the Qur'ānic message and the absence of any helper besides God.

This narrative structure exemplifies the Qur'ān's distinctive storytelling approach, which is both concise and profound. It deliberately avoids extraneous detail, concentrating instead on core theological and moral lessons. The story of the Companions of the Cave transcends a mere historical or mythical account, serving as a powerful reminder of God's sovereignty, the significance of faith, and the necessity of ultimate reliance on divine guidance. By embedding this story within the broader framework of *Surah al-Kahf*, the Qur'ān connects it to overarching themes such as monotheism, resurrection, and the transient nature of worldly life, thereby reinforcing the surah's central message and purpose.

As evident from this brief overview, the embedded narrative of God's warnings and admonitions is intricately woven into the overarching story of the Companions of the Cave. This story, in turn, forms a part of *Surah al-Kahf*, one of the chapters of the Qur'ān. While certain thematic elements—such as seeking refuge in a cave—may bear resemblance to motifs found in other traditions, particularly Jewish and Christian texts, Dundes argues that the motif of sleeping in a cave appears in pre-Qur'ānic Biblical sources and corresponds to folktale Type 756, titled *The Seven Sleepers*. Yet, the themes of sleep, slumber, and return to life are widespread and recur in the myths and epics of numerous cultures.

Accordingly, this study will first examine the mythological, Greek, Jewish, Christian, and global sources of this narrative. These sources provide a broader context for understanding the Qur'ānic account, highlighting both its unique features and its connections to universal storytelling traditions. By comparing these various versions, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the Qur'ān's distinctive approach to this motif and its theological and literary significance.

## 4. Mythological, Greek, Religious, and Folkloric Sources of the Sleep Motif

### 4.1. The Sleep Motif in the Epic of Gilgamesh

In the ancient Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, the hero Gilgamesh embarks on a quest for immortality following the death of his close friend Enkidu. His journey takes him to the underworld, where he encounters the spirits of the dead, and then to Utnapishtim—the sole survivor of the great flood—who, along with his wife, was granted eternal life by the gods. When Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim how to attain immortality, he is challenged to stay awake for several days and nights. Exhausted from his travels, Gilgamesh cannot resist sleep and falls asleep. Upon waking, Utnapishtim explains that immortality is reserved for the gods, not humans. However, he directs Gilgamesh to a plant at the bottom of the dark seas that can grant eternal life. After enduring great hardship, Gilgamesh finds the plant but loses it when a snake steals it while he bathes in a spring, shedding its skin afterward. Realizing that immortality is beyond human reach, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, resolved to live the remainder of his life virtuously.

Interestingly, this story shares similarities with the tale of Alexander the Great, who sought the Water of Life. Some interpretations, including that of Abul Kalam (as cited by Ruhi), identify Alexander with Dhul-Qarnayn, whose story also appears in *Surah al-Kahf*. However, Badra'i (2005) argues that "Alexander cannot be Dhul-Qarnayn, neither in the

Jewish Bible nor in the Qur'ān" (p. 8). The motifs present in these narratives—such as the spring of eternal life; Gilgamesh bathing in the spring; the roasted fish that comes to life in the sea where Moses is to meet the righteous servant; the fish reviving in life-giving water; Alexander's journey to the ends of the earth; Gilgamesh's quest for Utnapishtim at the edge of the world; the immortality of Utnapishtim and of the righteous servant (identified in Islamic tradition as Khidr); and the relationship between Moses and Joshua—are deeply interconnected themes that enhance the complexity and richness of *Surah al-Kahf* and its four parables.

These parallels highlight the universal nature of certain motifs, such as the quest for immortality, the transformative power of sleep, and the tension between human mortality and divine eternity. However, the Qur'ānic narratives in *Surah Al-Kahf* reinterpret these motifs within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing themes such as divine guidance, the transient nature of worldly life, and the ultimate reliance on God. This approach distinguishes the Qur'ānic accounts from their mythological and folkloric counterparts, underscoring the Qur'ān's unique theological and literary contributions.

#### 4.2. Greek Sources

Fender Horst (2015) argues that this story also has parallels in Greek and Roman traditions, citing the example of the 57-year sleep of Epimenides in the 3rd century BCE. Epimenides, a young man from the island of Crete in Greece, enters a cave to search for his father's lost sheep and falls asleep there for an extended period. When he wakes up, he finds that everything has changed, and he eventually learns the truth from his younger brother, who is now an old man. John Koch identifies Aristotle as the first to discuss the concept of sleepers, referencing Aristotle's *Physics*:

Time is not unchanged, for when the state of our mind has not changed, or we have not perceived its change, we imagine that time has passed. This is like the heroes of Sardis who fell asleep and, upon waking, believed that the 'now' before and the 'now' after were the same, thus eliminating the interval between them (*Physics* 4.11, 218b23–26) (cited in Fender Horst, p. 94).

However, John Koch clarifies that there is no definitive evidence to confirm that Aristotle was referring to the sleepers of Sardis. These Greek sources reflect the recurring motif of prolonged sleep followed by disorientation upon awakening, a theme that resonates with the story of the Companions of the Cave in the Qur'ān. While the details and contexts differ, the underlying concept of sleep as a transformative or revelatory experience remains consistent. The Qur'ānic narrative, however, reinterprets this motif within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing divine intervention, the power of faith, and the fleeting nature of worldly life. This distinctive approach sets the Qur'ānic account apart from its Greek counterparts, underscoring its unique theological and literary significance.

#### 4.3. Jewish Sources

Similarly, Fender Horst (2015) references Jewish sources related to the motif of prolonged sleep, citing, for example, the story of Abimelech, a disciple of Jeremiah, who sleeps for 66 years. According to the tale, Abimelech goes outside Jerusalem to gather olives and, overcome by exhaustion, falls asleep beneath a tree. Upon waking, he believes only a short time has passed and feels drowsy, but remembering his promise to Jeremiah, he hastens back to Jerusalem. When he arrives, he finds the city completely transformed and learns

from an old man that 66 years have elapsed since Nebuchadnezzar took the inhabitants of Jerusalem—including Jeremiah—into captivity. Fender Horst argues that this story likely does not have a purely Jewish origin, as its elements align more closely with Christian traditions than Jewish ones. He suggests it may have been influenced by Greek culture, but also notes that since the story appears in various forms across multiple cultures, it probably has a mixed origin rather than being exclusively Greek. Additionally, Horst cites Thompson, who classifies this story under motif 1960D and points to its global roots, a topic we will revisit later.

Similarly, Brown (1983) and Fender Horst (2015) reference other Jewish sources related to this motif. For example, they recount the story of a young man who encounters an old man planting a sapling. When the young man asks how long it will take for the tree to bear fruit, the old man replies, “77 years.” Due to unforeseen circumstances, the young man falls asleep there and awakens to find an old man harvesting fruit from the tree. To his amazement, he learns that this man is the grandson of the original planter and that 77 years have passed. Through close analysis, Fender Horst traces the origins of this story back to the 1st century BCE, noting that it cannot predate the second destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. Consequently, Fender Horst suggests that these two stories likely emerged around the same time, between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE (p. 104), concluding that it is difficult to ascertain which story came first.

In summary, Fender Horst identifies several commonalities among these stories and Jewish sources: all are linked to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple; all depict a complete transformation of Jerusalem; all emphasize the sleepers’ perception of a brief slumber despite the passage of decades; and while the places of sleep vary—one in a cave, another by the roadside, and a third under an olive tree—they share the central motif of sleeping and awakening after approximately 66 or 70 years (*ibid.*). Notably, Al-Tha‘labi’s *Qisas al-Anbiya* (Stories of the Prophets) recounts two similar stories about the Prophet Ezra, described as “among the descendants of the prophets and a prominent figure of the Israelites” (p. 350), a narrative also alluded to in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 259.

These Jewish sources underscore the recurring theme of prolonged sleep and the ensuing disorientation upon awakening, often connected to significant historical or religious upheavals. While the Qur’ānic narrative of the Companions of the Cave shares thematic parallels with these accounts, it reinterprets the motif through a distinctly monotheistic lens—highlighting divine intervention, the power of faith, and the transient nature of worldly life. This theological and literary approach sets the Qur’ānic story apart from its Jewish counterparts, underscoring its unique significance within Islamic scripture.

#### 4.4. Christian Sources of the Story

As reported by Fender Horst (2015), in the mid-13th century CE (7th century AH), the Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine compiled and edited his famous work *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend) in Latin. This work, of which nearly a thousand medieval Latin manuscripts survive, consists of a collection of hagiographies of Christian saints and short treatises on Christian feasts, comprising 175 chapters (p. 93). According to Sattari (1997), the original story was likely written in Latin, translated into Greek and Syriac, and then retranslated into Latin by Gregory of Tours (d. 595 CE) (p. 6). Sattari argues that this story entered Islamic tradition through the Syriac version written by Jacob of Sarug (521-452 CE). The story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, as recounted in *The Golden Legend*, is as follows:

During the persecution of Christians under Emperor Decius (around 250 CE), seven pious young men took refuge in a cave near Ephesus and fell into a deep sleep for an extended period. When they awoke, they believed they had only slept for a short time. One of them was sent to the city to fetch food. Upon entering the city, he found it completely transformed: the buildings had changed, people spoke openly of Christ, and crosses hung on the city walls. Eventually, he learned that the current era was that of Emperor Theodosius, not Decius, and that they had slept for nearly 372 years. The arrival of these seven sleepers sparked celebrations in which even the emperor participated. All who saw these young men thanked God for the miracle, and the cave became a pilgrimage site for many years.

In summary, Fender Horst argues that if we consider the stories related to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple to have Jewish origins, it is undeniable that Christian scribes were aware of and heavily influenced by these Jewish sources when crafting the story of the Sleepers of Ephesus (p. 110). The Jewish sources of the story are linked to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon, while the Christian source is tied to the persecution and martyrdom of early Christians under Decius. According to both Jewish and Christian sources, the place of sleep is a cave in or near a mountainous area. Both traditions emphasize the return to the city and the astonishment at its complete transformation. In both, there is a dialogue between the sleepers and the city's inhabitants. In both, the sleeper believes they have lost their senses and are disoriented. Fender Horst concludes that by the mid-5th century CE, stories derived from Jewish sources must have been familiar enough to Christian scribes that they sought to adapt them for Christian purposes. In this sense, the story of the Sleepers of Ephesus is essentially the same as the stories derived from Jewish sources (p. 111).

These Christian sources highlight the adaptation and reinterpretation of earlier motifs within a new religious context. The Qur'ānic narrative of the Companions of the Cave, while sharing some similarities with these stories, reinterprets the motif within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing divine intervention, the power of faith, and the transient nature of worldly life. This approach distinguishes the Qur'ānic account from its Christian counterparts, underscoring its unique theological and literary significance.

#### 4.5. Islamic Sources of the Story

As previously mentioned, the core of the story is what the Qur'ān has revealed in a concise and distinctive manner, organically connected to the overall thematic and structural framework of Surah Al-Kahf and the Qur'ān as a whole, as well as to the era and biography of the Prophet. However, from the very beginning of the Qur'ān's revelation, attention to the interpretation, explanation, and clarification of its verses, especially those related to narratives, has been a central focus. Due to the lack of written sources, many of these interpretations, sayings, and narrations were transmitted orally from the Prophet and, by extension, through his successors (*Tabi'in*) and their successors (*Tabi' al-Tabi'in*). Among these, some narrators and exegetes, primarily converts to Islam from among the *Tabi'in*, took the opportunity to utilize Jewish and Christian sources in interpreting and explaining Qur'ānic verses, particularly in elaborating on its narratives. Thus, the commentaries or explanations available for the stories in Surah Al-Kahf, especially the Companions of the Cave, are derived from these exegetes and have subsequently entered the tradition of Qur'ānic exegesis in later centuries.

However, in more recent commentaries, such as those by Islahi, Sayyid Qutb, and Tabatabai, rational interpretations based on the internal unity and thematic coherence of the

surah itself have been presented. As Mir (1986) reports, Tabatabai (vol. 13:263) considers the "purpose" of the surah to be the affirmation of monotheism (*tawhid*) and the encouragement of piety and fear of God. Sayyid Qutb (vol. 4:2257) identifies the "axis" of the surah as the reform of beliefs, perspectives, and values by referring to its teachings and doctrines. Islahi (vol. 4:9) views the "pillar" of the surah as twofold: a warning to the Quraysh that wealth and power should not lead them to arrogantly deny the truth, and an instruction to Muslims to remain steadfast in their confrontation with the Quraysh, promising them salvation. Regarding the themes of the surah, Islahi writes:

The story of the Sleepers in the Cave refers to God's assistance to a group of believers and their deliverance from oppressors. The parable of the two gardens speaks of the fate of those whom worldly wealth distances from the true source of wealth, which is God. The story of Adam and Satan compares the Quraysh's disregard for God to Satan's disregard for God and warns the Quraysh of the consequences of this neglect. The story of Moses highlights the virtue of patience and submission to God's wise decree. The story of Dhul-Qarnayn speaks of a correct perspective that material success brings to a person—not pride and arrogance, but humility and submission (cited in Mir 1986: 68).

In addition to these two primary types of exegesis—the early, predominantly narrative-based (*naqli*) interpretations and the later, predominantly rational (*aqli*) ones (for an overview of these two types, see Saeed 2018)—there are also commentaries that blend both approaches. For example, some European scholars have attempted to offer alternative interpretations of this surah while considering both narrative and rational exegesis. Among them are Brown (1983) and Roberts (1993), who also refer to Islamic sources regarding the Companions of the Cave. As mentioned earlier, Brown (1983), following Massignon (1969), describes Surah Al-Kahf as "Islamic eschatology" and seeks to explore various perspectives, particularly on terms such as *zahir* (apparent) and *batin* (hidden), *nabi* (prophet) and *wali* (saint), and the Shi'a concept of the Imam and the Sufi concept of the spiritual guide (*pir* or *murshid*). He also outlines a Shi'a interpretive perspective related to this surah, especially concerning the Companions of the Cave. After providing a complete English translation of Surah Al-Kahf, Brown first highlights its connections with Jewish and Christian sources and then establishes links between the Companions of the Cave, Moses, the righteous servant, Joshua, Elijah, Khidr, Dhul-Qarnayn, Alexander, Gog and Magog, the end-time community, and the prophecies of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation about the end times (p. 160).

These Islamic sources and interpretations demonstrate the richness and complexity of the Qur'ānic narrative of the Companions of the Cave. While earlier exegesis often relied on external sources, later interpretations emphasize the Qur'ān's internal coherence and theological depth, offering fresh insights into its timeless message. This evolution in Qur'ānic exegesis reflects a broader trend toward contextual and thematic approaches that seek to uncover the Qur'ān's unique contributions to spiritual and moral discourse.

Brown argues that the Qur'ān separates the stories of Moses and Alexander from their Hebrew traditions and elevates them to a transcultural, universal, and historical-global level (p. 161). What is commonly known in Jewish tradition as the story of Moses and Joshua or Elijah and Moses is, in the Qur'ān, transformed into the story of Moses and the righteous servant (*Abd al-Salih*), introducing a new figure, Dhul-Qarnayn. Here, Brown notes that the Qur'ān, in order to establish connections with other revelatory sources, refers to the story of Moses and Joshua, which is also a global folktale type found in the Aarne-Thompson classification (p. 161). However, as previously mentioned, the Qur'ān presents its own



original account of this story and does not mention Elijah or Joshua, instead using the term "righteous servant" (*Abd al-Salih*). Dundes, in support of the idea that the Qur'ān borrowed this story from folk tales, refers to Brown's perspective, which, as we have shown, is not entirely accurate. While we have demonstrated that shared motifs are not the primary focus in the Qur'ān, the way these motifs are framed and presented in alignment with the Qur'ān's theological objectives is what matters.

Brown emphasizes that, unlike Western scholars who focus solely on the similarities between this story and global folktale types or Jewish and Christian sources, one should not limit oneself to the literal meaning of the folk tale. It is essential to look beyond, for example, what Moses sees in the boat, the ruined wall, and the killing of the young boy, and to consider the inner and esoteric meanings. Here, Brown draws attention to the terms *zahir* (apparent) and *batin* (hidden) in Islamic tradition: "The story of the Companions of the Cave led to the distinction in Islamic culture between the literal and apparent meaning of the text (*zahir*) and its deeper, esoteric meaning (*batin*). This distinction in Islamic thought refers to the difference between what appears to have happened (*zahir*) and what is actually occurring (*batin*)" (p. 162).

Thus, Brown distinguishes the Shi'a Imam from the Sufi spiritual guide (*pir*): the Shi'a Imam represents revelation and divine inspiration, while the Sufi guide represents mystical illumination and inspiration (p. 163). According to Brown, Shi'ism offers the most complex mythological interpretation of Surah Al-Kahf, as it believes that the Twelfth Imam, after the minor occultation (*ghaybat al-sughra*), entered the major occultation (*ghaybat al-kubra*) and will reappear at the appointed time, just as the Companions of the Cave returned to life after three centuries of slumber (p. 165). Brown equates the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in Shi'ism with motif D1960.2 in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, which tells of a king named Barbarossa who sleeps in a mountain and will one day awaken to aid his people (p. 167).

In his continued interpretive analysis, Brown associates the number seven (the seven sleepers) with the seven Imams of Ismailism, who are said to be hidden in the cave, the "womb of Fatima" (peace be upon her), and protected by Imam Ali (peace be upon him). Alternatively, he links the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt during the 3rd and 4th centuries AH to these sleepers in the cave (ibid.).

In conclusion, Brown asserts that pious Muslims need not worry about similar elements from other traditions finding their way into this surah. Surah Al-Kahf is a perfect model of Islamic convergence. The Qur'ān is not a translation or adaptation of the legacies of Greek, Jewish, or Christian traditions. The Qur'ān does not need to borrow from other civilizations to establish a new civilization; the fact that it has been able to transform the imagination of the masses is sufficient—masses who are shaped by and shape culture and folk tales (p. 169).

(For an overview of various Muslim interpretations of this surah and the Companions of the Cave, see prominent commentaries such as *Al-Mizan*, *Noor*, *Majma' al-Bayan*, among others.)

Brown's analysis highlights the Qur'ān's ability to reinterpret universal motifs within a uniquely Islamic framework, emphasizing its theological depth and literary originality. This approach underscores the Qur'ān's role not only as a religious text but also as a transformative cultural and civilizational force.

#### 4.6. Global Sources of the Story

As Dundes (2003) notes, the global sources of this story are classified under Type 766, titled *The Seven Sleepers*, in the well-known Aarne-Thompson classification (1961), described as “a miraculous sleep lasting for years.” The Aarne-Thompson system also references similar stories from various cultures worldwide, including German (Brothers Grimm, No. 202), Finnish, Swedish, Irish, English, and American (notably the story of Rip Van Winkle). Citing Brown (1983:166), Dundes identifies the Jewish source of this story as motif D1960.1 (p. 265). However, Dundes points out that what Brown terms a “folktale type” is, in Thompson’s classification, actually a “motif.” Furthermore, Dundes argues that this motif and its associated events do not constitute a folktale but rather a “legend” containing a kernel of historical truth (p. 62).

After referencing scholars who have commented on this surah, including Louis Massignon (1969), Brown (1983), and Roberts (1993), Dundes writes that none of these scholars have highlighted the widespread circulation and transmission of this story among global folktales. However, this claim is not entirely accurate. For example, if we examine the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) of Surah Al-Kahf, and consider that many *asbāb al-nuzūl* share characteristics typical of folktales, such as adaptability, variability, and transmissibility, we find that the narrations, sayings, and occasions related to this surah were recorded in traditional commentaries long before the Aarne-Thompson classification system was developed, even if these commentaries drew extensively from Jewish and Christian sources.

In fact, it is precisely because of these fabricated *asbāb al-nuzūl* that Dundes’ claim about the Qur’ān’s influence from folktales—whether in recounting the story of the Cave, other stories in Surah Al-Kahf, or Qur’ānic narratives such as the story of Solomon and the ants (which Dundes likens to Type 670, *The Language of Animals*)—may be seriously questioned. A more accurate assessment would acknowledge that some themes in Qur’ānic narratives may resemble global folktales, which is natural. However, the way the Qur’ān presents these stories, in connection with the overall thematic and structural coherence of the surahs, the Qur’ān as a whole, and especially in relation to the Prophet’s biography, is distinctive and unique to its storytelling style.

The Qur’ānic approach is not merely about recounting events but about embedding these narratives within a broader theological and moral framework. This method sets the Qur’ānic accounts apart from their folkloric counterparts, highlighting their originality and divine purpose. While similarities with global motifs exist, the Qur’ān’s reinterpretation of these motifs within a monotheistic context underscores its unique contribution to spiritual and literary traditions.

### 5. Discussion

The reality is that the story of the Seven Sleepers does not appear directly in the Bible (Torah and Gospel) but is mentioned in Christian and Jewish interpretive and narrative texts, as noted by Fender Horst and others. Given the numerous Jewish and Christian manuscripts—especially from the Eastern Church tradition—and the fact that many early Islamic narrators, hadith scholars, and exegetes, including the *Tabi‘in* and *Tabi‘ al-Tabi‘in*, were Jewish converts to Islam, it is natural that some Jewish and Christian origins of the story of the Sleepers of the Cave found their way into Qur’ānic interpretations. This is particularly true because many *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) for Qur’ānic verses,

especially the narratives, were transmitted by these individuals, leading to what is known in the exegetical tradition as *Isra'iliyyat*. A brief examination of some commentaries that narrate the *asbāb al-nuzūl* of the Qur'ānic story of the Companions of the Cave—from sources such as Ibn Ishaq, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Wahb ibn Munabbih, and others—reveals the extensive influence of Jewish and Christian narrators and scholars.

However, Roberts (1993) argues that this story should be considered a blend of three traditions—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—that share the common themes of life, death, and revival. What distinguishes these traditions is how the theme is framed within the context of death and resurrection: it is less prominent in the Jewish tradition, more pronounced in the Christian tradition, and dominant in the Islamic tradition. Most importantly, within the Islamic tradition—particularly in Surah Al-Kahf—this theme is organically connected to the core teachings of Islam, especially the principle of resurrection (*ma'ād*), the central themes of the Qur'ān, the main subjects of Surah Al-Kahf itself, and the era and biography of the Prophet. In Surah Al-Kahf, the reference to the Companions of the Cave, though concise, symbolic, and allegorical, emphasizes fundamental Islamic doctrines such as monotheism (*tawhīd*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), resurrection (*ma'ād*), the Day of Judgment, the reckoning of deeds, divine reward and punishment, the insignificance of worldly wealth and beauty, and the ultimate return to God. These themes are presented coherently and integratively within the surah, aligning with the broader theological objectives of the Qur'ān. This thematic coherence, structural unity, and integration of form and content are not found in Jewish and Christian sources. Indeed, not only is the storytelling of the Companions of the Cave unique, but the Qur'ān's theological framing of the narrative is also distinctive and unparalleled.

Returning to Surah Al-Kahf, we can further appreciate its formal and thematic brilliance along with its distinctive features. The surah's structure, centered around four parables—the Companions of the Cave, the parable of the two gardens, the story of Moses and the righteous servant, and the story of Dhul-Qarnayn—demonstrates profound interconnectedness. Each narrative reinforces the central message of the surah: the transient nature of worldly life, the importance of faith and divine guidance, and ultimate reliance on God. The Qur'ān's ability to weave these stories into a cohesive theological framework highlights its unique literary and spiritual contribution.

In conclusion, while the story of the Companions of the Cave shares certain thematic similarities with Jewish and Christian traditions, the Qur'ānic account stands apart through its theological depth, structural coherence, and integration with the broader teachings of Islam. The Qur'ān's reinterpretation of universal motifs within a monotheistic framework underscores its originality and divine purpose, making it a timeless and transformative text.

This article focuses on Dundes' perspective that certain Qur'ānic stories, such as the speaking ant in Surah An-Naml, the Companions of the Cave, Moses and the righteous servant, and Dhul-Qarnayn, are derived from specific global folktale types found across various cultures. Dundes specifically argues that the story of the speaking ant corresponds to Type 670 ("The Language of Animals"); the story of the Companions of the Cave to Type 766 ("The Seven Sleepers"); and the story of Moses and the righteous servant to Type 759 ("The Angel and the Hermit") in the Aarne-Thompson classification (1961). While it may not be surprising that some Qur'ānic themes resemble those in other literary traditions, as Dundes demonstrates, it is important to recognize that the Qur'ān—being a text that claims to guide humanity—naturally employs familiar human themes and motifs. However, the

Qur'ān's use of these motifs is not mere repetition or imitation but rather a purposeful and transformative reinterpretation within a monotheistic framework.

Dundes does not approach the Qur'ān with animosity; rather, he acknowledges in the final chapter of his book that "if God Himself emphasizes the use of parables (stories in the modern sense) to guide and instruct humanity, we mortals are in no position to deny it or reject the presence of stories in the Qur'ān" (p. 71). However, the suggestion that the Qur'ān borrows directly from folktales risks undermining its originality and divine nature. Therefore, Dundes' claims warrant careful reconsideration and reevaluation.

This reevaluation is necessary for two reasons. First, the Qur'ān openly employs various forms of speech, thought, and examples to convey its messages. It even uses the example of a gnat or something smaller (Surah Al-Baqarah). As evident from its verses, the Qur'ān—especially through its parables—uses familiar, ordinary, and even mundane examples and objects from daily life. These are used purposefully and effectively, in alignment with the thematic and theological objectives of the surahs. Among these examples, some may resemble narratives found in other sources, particularly Biblical texts. This similarity is not surprising, as the ultimate source of all revealed scriptures is God. It is as if God, as the omniscient author, reiterates His messages in different forms across various scriptures. Therefore, if the motif of the Sleepers in the Cave resembles similar themes in Biblical commentaries, it is not particularly unusual.

Second, if these messages, sayings, and stories—or, as Dundes calls them, folktales—resemble themes in other scriptures, one possible reason is the influence of Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions rather than direct borrowing by the Qur'ān or the Prophet. What matters most in the Qur'ān is the manner in which these messages are presented, which is unique and distinctive in several important ways.

**Divine Origin and Authenticity:** These stories or messages are directly revealed to the Prophet through the Angel Gabriel, and the Prophet transmits them without addition or omission. Thus, these stories have Qur'ānic authenticity and are not borrowed from any external source.

**Theological Purpose:** These stories are not for entertainment or amusement but serve the Qur'ān's theological objectives. The Qur'ān does not aim to entertain through storytelling but to convey profound spiritual and moral lessons. At the same time, God describes Himself as the best of storytellers (*ahsan al-qasas*), as seen in Surah Yusuf (12:3), which refers to both the best stories and the best method of storytelling. This dual function explains why more than a quarter of the Qur'ān consists of storytelling, with God presenting the best and most diverse narratives.

**Contextual and Structural Coherence:** These stories, which are among the best of their kind, are placed within surahs that align with their theological goals. God, as the storyteller, selects portions of a story that fit the context and requirements of each surah. This selective narration often involves repeated phrases and idioms, a feature of Qur'ānic expression known in Islamic rhetoric as *tasreef fi al-bayan* (variation in expression), which distinguishes Qur'ānic style from monotonous repetition. These phrases are specific to each surah and cannot be removed, as Dundes suggests, without disrupting the surah's structure. Moreover, these narrative fragments are intertextually connected within the surah and across other surahs, forming complementary clusters. For example, Surah Al-Kahf forms a triad with Surahs Al-Isra and Maryam, functioning in a complementary relationship.

**Historical and Prophetic Context:** These narrative fragments are not only connected to the overall themes of the surahs and the Qur'ān but also to the historical context of the Qur'ān's revelation and the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). For instance, Surah Al-Kahf, which contains these stories, was revealed in response to the Quraysh's challenge to the Prophet. Its themes directly address the arrogance and defiance of the disbelievers, their neglect of the Day of Judgment, their obsession with worldly wealth, and their disregard for the poor.

In conclusion, while some Qur'ānic themes may resemble global folktales, the Qur'ān's approach to storytelling is unique in its divine origin, theological purpose, structural coherence, and historical context. The Qur'ān reinterprets universal motifs within a monotheistic framework, emphasizing its originality and transformative power. This approach underscores the Qur'ān's role not only as a religious text but also as a literary and spiritual masterpiece.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, this article aimed to demonstrate that Dundes' claim regarding the influence of certain Qur'ānic narratives, such as those in Surah Al-Kahf on Jewish, Christian, and particularly folkloric sources is not entirely accurate. The Qur'ānic account of stories like the Companions of the Cave is deeply rooted in the overall structure of the surah, the theological objectives of the Qur'ān, and the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him). What early Qur'ānic commentators and narrators derived from these stories and incorporated into their transmitted (naqli) interpretations was often influenced by Jewish and Christian sources, particularly Isra'iliyyat.

More importantly, modern rational (aqli) interpretations have introduced new dimensions to these stories, some of which were discussed in this article. Future research could examine the stories of Surah Al-Kahf in relation to one another and to other parts of the surah, including the story of Satan and Adam, which also appears here. Such analysis would further highlight the Qur'ān's unique approach to storytelling, its thematic coherence, and its ability to reinterpret universal motifs within a monotheistic framework.

The Qur'ān's narratives are not mere repetitions or borrowings from other traditions but transformative reinterpretations that serve its divine purpose. By embedding these stories within a broader theological and historical context, the Qur'ān distinguishes itself as a unique and unparalleled text—both spiritually and literarily. This approach underscores the Qur'ān's originality and its role as a guide for humanity, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries.

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# An Error Analysis of Translation of Qur'ānic Verses: A Case Study of Surah Al-Kahf

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## ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the quality of two English translations of Surah Al-Kahf, produced by two prominent translators: Pickthall (1930), a native English speaker, and Qarai (2018), a non-native translator. The assessment was based on Khazaefar's (2012) error analysis model. To determine the accurate meanings of key terms, two Qur'ānic commentaries and two dictionaries were consulted. This facilitated a comparative analysis between the Arabic source text and its English renderings, allowing the identification of translation errors. Furthermore, macro-level translation issues—such as sentence structure, coherence, cohesion, and stylistic choices—were also examined. The findings revealed that the non-native translator made fewer errors and produced a higher-quality translation than Pickthall. The study concludes that a translator's proficiency in Arabic and understanding of its contextual and structural nuances play a crucial role in the accurate translation of the Qur'ān. In this regard, the non-native translator effectively met these demands.

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## 1. Introduction

The English term “*translation*”, first attested around 1340, derives either from the Old French *translation* or more directly from the Latin *translatio* (meaning “transporting”), which itself comes from the past participle of the verb *transferre* (“to carry over”) (Munday, 2016, p. 8). Nida and Taber (1982, p. 12) define translation as the reproduction of the closest natural equivalent in the target language—first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. According to this view, meaning takes precedence over style, although both are important. In other words, a translated text should correspond as closely as possible to the original in terms of both content and style (Manafi Anari, 2014, p. 1).

The academic discipline known as *Translation Studies* was introduced by James Holmes in the 20th century (as cited in Munday, 2016, p. 11). He described the field as being concerned with “the complex of problems clustered round the phenomenon of translating and translation” (p. 11). One of these problems is the assessment of translation quality.

To address this issue, scholars have employed theoretical frameworks within Translation Studies, as any translation theory inherently includes a model for assessing translation quality. In other words, different translation theories yield different approaches to evaluating translation quality. The earliest theories were based on linguistic models. Initially, Translation Studies was regarded as a sub-discipline of traditional philology or linguistics (Neubert & Shreve, 1992, vii). Within this framework, literal or word-for-word translation was considered the most accurate. This approach dominated for much of translation history.

In recent decades, the concept of “text type” has significantly influenced the field of Translation Studies, following its introduction by Reiss (as cited in Munday, 2016, p. 114). This marked a shift in focus from the translation of individual lexical and syntactic units to a broader consideration of entire text types. Reiss categorized texts into four main types: informative, expressive, operative, and audio-medial (pp. 115–116). Each text type requires a different translation strategy based on its primary communicative function, thereby enriching the theoretical framework and practical application of translation.

This classification was based on Bühler’s theory that language serves three main functions: informative, expressive and appellative (pp. 115–116). According to this approach, translators may deliberately adapt the translation according to the text type and its intended function in the target language. Consequently, translation quality assessment (TQA) shifts from a focus on individual words to the evaluation of the entire text. Linguistic approaches to translation focus primarily on words and the relationship between the ST and TT. However, they often fall short in providing detailed procedures for assessing and evaluating translated texts. More promising are approaches that consider the interconnectedness of text and context (House, 2001). While text analysis concentrates on the structure of the text itself, discourse analysis examines meaning in relation to the context of the situation (Munday, 2016, p. 142).

The assessment and analysis of translation errors has long been a topic of interest in translation studies. Varying perspectives on the nature of errors have led to the development of different analytical frameworks. One such framework was introduced by Khazaefar (2012), who proposed a model for evaluating translation quality. Based on error analysis, this model is particularly useful for translation training in academic settings. Khazaefar’s theoretical framework can also be applied to the error analysis of Qur’ānic translations. Among the chapters of the Holy Qur’ān, Surah Al-Kahf (the 18th chapter) provides a

suitable sample for analysis due to the richness of its content. In this study, the researchers aim to assess the quality of two English translations of this chapter using the model proposed by Khazaefar (2012).

Throughout history, religious texts have played a vital role in human societies. For Muslims, the most important religious text is the Qur'ān, believed to be the miracle of the final prophet and a comprehensive guide for humankind. Translating the Qur'ān is one of the most complex and debated issues in translation studies. Millions of Muslims—both Arabs and non-Arabs—as well as non-Muslims around the world seek to understand God's message in their native languages. Therefore, translating the Qur'ān is essential for enhancing non-Arab Muslims' understanding of their faith and for spreading the knowledge and teachings of the holy book globally (Foroutan, 2019).

Some scholars argue that the Holy Qur'ān is untranslatable and provide various reasons for this view (Foroutan, 2019, p. 14). However, translation remains the only means by which the meanings and messages of the Glorious Qur'ān can be conveyed to non-Arabic speakers.

Numerous English translations of the Holy Qur'ān—including those examined in this study—often fail to accurately reflect the original text. These translations sometimes contain significant shortcomings that result in confusion or misinterpretation, making it difficult for the target audience to fully grasp the intended meaning (Al-Jabari, 2008). Applying a theoretical framework to analyze a specific chapter of the Qur'ān may offer deeper insights into the translation strategies employed by different translators. Errors made during the translation process can distort the content and meaning of the verses. This study seeks to identify and evaluate such errors in two English translations of Surah Al-Kahf—one by a native Persian speaker and the other by a native English speaker.

This research aims to assist translators in recognizing and correcting errors in their work, thereby contributing to the production of more accurate and potentially error-free translations. By comparing translations from native and non-native English speakers, the study also investigates whether the translator's linguistic background influences the frequency and nature of errors. For each identified issue, the researcher proposes possible solutions where appropriate. Despite the sincere efforts of many translators to provide faithful English renditions of the Qur'ān, some translations still fall short. Native English speakers may struggle to understand the intended meanings due to awkward phrasing, stylistic issues, or lack of fluency (Al-Jabari, 2008, p. 1). Such shortcomings highlight serious limitations in certain translations of the Holy Qur'ān. A translator of the Qur'ān must be attuned to its unique linguistic, rhetorical, and theological features in order to convey its meanings precisely. Mastery of both Arabic and English, along with a deep understanding of Qur'ānic interpretation and commentary, is essential for delivering God's message to the target audience with fidelity and clarity.

Many translators make errors when attempting to render the Qur'ān's verses into another language. This study seeks to identify these mistakes and offer recommendations for improving accuracy. According to Holmes's map of translation studies, TQA falls under the domain of applied translation criticism. Thus, this research also functions as a critique of existing translations, aiming to raise awareness among translators about the Qur'ān's distinctive features and the strategies needed for accurate translation. Surah Al-Kahf (The Cave), the 18th chapter of the Holy Qur'ān, was revealed in Mecca to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This chapter was selected for analysis due to its thematic richness and the variety of stories it presents. It includes the following five narratives:

1. A group of young believers who were forced to flee their city because of their faith in God.
2. A wealthy man with two beautiful gardens whose ingratitude led to their destruction.
3. The story of the angels' prostration before Adam and Satan's refusal to obey God.
4. The journey of Moses and Khidr, a mysterious and knowledgeable servant of God.
5. The story of Dhul-Qarnayn, a righteous and powerful king mentioned in the Qur'ān.

In addition to these narratives, the chapter contains important guidance on faith, righteous conduct, and preparation for the afterlife and the Day of Judgment.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: What errors are found in the translated texts based on Khazaeefar's Model?
- RQ2: Which translator has made fewer errors in the translation of this chapter?
- RQ3: What types of errors are most common, and which are less frequent or less noticeable?
- RQ4: What corrective strategies or solutions can be proposed to help translators reduce their errors?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Translation of the Holy Qur'ān

The Holy Qur'ān is regarded as the most significant text in Islamic culture, and its translation has long been a subject of scholarly investigation within the field of translation studies. Scholars generally express two opposing views on the translatability of the Qur'ān (Maleki, 2011). One perspective holds that the Qur'ān is inherently untranslatable, deeming any attempt to translate it as illegitimate. In contrast, the other perspective emphasizes the necessity of translating the Qur'ān into other languages to ensure wider accessibility and understanding.

Foroutan (2019, pp. 14–16) outlines several reasons why some scholars argue that the Qur'ān cannot be truly translated. First, the Qur'ān is regarded as a divine miracle, placing it beyond the limits of human capability to reproduce in another language. Additionally, Arabic is viewed as a perfect and sacred language, capable of conveying meanings and stylistic subtleties that are extremely difficult—if not impossible—to capture in translation (Biazar Shirazi, 1376 Sh, 1:72, as cited in Foroutan, 2019, p. 15). The Qur'ān is also described as a “book of light”, and any attempt to translate it may risk diminishing its spiritual and sacred essence. Moreover, translations are inherently vulnerable to errors, including omissions and additions, which may lead to a distortion of the original message.

Foroutan (2019) identifies three primary approaches to Qur'ān translation: literal translation, free translation, and translation of meaning, where the translator renders the source text (ST) sentence into a corresponding sentence in the TT (p. 18). Given the inherent complexities of the Qur'ānic text, translators must consult various exegetical sources and

commentaries to ensure an accurate representation of meaning. Foroutan (pp. 19–20) emphasizes that a reliable translation requires the translator to possess a profound command of both the source language and target language, as well as an in-depth understanding of Qur'ānic interpretation and sciences. Furthermore, the translator must maintain objectivity, avoid bias, and adhere to established principles of translation. In addition, Foroutan (p. 139) highlights two fundamental considerations in Qur'ān translation: the Qur'ān is composed in standard Arabic, and the translator's ultimate goal is to faithfully and fully convey the message of Allah.

## *2.2. Rhetorical dimension of the Qur'ān*

The rhetorical features of the Qur'ān present unique challenges for translators. Hemmatian (2015) explores these dimensions in her analysis of Surah Al-Kawthar, identifying four key rhetorical components based on Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics and House's model:

1. The Speaker: Allah is the speaker. His omnipotence is reflected in the tone, stress patterns, use of imperative sentences, and prophetic declarations found in the text.

2. The Audience: The general audience includes both supporters and opponents of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), while the specific audience consists of the Prophet himself and those who criticized him. The verses address the Prophet's emotional state, including his anxieties and disappointments.

3. The Text: The content delivers glad tidings to the Prophet and warnings to his adversaries. The use of the past tense emphasizes the certainty of the events described. Furthermore, the tone and fluency of the language enhance both the clarity and accessibility of the text for a general audience.

4. Situational Context: This encompasses the cultural and social environment at the time of revelation, as well as the specific circumstances that prompted the chapter's disclosure.

Understanding these rhetorical elements is crucial for translators seeking to faithfully convey the intended meaning and emotional depth of the Qur'ānic message. These insights underscore the need for a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to translation.

## *2.2. Error analysis as a TQA model*

Khazaeefar (2012) proposed a model for TQA based on error analysis, which is particularly useful in translation courses. This model identifies errors at two levels: micro and macro.

### *2.2.1. Micro-level errors*

At the micro level, errors are categorized into four types: lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.

#### *2.2.1.1. Lexical errors*

Lexical errors involve mistakes in word choice and include:

1. Selecting an equivalent word with an incorrect meaning.
2. Choosing a word with the correct meaning but inappropriate usage.
3. Using the primary meaning of a word from the source language instead of its contextual or secondary meaning.
4. Choosing a word that violates the collocational norms of the TT.
5. Using a word that does not conform to the lexical conventions of the target language.
6. Selecting a hypernym (more general term) or a hyponym (more specific term) in the TT that does not match the specificity of the original word.
7. Choosing a word that carries a different emotional impact or connotation in the TT than in the SL.

#### 2.2.1.2. Syntactic errors

Syntactic errors are related to sentence structure and include:

1. Unjustifiably transferring the original sentence structure to the TT.
2. Failing to transfer necessary original sentence structures into the TT.
3. Retaining the original word order in the TT when it is inappropriate.
4. Using incorrect verb tenses in the TT.
5. Misinterpreting the grammatical function of a word within the sentence.

#### 2.2.1.3. Semantic errors

Semantic errors occur when the translator uses words that are dictionary equivalents but differ in meaning or nuance in context. For example, the English verb *expect* and the Persian “توقع داشتن” may appear equivalent in a bilingual dictionary but are not always interchangeable due to contextual differences.

#### 2.2.1.4. Pragmatic errors

Pragmatic errors involve failing to convey the speaker's intended meaning within a specific context, often by translating too literally. Pragmatics considers indirect communication and cultural nuances. While a word-for-word translation may sometimes suffice, in many cases the translator must adapt the message to reflect the intended tone and cultural appropriateness in the target language.

#### 2.2.2. Macro-level errors

Macro-level errors pertain to the overall structure, style, and coherence of the translation.

### 2.2.2.1. Stylistic errors

Stylistic errors occur when there is a mismatch in tone or style between the ST and the TT. For example, the TT might shift from formal to informal, literary to non-literary, humorous to serious, or conversational to non-conversational, diverging from the tone of the ST.

### 2.2.2.2. Errors in cohesion and coherence

These errors result in a translation that lacks fluency and logical flow, making the text difficult to read and understand. Often caused by excessive reliance on the original structure, such translations may appear disjointed or awkward, negatively affecting readability and the logical progression of ideas.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Design

This study investigated two English translations of the Qur'ān, produced by a native and a non-native English translator. The central premise was that each translation may exhibit shortcomings in conveying the intended meaning of the Holy Qur'ān into the target language. To identify and quantify translation errors, this research employed Khazaefar's TQA model. Subsequently, the two translations were compared to determine which exhibited a lower frequency of errors based on the TQA assessment. The methodological design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative elements. A quantitative approach was used to determine the number of errors, while a qualitative analysis was conducted to assess the nature and potential impact of these errors on the overall quality and accuracy of each translation.

### 3.2. Procedure

A descriptive and comparative procedure was employed in this study. The initial step involved the researcher's reading of the Holy Qur'ān in its original Arabic. To establish a robust understanding of the verses' intended meaning, two established Persian commentaries (Tafsir) and two Qur'ānic dictionaries were consulted. Following this interpretive groundwork, each verse translation was examined against Khazaefar's TQA model to identify potential errors. Furthermore, relevant Persian translations were reviewed to provide additional context and facilitate a deeper understanding of the nuances in meaning. This multi-faceted approach enabled the researcher to assess the relative success of each translator in accurately conveying the meaning of the Holy Qur'ān into the English language. Observed shortcomings in the translations were subsequently analyzed to identify the potential origins and causes of these errors.

### 3.3. Material

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design. The selected material for analysis was Surah Al-Kahf, the 18th chapter of the Holy Qur'ān. This chapter, comprising 110 verses, which contains reasonable data to be collected, revealed in Mecca to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is named "Kahf," meaning "cave," derived from verses 9-26 which recount the story of the Companions of the Cave. Beyond this central narrative, Surah Al-Kahf encompasses four additional significant stories: the

parable of a wealthy and impoverished individual with two gardens (verses 32-44), the account of Iblis and Adam (verses 50-51), the narrative of Moses and Khidr (verses 60-82), and the story of Dhul-Qarnayn with Gog and Magog (verses 83-98).

Translations of the Holy Qur'ān have been undertaken by a diverse range of translators, encompassing both native Arab speakers and non-Arabs, as well as native English and non-native English speakers. The translation texts used in this research comprise the work of both a native English speaker and a non-native English speaker. The translators are: Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930) (1875-1936): born in England, Pickthall (1930) was a Western Islamic scholar, journalist, novelist, and political and religious leader. He resided in Palestine and acquired proficiency in Arabic. His translation of the Qur'ān, entitled "The Meaning of the Glorious Koran," is widely recognized as a significant contribution to the field. Ali Quli Qarai (2018) (born 1947): born in India, Qarai (2018) graduated from Osmania University of Hyderabad in 1970. He subsequently moved to the U.S. and earned a degree from the University of Wisconsin. A prolific writer and translator, Qarai (2018) has translated numerous texts from Arabic and Persian into English. His most prominent work is a phrase-by-phrase English translation of the Qur'ān, first published in 2003.

To facilitate a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the Qur'ānic meanings, several key interpretive resources were consulted. Among these is Tafsir al-Mizan, an Arabic exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān by Allameh Tabatabai, later translated into Persian by Mousavi Hamedani. This work is notable for its methodological approach of interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān itself, known as the "Qur'ān by Qur'ān" method. Another significant source is Tafsir-e Nemooneh, a Persian commentary authored by Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, recognized for its clear and accessible language and its engagement with contemporary social issues. Lexical support was provided by Qamoos al-Qur'ān, a Persian Qur'ānic dictionary by Ali Akbar Qureshi, and Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'ān by Raghib Isfahani, an authoritative Arabic dictionary offering concise definitions of Qur'ānic terms in a single volume. Additionally, two digital platforms were used to supplement the study. The website [www.tanzil.net](http://www.tanzil.net) provides the Qur'ān in Arabic along with translations in numerous languages, including English and Persian. Another valuable resource is [www.Qur'an.inoor.ir](http://www.Qur'an.inoor.ir), developed by the Computer Research Center of Islamic Science, which offers various tools for Qur'ānic studies.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

The primary aim of this study is to pinpoint the mistakes found in both translations of Surah Al-Kahf. This section has focused on the data and its interpretation. The information includes the mistakes made by the translators in their translations. In order to identify the mistakes, the interpretations of the Arabic terms were first examined through these books: 1. Mofradat of the Qur'ān 2. Dictionary of the Qur'ān 3. Al-Mizan Exegesis 4. Nemooneh Analysis. Next, the Arabic and English lexicons were analyzed in comparison to one another to pinpoint the mistakes, and the categories of errors were organized based on the framework suggested by Khazaeefar. To enhance the comprehension of the verses' meanings, several Persian translations were analyzed (such as the translations by Ghomshei and Ansari). Furthermore, the base of every word was noted. If any word within these lexicons had multiple meanings, its context was analyzed with the help of the interpretation texts of Al-Mizan and Nemooneh to identify the appropriate secondary meaning. To aid in locating the mistakes and their translations, the errors have been highlighted.

To assess the translation qualities of the data research data, 110 verses were analyzed, a summary of sample are discussed.

Example 1:

مَكِّيْنٍ فِيْهِ اَبَدًا

*Qarai (2018) 's translation:*

To abide in it forever.

*Pickthall (1930) 's Translation:*

Wherein they will abide for ever.

Error in coherence:

Tabatabai in Al-Mizan commentary states that in the previous verse “اجرا حسنا” means “heaven.” In this verse, it is stated that the reward of the believers is heaven, where they will live forever. The reference of the pronoun “it” is not clear for the target reader. There is ambiguity, which undermines the coherence of the text. Therefore, it is necessary for the translator to explain it in parentheses or footnotes; otherwise, the translation lacks coherence.

Example 2:

اِذْ اٰوٰى الْفَرِيقَةُ اِلٰى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوْا رَبَّنَا اِنَّا مِنْ لَّدُنْكَ رَحِمَةً وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ اَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا

*Qarai (2018) 's translation:*

When the youths took refuge in the Cave, they said, ‘Our Lord! Grant us a mercy from Yourself, and help us on to rectitude in our affair.’

*Pickthall (1930) 's Translation:*

When the young men fled for refuge to the Cave and said: Our Lord! Give us mercy from Thy presence, and shape for us right conduct in our plight.

Explanation of the verse:

Young people moved to a cave to be safe from the tyrant king and demanded help from God and prayed for guidance and asked for forgiveness from Him.

Error in collocation:

The translators, Qarai (2018) and Pickthall (1930) have rendered “اننا رحمه” in “grant us mercy” and “give us mercy” respectively. According to Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary and Longman Dictionary, “grant mercy” and “give mercy” are not collocations. It is proposed that “have/ show mercy” be applied like: *God have mercy on us! They showed no mercy to their captives.*



## Example 3:

هَؤُلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا

*Qarai (2018) 's translation:*

These—our people—have taken gods besides Him. Why do they not bring any clear authority touching them? So who is a greater wrongdoer than he who fabricates a lie against Allah?

*Pickthall (1930) 's Translation:*

These, our people, have chosen (other) gods beside Him though they bring no clear warrant (vouchsafed) to them. And who doth greater wrong than he who inventeth a lie concerning Allah?

## Analysis of the word “سلطان”:

The word is a noun derived from the root “سلط”. According to Raghib, “سلطان” has two meanings. The first is “king”, referring to any powerful person who dominates others by force. The second meaning is “proof” or “reason”. In the verse under discussion, it is stated that those who do not believe in God and instead follow other gods cannot bring any “سلطان” because they blindly follow the beliefs of their ancestors. Based on the context, the second meaning—proof or reason—is the correct interpretation. Both translators have made errors. Qarai (2018) translated the word as “authority,” which can mean the power of an official position, an official organization, an expert, or formal permission, among other senses (LD). However, “authority” does not convey the meaning of “reason” or “proof.” Pickthall (1930) translated it as “warrant,” which refers to a legal document issued by a judge, permitting law enforcement to take specific actions. While this sense is somewhat closer to the meaning of “سلطان” it still does not capture the idea of “reason.” Therefore, both translations are inaccurate. This represents an error in coherence within the pattern of translation.

## Syntactical error:

In Pickthall's (1930) translation, the sentence “لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ” is originally an interrogative sentence, but it has been rendered as a declarative sentence (“though they bring no clear warrant [vouchsafed] to them”). This sentence is actually a rhetorical question aimed at addressing those who do not believe in Allah. As previously discussed, a rhetorical question is used to impact and impress the audience rather than to elicit an answer. This important nuance is lost in the TT because the translator has rendered the Arabic particle “لو” as “though”, changing the original rhetorical question into a negative declarative sentence. According to the model, this constitutes an error because the original sentence structure and its rhetorical function were not preserved or appropriately transferred into the translation for no apparent reason.

## Example 4:

وَكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا

*Qarai (2018)'s translation:*

He had abundant fruits, so he said to his companion, as he conversed with him: 'I have more wealth than you, and am stronger with respect to numbers.'

*Pickthall (1930)'s Translation:*

And he had fruit. And he said unto his comrade, when he spake with him: I am more than thee in wealth, and stronger in respect of men.

## Error in cohesion (error in conjunction):

The verse states that the rich man who had gardens and abundant fruits, said to his friend: my wealth is more than yours and I have more men who help me. This verse is the continuation of the previous verse. At the first of this verse, the conjunction “و” (means: and) has connected the verses 33 and 34. Pickthall (1930) has conveyed it to the translated text but Qarai (2018) has not done this. It is an error that according to the model, it is an error in cohesion (conjunction).

According to the results, a total of 257 errors were identified across both translations. Qarai (2018) made 111 errors, while Pickthall's (1930) translation contained 146 errors. The percentage of errors for each translator is as follows: Qarai (2018) accounted for 43% of the errors, and Pickthall (1930) accounted for 57%. Therefore, despite being a non-native English speaker, Qarai (2018) committed fewer errors and produced a more successful translation compared to Pickthall (1930). In terms of cohesion and coherence, Qarai (2018) made 15 and 3 errors respectively, while Pickthall (1930) committed 7 errors in cohesion and 5 in coherence. In this category, Pickthall (1930), with a total of 12 errors, actually performed better than Qarai (2018), who made 18 errors overall. Regarding lexical errors, Qarai (2018) made 28 mistranslation errors compared to Pickthall's 45. Additionally, Qarai made 2 errors in recognizing secondary meanings, 23 in collocation, and 10 in conveying the appropriate emotional effect. Pickthall, on the other hand, made 3 errors in secondary meanings, 24 in collocation, and 28 in emotional effect. Both translators made 3 errors related to hyponyms and 4 errors concerning hypernyms. Altogether, Qarai (2018) committed 70 lexical errors, whereas Pickthall (1930) made 107 in this category. Therefore, Qarai (2018) demonstrated greater accuracy and produced a translation with fewer errors overall.

The word order in the TT is similar to the word order in the ST. The sentence structure of the ST is transferred to the TT unnecessarily. The sentence structure of the ST is not transferred to the TT when it should be. The role of a word is incorrectly translated.

As shown, Qarai (2018) has produced a better translation in these respects. Qarai did not commit any errors in the first category—he maintained the word order in accordance with the ST. In contrast, Pickthall (1930) made 1 error here. Regarding the second category, Qarai transferred the ST sentence structure to the TT unnecessarily only once, while Pickthall did so 3 times. The third category is the opposite situation: Qarai failed to transfer the ST sentence structure to the TT twice, whereas Pickthall made this error 4 times. In the final

category, both translators made the same number of errors, with each committing 1 error related to incorrectly changing the role of a word. Overall, Pickthall (1930) made slightly fewer semantic errors, with his translation containing 18 errors compared to Qarai (2018)'s 19. The statistics in this section indicate that both translators' performances are very close.

## **5. Discussion**

This section discusses the errors identified in the translations and explores the reasons behind the translators' mistakes. Given the crucial importance of macro-level errors, these are examined first, followed by an analysis of micro-level errors.

### *5.1. Macro-level errors*

According to Khazaeefar's error analysis model, errors in coherence, cohesion, and style fall under macro-level errors. These will be addressed in turn.

#### **5.1.1. Coherence and cohesion**

One of the key factors that engages readers is the fluency of the text. In translation, fluency and immediate comprehension are essential markers of success. The fluency and clarity of a translated text depend largely on its cohesion and coherence. Scholars studying the Holy Qur'ān widely acknowledge that it is a text with a high degree of both coherence and cohesion. In this study, Halliday and Hassan's theory of coherence and cohesion was reviewed. Cohesion relates to the "exterior beauty" of the text—how the surface elements connect—while coherence pertains to the "interior beauty," or the logical flow and meaningful connection of ideas. The translator's responsibility is to faithfully convey the cohesion elements present in the ST. For example, in Pickthall's (1930) translation, the Arabic conjunction "و" is generally rendered, but both Qarai (2018) and Pickthall omit some instances of it, such as in verses 27, 28, 29, 34, and others. It is important to recognize that in the Holy Qur'ān, every letter is purposefully placed; even the omission of a single letter can alter the interpretation of a verse.

Regarding pronoun references, the translator must carefully identify and preserve the referent if it is clearly specified in the ST. If the referent is unspecified or ambiguous, the translation should maintain that ambiguity rather than impose a specific interpretation. Coherence, meanwhile, plays a significant role in the reader's understanding of the text. While cohesion can be seen as a micro-level aspect, coherence operates at the macro level, ensuring that ideas are logically connected and the overall text makes sense. Certain errors classified as "mistranslations" in this study could also be considered coherence errors.

For instance, in verse 16, Pickthall translates the Arabic word "مَرْفُئًا" as "pillow," which is logically inappropriate. This verse addresses the Companions of the Cave, explaining that when the youths withdrew from society, sought refuge in the cave, and rejected other gods, God granted them mercy and made their hardship easier to bear. Pickthall's choice of the word "pillow" distorts this meaning, disrupting the logical flow and rendering the translation ambiguous and incoherent. In terms of coherence, Qarai (2018) delivers a better translation, while in terms of cohesion, Pickthall (1930) performs better. Most cohesion errors in both translations relate to the omission or mistranslation of conjunctions, with only three exceptions in each. Overall, Pickthall's translation demonstrates stronger cohesion.

### 5.1.2. Style of the translations

The Holy Qur'ān is neither purely prose nor purely poetry; rather, it is a unique combination of both. The translation's style should take this into account, specifically in two aspects:

1. Sentence length and word count: The number of words or the length of a verse and its translation should ideally be equal. For example, Saffarzadeh (2001) adopts an interpretive approach that often results in longer sentences in the translation. However, as much as possible, translators should avoid adding unnecessary words or synonyms that do not appear in the original text.

2. Rhyme: Most chapters of the Qur'ān are composed with rhyme, carefully organizing the syntax so that verses end with rhyming sounds. In Surah Al-Kahf specifically, nearly all verses end with the letter "l" (aa), producing a consistent end rhyme that is a defining stylistic feature.

Both translations respect the first element well, with sentence lengths in the translations closely mirroring those of the original Arabic verses. Neither includes superfluous words or unnecessary synonyms. Regarding the second element, Qarai (2018) presents a simple prose translation. Although clear and accessible, his translation does not preserve the Qur'ān's rhyming style. It focuses on conveying the meaning and content rather than the poetic form. This approach is common in most Qur'ān translations. It highlights the difficulty of maintaining both form and content simultaneously—emphasizing meaning often means sacrificing stylistic elements like rhyme. Similarly, Pickthall's translation is also prose and lacks rhyme. However, he uses an archaic, literary style of English, which can be challenging for many readers, particularly non-native speakers. His translation does not replicate the rhyme scheme of the original Qur'ān and may be less accessible due to the older language. In summary, neither translation preserves the Qur'ān's distinctive rhymed style, though both maintain close fidelity to sentence length.

## 5.2. Micro-level errors

In Khazaeefar's error analysis model, micro-level errors are categorized into: lexical errors, syntactical errors, semantic errors and pragmatic errors. Notably, no pragmatic errors were found in either translation.

### 5.2.1. Lexical errors

The first and most obvious type of lexical error is mistranslation—when a word is translated incorrectly and there is little or no similarity between ST and TT words. In this area, Qarai (2018) produced a more accurate translation, committing 28 errors compared to Pickthall (1930), who made 45 errors. Mistranslation errors generally occur when translators fail to consult essential resources like Qur'ānic dictionaries and commentaries to understand the word's meaning and context. Though Qarai is a non-native English speaker, he made fewer errors in this regard. Some errors stem from translators relying more on interpretation books than dictionaries. For example, in verse 79, the word “البحر” simply means “sea”, but was translated as “river”. This reflects a translator's misstep in rendering interpretation rather than literal translation. The translator's primary task is to translate, not interpret.

Another type of lexical error arises when the translator chooses a word's primary meaning while the secondary meaning is contextually intended. Here, interpretive books play a vital role in discerning the correct sense of polysemous words. For instance, in verse 6, Pickthall translated "أَتَاكَ" as "footsteps" (its primary meaning) instead of "deeds", which better fits the context. This underscores the importance of consulting Qur'ānic dictionaries and commentaries to recognize intended meanings. Qarai made fewer such errors (2 errors) compared to Pickthall (3 errors).

Collocation is another important linguistic feature impacting the naturalness and coherence of a translation. Some errors in collocation occur not due to unfamiliarity with the target language, but because translators prioritize conveying exact meanings over natural phraseology. This can sacrifice the natural flow and idiomatic usage of the target language. For example, in verse 10, the words "آتَانَا" and "رَحْمَةً" form a collocation in Arabic. Both translators rendered it as "grant mercy" and "give mercy," whereas "have mercy" would be a more natural collocation in English without altering the meaning. Both translators use natural collocations, when possible, but minor errors remain: Qarai made 23 collocation errors, and Pickthall made 24, indicating very similar performance.

The Qur'ān often uses words and structures to convey emphasis and emotional impact. According to Foroutan (2019, pp.132-137), there are five Arabic emphatic structures that convey this sense, along with emphatic words like "لَنْ" and "أَحَدًا" (appearing in verses 47 and 49). Properly conveying this emphasis in translation requires a deep familiarity with Arabic emphatic forms. Failure to do so results in altered emotional effects and thus an error. Qarai's translation fares better in this respect, with 10 errors compared to Pickthall's 28, demonstrating greater sensitivity to emphatic structures and words.

Hyponym and hypernym errors sometimes arise from misrecognizing word meanings, lack of direct equivalents, or cultural differences. For example, both translators used "son" as the equivalent of "وَلَدٌ". The phrase "Son of God" is familiar in English religious texts and is considered a collocation, so it resonates with English readers. Both translators made the same number of errors here: 4 hypernym errors (using overly general terms) and 3 hyponym errors (using overly specific terms). Thus, their performance on this aspect was equal.

### 5.2.2. Syntactical errors

Syntax refers to the arrangement of words to form sentences or phrases, governed by grammatical rules. In English, a simple sentence typically follows the order: subject + verb + (possibly) object. Occasionally, translators fail to follow this order correctly.

This error appears only once in Pickthall's (1930) translation, where the positions of the verb and subject are reversed. Sometimes translators attempt to mirror the structure of the original Arabic verse in the translation. According to Khazaefar, this is an error because it violates the grammatical rules of the target language. Although the syntax and word arrangement of the Qur'ān conveys special meaning—especially considering it is not simple prose—translators must use structures that are familiar to English readers, enabling fluent reading and immediate comprehension. When possible, translators should adapt sentence structure to fit the target language conventions. Consequently, transferring the ST structure

to the TT unnecessarily is considered an error. Qarai (2018) committed one such error, while Pickthall (1930) made three.

Conversely, sometimes translators fail to transfer the ST structure when necessary, resulting in a change in the verse's function. For example, in verse 15, the Arabic particle “لو” in the phrase “لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ” is used for reprimand, as noted by Qureshi. Qarai (2018) translated it as “why,” preserving the interrogative function of the original sentence. However, Pickthall (1930) rendered it as a declarative sentence, altering its function. In this category, Qarai made two errors, while Pickthall made four, indicating a more successful translation by Qarai.

Translating verbs in the Qur'ān poses particular challenges. Commentary books are valuable for understanding the contextual nuances of verb tense. Often, the grammatical tense in the Qur'ān does not match the real tense intended; for example, past tense verbs may refer to future events with certainty. The translator must recognize this through situational context and commentary insights. In this respect, both translations showed no errors. For instance, in verse 20, the present tense verb “تَفْلِحُوا” is appropriately translated into the future tense by both translators. Another syntactical error found in both translations involves the translation of the role of certain words. Both translators rendered the word “عدن” as a proper noun rather than translating its meaning, which may have facilitated better reader comprehension. Each translator made one error in this regard.

### 5.2.3. Semantic errors

Qur'ānic dictionaries are essential tools for accurately translating Qur'ānic lexicon. Semantic errors occur when the translated word and the original word are not exact equivalents and differ in their attributes. This error type is common in both translations, often due to the translators not considering all semantic features of the word. Words may appear equivalent but differ in nuances or connotations.

For example, in verse 48, the word “موعدا” is translated as “tryst.” However, “tryst” carries connotations of love, secrecy, and humor that are absent in the original word. Such errors often stem from cultural differences between languages.

Another example is the translation of “اسجدوا” as “prostrate” or “fall prostrate” by both translators, which fails to fully convey the meaning of the Arabic verb. Using transliteration accompanied by a footnote might better convey its significance.

Moreover, words may carry intensified or special meanings due to their grammatical or morphological structure, which translators may overlook. For instance, the Arabic word “الغفور” in verse 58 is a “صيغة مبالغة” (intensive form) meaning “extreme forgiver,” but Pickthall (1930) translates it simply as “forgiver”. In this category, the performance of both translators is very similar: Qarai (2018) made 19 errors, while Pickthall (1930) made 18.

## 6. Conclusions

The present research was designed to identify and analyze the errors in two English translations of Surah Al-Kahf, Pickthall's (1930) translation and Qarai's (2018) translation, using Khazaefar's model of error analysis. To this end, several Qur'ānic dictionaries and

commentaries were consulted. However, the study faced certain limitations, such as being unable to cover all chapters of the Qur'ān or analyze errors in a wider range of English translations. By examining the translations of Qarai (2018) and Pickthall (1930), both considered among the more readable English versions of the Qur'ān, a significant number of errors were identified that impact the meaning and cause deviations from the original intent. The study concludes that the non-native English translator, Qarai, was more successful in conveying the Qur'ān's message in English compared to Pickthall. This success is attributed to Qarai's deeper knowledge of the Arabic language, effective use of Qur'ānic dictionaries and commentaries, and familiarity with Arabic culture, all of which positively influenced his translation.

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## A Semantic Analysis of Mawaddah and the Islamic Philosophy of Marriage in Surah *Ar-Rum* (30:21)

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### ABSTRACT

Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum states: “And of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reflect”. This verse, which conveys the Qur'ānic philosophy of marriage, notably employs the word *mawaddah* to express affection, a choice that warrants deeper investigation. Analyzing the semantic evolution of key Qur'ānic terms is a valuable and emerging approach in Qur'ānic studies. The vocabulary of the Qur'ān often draws from the lexicon of pre-Islamic Arab culture, including terms common in tribal discourse and poetic expression. Like many such words, *mawaddah* retained its semantic core but underwent significant development in its meaning within the Qur'ānic worldview. This paper explores the semantic trajectory of *mawaddah* and offers a critical analysis of its usage in Surah Ar-Rum, verse 21. It concludes that no other synonymous term would convey the depth and intended meaning as effectively as *mawaddah* in this context.

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of forming and sustaining a family can vary between men and women, who are the primary agents in this process. These purposes may include contributing to a healthy society, ensuring the continuation of the human race, fulfilling basic needs, providing social education for future generations, preserving faith, promoting social cohesion, and fostering growth and development. However, within the framework of the Qur'ān, the purpose of family formation and the philosophy of marriage go beyond these objectives. A thoughtful reflection on Qur'ānic concepts and interpretations offers a powerful means of uncovering profound, latent knowledge for humanity.

Semantics plays a vital role in helping interpreters uncover the deeper meanings embedded in Qur'ānic conceptualizations. It enables a non-reductionist examination of terms in their original form. Given that the Qur'ān is regarded as a divine miracle, its terminology is believed to stem from divine wisdom and is not arbitrary. Thus, Qur'ānic words and expressions must be analyzed as they appear in the sacred text (Ghaeminia, 2011).

Additionally, the semantic evolution of words can shed light on interpretive differences, revealing nuanced layers of meaning through cognitive analysis and broadening the interpreter's perspective. Although many books and scholarly articles address marriage, spousal relationships, and the strengthening of family bonds, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the philosophy of marriage, particularly in relation to the semantic evolution and critical analysis of the term *mawaddah*, a key concept in this domain. This gap underscores the need for further Qur'ānic scholarship to deepen our understanding of marriage's meaning and quality.

In today's mechanized world, where machines increasingly replace human roles, a significant challenge in marital and familial relationships is the inability of couples to effectively express love. A thorough understanding of the semantic range of *mawaddah* within the philosophy of marriage can provide valuable insights. Grasping the true meaning of this term—as a foundational element of spousal relationships, has the potential to inform modern theories of marriage and may help prevent many cases of separation and divorce.

Qur'ānic research necessitates a nuanced and insightful examination of the meanings of verses and surahs, a task that is unachievable without an in-depth analysis of the Qur'ān's vocabulary and the deliberate selection of specific words over others. This approach is supported by empirical studies conducted by religious scholars who argue that uncovering the precise, underlying meanings of Qur'ānic terminology is essential for understanding the divine intent. Given the originality and depth of Qur'ānic language, its words and phrases invite multiple layers of interpretation and translation. This perspective has been emphasized by the most authoritative interpreters of the Qur'ān, namely, the infallible Shiite Imams. In their absence, their true followers are expected to engage directly with the sacred text, reflecting on the significance of key terms and expressions. Such an endeavor, however, cannot be carried out without proper tools. Semantic analysis, a relatively modern discipline that has emerged in the past century, offers a systematic method for examining meaning and achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ānic text (Izutsu, 2003).

Semantics has proven particularly effective in exploring the relationships between words and meanings, helping to reveal the rationale behind the Qur'ān's specific lexical choices. In recent years, there has been increasing scholarly interest in applying semantic analysis to the Qur'ānic text. Despite this progress, many significant terms remain underexplored,

among them, the word *mawaddah*. While its denotative meaning refers to love or desire for someone or something, the term holds rich potential for uncovering deeper connotative meanings. In an effort to address this gap in the literature, the present study aims to investigate the lexical evolution of *mawaddah* and its broader semantic implications.

## 2. This research

To serve the objectives of this study, a semantic analytic framework was employed—an approach that enhances the significance of the research by providing a structured method for uncovering meaning and interpreting texts. In the context of the Holy Qur’ān, semantic analysis is particularly valuable as it enables scholars to explore the underlying intentions and implications of divine revelation. This method investigates the relationships between words and meanings, shedding light on how the deliberate selection of specific terms in the Qur’ānic text reveals distinct semantic layers and theological insights. In recent years, growing attention has been devoted to discussions on the stability of marriage and the factors that may threaten it. From an Islamic perspective, this study’s semantic analysis illustrates how the Qur’ān uses the word *mawaddah* to underscore the essential role of affection in sustaining marital life and nurturing the bond between spouses. As such, the findings have meaningful implications for both sociolinguistics and the psychology of marriage. This research further demonstrates how the root of *mawaddah* is intricately linked to the Islamic concept of the marriage contract, reflecting the divine emphasis on emotional connection and mutual affection within this sacred agreement. Therefore, the present paper aims to examine the semantic evolution of the word *mawaddah* (i.e., affection), and analyze the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, which pertains to the philosophy of marriage. Overall, this paper addresses these questions:

RQ1: What is the semantic development of the word *mawaddah*?

RQ2: What is the significance of the word *mawaddah* in Qur’ānic terminology, particularly in the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum?

RQ3: What is the significance and relevance of *mawaddah* in relation to the love between spouses, from a Qur’ānic perspective?

## 3. Literature review

The present study employs semantic analysis and is therefore situated within the broader field of semantics in religious literature. In recent decades, notable contributions have been made in this area, most prominently by the Japanese scholar Izutsu (2002), who applied semantic analysis in his influential works *God and Man in the Qur’ān* and *Ethical-Religious Concepts in the Holy Qur’ān*. In the Iranian context, however, scholarly works on semantics in religious texts, particularly the Holy Qur’ān, remain relatively limited. Notable examples include *Semantic Changes in the Qur’ān* by Seyedi (2015), *An Introduction to Semantics* by Safavi (2004), and *An Introduction to Semantics* by Roshan (2019). While the significance of the Qur’ān is universally acknowledged, there remains a pressing need for deeper investigation into its language—especially the nuanced meanings of its words and phrases. The current body of semantic research is still limited, particularly in terms of historical, descriptive, and cognitive approaches to analyzing the originality and authenticity of Qur’ānic content. This gap underscores the importance and necessity of the present study.

Discussions surrounding the authenticity and originality of the Holy Qur'ān have existed since its revelation to the Prophet. Both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of evidence have been identified to support the originality and divine origin of its content (Waqdan, 2014). Like other studies that conduct semantic analyses of Qur'ānic vocabulary, the present research assumes the Qur'ān's authenticity as a foundational premise. It upholds the belief that the Qur'ānic teachings are entirely original—neither adapted from other sources nor plagiarized. This inherent authenticity is directly linked to a key principle in semantic analysis: the belief in non-synonymy within the Qur'ānic text. According to this view, every word, phrase, and structure in the Qur'ān has been deliberately chosen by God and cannot be substituted without loss of meaning (Yusuf, 2006; Al-Askari, 1974; Hafani, 1970). Therefore, each lexical item in the Qur'ān merits detailed semantic analysis to uncover its historical, descriptive, and cognitive properties—features that justify its use in a specific context and co-text. In recent years, a number of studies have applied semantic analysis to Qur'ānic terms. For instance, Veysi and Gorjian (2023) conducted a componential analysis of the equivalents of Qur'ānic terms; Nasiri et al. (2023) examined lexical consistency in economic verses through textual analysis; and Omidvar et al. (2025) explored the stylistic use of masculine and feminine noun forms in lexically similar verses, uncovering their implicit meanings. Despite these advances, limited research has focused on the social dimensions of Qur'ānic vocabulary—particularly the significance of specific word combinations in fostering and reinforcing family bonds.

To date, no published academic article has specifically examined the content word *mawaddah* in Surah Ar-Rum of the Holy Qur'ān to explore its various semantic layers or its relationship to the concept of marriage and the expression of affection essential for a secure and harmonious marital life. This study seeks to approach *mawaddah* more comprehensively through a semantic lens in order to uncover a deeper and more representative understanding of its meaning and interpretation. Semantic analysis offers a powerful tool for clarifying divergent interpretations of Qur'ānic expressions and for uncovering the subtle nuances embedded in the text. Through cognitive semantic analysis, it is possible to identify limitations in purely literary readings and to expand the interpretive scope of Qur'ānic scholarship (Izutsu, 2002, 2003). Given the notable gap in semantic analysis of *mawaddah* in Surah Ar-Rum—and its potential implications for reinforcing family bonds and emphasizing the value of emotional expression in marital relationships from an Islamic perspective—this study aims to provide a detailed semantic analysis of the term as it appears in the Holy Qur'ān. To achieve this, a qualitative methodology was adopted, which will be outlined in the following section, with a focus on tracing the lexical evolution of the word *mawaddah*.

#### 4. Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing a descriptive-analytic design to investigate the foundations of semantic knowledge and to extract both the lexical meaning and the broader semantic domain of the concept of *mawaddah* in the Holy Qur'ān. The primary data source throughout the study was the text of the Holy Qur'ān itself. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and followed three main steps:

1. Tracing semantic development: To address the first research question, the semantic development of *mawaddah* was traced across three historical phases—prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān, during the time of revelation, and in the immediate post-revelation period among Arab communities.

2. Analyzing contextual significance: The second step focused on examining the specific use of *mawaddah* in verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum. This involved exploring the syntagmatic relationships of the word within its immediate co-text to uncover its contextual significance.

3. Relating to marital love: The third step sought to explore how *mawaddah* relates to the Qur'ānic view of love and affection between spouses. Specifically, it examined how the term is judiciously employed in the Qur'ānic discourse to emphasize the emotional and spiritual foundations of a successful, loving, and enduring marital relationship. This step addressed the third research question.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is lexical semantics, which focuses on the meaning of words and their combinations. Lexical semantics, as defined by Cooper and Retoré (2017), primarily addresses two areas: the internal semantic structure of individual words and the semantic relationships that exist within a language's lexicon.

## 5. Results

The present study addressed three research questions and the results are also presented here in three parts, respectively.

### 5.1. The semantic development of *mawaddah*

The word *mawaddah* existed prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān and appears in various literary texts and poetry from the pre-Islamic era. The root *wadd* “وَدَّ” was used frequently during this period in different morphological forms, with a basic and central meaning associated with love and desire. Before the emergence of Islam, this root was commonly used by Arabs to express affection or longing for objects such as idols, prominent mountains, women, and horses (Farahidi, 1995; Ibn Manzur, 1993; Mostafavi, 1981; Qurashi, 1992; Mohana, 1992). Thus, the core meanings of love and desire are inherently embedded in the concept of *mawaddah*. In the non-divine, materialistic worldview of the pre-Islamic period, referred to as *Jahiliyya*, or “the age of ignorance”, *wadd* conveyed a worldly and often hedonistic sense of affection, shaped by desires for status, beauty, or power. The cultural values of this era were centered on passion, pride, and honor, frequently reflected in love for women, horses, swords, and tribal dominance. The concept of *Jahiliyya*, as described by Hawting (2011), is a theological and historical construct developed by Islamic thinkers to characterize the spiritual and moral condition of Arabian society prior to Islam. It represents an Islamic re-evaluation of that era, particularly focusing on the Hijaz region and the sociocultural environment preceding and surrounding the early life of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). In this context, the transformation of the term *mawaddah* in the Qur'ānic revelation marks a significant shift, from secular and often superficial affections to a divine, spiritually grounded expression of love.

During the time of the Qur'ānic revelation, the word *mawaddah* appears six times in the Holy Qur'ān. In five of these instances, it refers to different types of friendship or affection: 1) friendship with the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family), 2) friendship with idols, 3) friendship with true believers, 4) friendship with enemies, and 5) friendship with Muslims. In one notable verse—related to the philosophy of marriage, it specifically refers to the affectionate bond between spouses. This diverse network of meanings highlights the

semantic richness of *mawaddah*. Izutsu (2002) emphasized that vocabulary, as the sum of all semantic fields, forms a complex and interconnected network of concepts that relate to and depend on one another in myriad ways.

In particular, the use of *mawaddah* in the verse of 7 of Surah Mumtahnah and the verse of 21 of Surah Ar-Rum, alongside the phrase “يَجْعَلُ بَيْنَكُمْ” (which indicates divine agency), points to a distinction in meaning. While one verse refers to friendship among idols (وَقَالَ إِنَّمَا اتَّخَذْتُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَانًا مَّوَدَّةَ بَيْنِكُمْ (Al-Ankabut: 25), the other verses imply a form of friendship or affection that is established by God. Before the Qur’ān’s revelation, words derived from the root *wadd* and their meanings did not bear any association with divine creation or establishment. Thus, the earliest semantic elevation of this root is its contextual link to divine ordination. Following the revelation, *mawaddah* took on multiple meanings. Over time, in Qur’ānic exegesis and application, the concept of “friendship of idols” underwent a semantic transformation into the notion of “friendship of spouses, the Ahl al-Bayt, and God”. This process is identified as “semantic development” and “semantic elevation” (Ragheb Isfahani, 1995; Mostafavi, 1981; Qurashi, 1992).

## 5.2. The semantic analysis of *mawaddah* in the verse of 21 of Surah Ar-Rum

In the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, the word *mawaddah* appears alongside other key terms, most notably “آيَات” (*āyāt*), meaning “signs”. This linguistic pairing underscores that marriage and the innate attraction between spouses are considered among the divine signs of God. This raises a critical theological question: what does marriage signify in the Islamic worldview? In other words, what deeper truths or realities does marriage unveil? Scholars and commentators have offered various interpretations. Some, such as Hosseini Shah Abdul Azimi (1984), suggest that marriage and the desire for companionship reflect God’s omnipotence. Others, including Khosravani (2011), interpret marriage as a sign of both God’s monotheism and power. Boroujerdi (1987) further argues that marriage serves as a means through which one may come to know God, particularly in recognizing His oneness. Additionally, Thaqafi Tehrani (2019) views marriage as an expression of divine mercy toward humankind. Allameh Tabataba’i (1996) offers a comprehensive interpretation, asserting that marriage is a sign of God’s unity in both divinity and lordship. He explains that beginning with the verse 20 of Surah Ar-Rum, the verses collectively emphasize God’s singularity in creation and governance, refuting the polytheistic notion that separates God’s role as Creator from the worship of idols. According to Tabataba’i, the Qur’ān clarifies that true Lordship belongs solely to God, and that attributing divinity to others undermines the holistic understanding of tawhid (oneness of God).

The structure and context of the verse clearly indicate that the pronoun in “آيَاتِهِ” refers directly to Allah (الله), rather than to an implied or omitted adverbial phrase related to Allah. Accordingly, the verse should be translated as: “And among the signs of Allah is that He created for you, from yourselves, spouses so that you may find tranquility in them”. This suggests that the primary purpose of the verse is to serve as evidence for the existence of God, rather than merely to describe His attributes—such as monotheism, mercy, or lordship. While these divine attributes are indeed central to Islamic theology and implicitly acknowledged in the verse, they are not the main focus of this particular verse. Instead, the verse presupposes these qualities and employs the phenomenon of marital companionship as a direct sign pointing to the existence of a divine creator. It appears, therefore, that some scholars have conflated the intended signification of this verse—i.e., providing rational

evidence for God's existence—with the secondary implication of affirming certain divine characteristics. This interpretive confusion highlights the need for a more precise semantic and theological analysis of the verse.

In the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, there is ongoing debate regarding the referent of the pronoun “*كُمْ*” in the phrase “*خَلَقَ لَكُمْ*”. While the majority of commentators interpret the addressee as all of humanity—both men and women—it is important to consider the linguistic convention in Arabic, where masculine pronouns are often employed generically to refer to both genders. Based on this linguistic norm, it can be argued that the use of the masculine pronoun “*كُمْ*” is inclusive and metaphorical rather than exclusive to males. Nonetheless, among classical commentators, Fakhr al-Razi takes a more literal stance, arguing that the addressee is specifically men. According to his interpretation, the verse could be read as: “He created [women] for you [men],” likening the creation of women to other blessings provided for human benefit—such as animals or plants—as seen in the verse “He created for you all that is on the earth” (Al-Baqarah: 29) (Fakhr al-Razi, 1999). However, this interpretation has been widely critiqued on both linguistic and theological grounds. Evidence from other Qur’ānic passages, such as those in Surahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Ma’idah, and Al-Hujurat, supports the inclusive interpretation, asserting that God created spouses for both men and women, so that each might find tranquility in the other. Therefore, a more balanced and contextually sound reading of this verse holds that “*كُمْ*” addresses all of humanity, not men alone.

It can be concluded that the pronoun “*كُمْ*” in the verse is not restricted to the masculine gender but rather encompasses both men and women. Consequently, the subject of the verb “*لِتَسْكُنُوا*” (so that you may find tranquility) includes both genders. In the terminology of the verse, the term “*سَكَنَ*” denotes rest or stillness following movement, with one of its primary manifestations being inner and interpersonal tranquility. Marriage, therefore, is understood as a means of alleviating both internal and external anxieties, leading to a state of peace. As Tabataba’i (1996) explains, each man and woman is inherently incomplete on their own and achieves wholeness through union with the other. This complementary relationship forms the basis of harmony, allowing marriage to serve as a path toward both emotional and psychological stability, thereby fulfilling a more complete and unified vision of human existence.

In the 21st verse of Surah Ar-Rum, the word *mawaddah* is used in conjunction with several other significant lexical items, forming a syntagmatic relationship that warrants closer semantic analysis. These content words include “*آيَةً*” (sign), “*نَفْسَ*” (self/soul), “*زَوْجَ*” (spouse), “*سَكَنَ*” (tranquility), and “*رَحْمَةً*” (mercy). In the Qur’ānic context, “*آيَةً*” refers to the signs of God—manifestations that originate from a divine source and cannot be imitated by human effort (Qurashi, 1992). The term “*نَفْسَ*” is associated with human nature and the soul, frequently used in the Qur’ān to denote aspects of the self or ego. “*زَوْجَ*” signifies a spouse and is used to refer to both men and women, including animals, and thus carries a generic meaning. In this verse, “*أَزْوَاجَ*” (spouses) clearly includes both genders, indicating mutuality and reciprocity in marital relationships.

The word “*سَكَنَ*” conveys dual meanings: to dwell or reside, and to find peace or tranquility. “*رَحْمَةً*”, meaning mercy or compassion, implies generosity and benevolence.

While it can describe human emotions, it is most profoundly associated with divine grace—the compassionate blessings that flow from a higher source to those in a subordinate or needy position.

The placement of *mawaddah* in this co-text, alongside “سَكَنَ”, “زَوْجَ”, “نَفْسَ”, “آيَةَ” and “رَحْمَةً”, suggests that the unique form of affection granted by God to spouses is not merely emotional, but a divine blessing and a clear sign (“آيَةَ”) of His majesty, deserving of deep contemplation. *Mawaddah* in this context is portrayed as a sacred affection imbued by God after marriage to secure emotional harmony and enduring companionship.

Thus, the implications of the verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum for human life may be summarized as follows:

- To regard marriage, family formation, and conjugal life as signs of God’s existence and wisdom.
- To understand the purpose of marriage as transcending mere physical gratification or procreation, instead fulfilling a profound human need for emotional and spiritual tranquility.
- To recognize that the foundation of marital stability lies not primarily in legal or social frameworks, but in *mawaddah*—the unique divine affection bestowed by God upon spouses.

### 5.3. *Mawaddah and human married life*

Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum is widely regarded as one of the most significant passages in the Holy Qur’ān concerning the value of family formation and married life. Other Qur’ānic passages that underscore the central role of family in a healthy human society include *An-Nisa’* (4:34) and *Al-Baqarah* (2:187). The concept of “مودّة” (*mawaddah*) mentioned in this verse—especially in response to Fakhr al-Razi’s claim that “زَوْجَ” (*zawj*) refers exclusively to one gender—should not be understood as a one-sided expectation. Rather, both husband and wife are equally responsible for expressing *mawaddah* in order to sustain a stable and loving marital relationship. Nothing in the verse suggests that only the wife is obliged to demonstrate this affection while the husband is exempt.

The Qur’ān consistently portrays both men and women as equally capable of virtue and equally accountable for their actions, without granting spiritual superiority to either gender. Verses such as *Al-Ma’idah* (5:38), *Aal Imran* (3:195), and *Al-Hujurat* (49:13) exemplify this balanced and inclusive framework. Further evidence for the mutual nature of *mawaddah* is found in the same verse (*Ar-Rum* 30:21), where the plural pronoun “كُم” (“*kum*”) is used. As previously noted, this pronoun typically addresses both male and female audiences in the Qur’ān, as seen in verses like *Al-Baqarah* (2:183).

Perhaps the most compelling support comes from *An-Nisa’* (4:1), where God states that both men and women were created from a single essence or “نَفْسَ” (*nafs*). According to Allameh Tabataba’i (1996), the term *nafs* in this context refers to the shared human nature that defines humanity and distinguishes it from other beings. Similarly, the phrase “لِتَسْكُنُوا” (“*litaskunū ilayhā*”) includes both sexes as its subject. As previously discussed, the verb



“سَكَنَ” (“sakan”) denotes the attainment of tranquility and peace after a state of movement or restlessness. Thus, marriage is depicted as a pivotal moment in human life, wherein both men and women find mental and emotional peace through one another. Because of their inherent differences, they are drawn to each other and, in coming together, achieve mutual completion and comfort (Tabataba’i, 1996).

Mawaddah, as previously discussed, essentially denotes desire and implies affection and love. Its root, “وَدَّ”, signifies affection, as also seen in other Qur’ānic verses, such as Maryam (19:96), where God promises “mawaddah” to the true believers. According to Tabataba’i (1996), this divine affection is a gift granted to those who sincerely believe in God.

The term “mawaddah” is often mentioned alongside “رَحْمَةً” (rahmah), indicating mercy or compassion. The root of rahmah “رَحِمَ” conveys a sense of nurturing and protection, as explained by Ibn Manzur (1993). Through marriage, spouses are expected to exhibit both “mawaddah” and “rahmah.” However, a distinction exists between these two qualities: while rahmah can be one-directional (for instance, compassion from one spouse to the other), mawaddah is inherently reciprocal (Mostafavi, 1981). In the context of marital life, which is fundamentally shaped by mutual emotional and practical needs, the significance of mawaddah becomes especially prominent.

To summarize what has been discussed thus far, the root “وَدَّ” was used in pre-Islamic Arabic to describe earthly love and desire. Prior to the Qur’ānic revelation, its derivatives were not associated with divine or spiritual love. However, with the advent of Islam, the semantic field of “mawaddah” evolved. Love once directed toward idols came to signify profound bonds such as the love between spouses, the love of the Ahl al-Bayt, and love for God. This transformation reflects a meaningful elevation in the term’s conceptual and moral scope.

In verse 21 of Ar-Rum, the word “mawaddah” implies a form of love that is both expressive and mutual. That is, it affects both spouses and is observable through action and responsiveness. This mutual influence emerges from attentiveness to one another’s emotional needs and fosters a sustained cycle of affection, where each partner’s response prompts further acts of care, until, of course, conflict or disruption intervenes (Zamakhshari, 1986).

Some scholars also argue that “mawaddah” conveys the intensity of love. This view stems from the root “وَدَّ”, which, in one interpretation, means “nail” or “mountain.” Thus, mawaddah is likened to a nail embedded firmly in a wall or to a mountain, two-thirds of which is anchored beneath the earth—stable, unmoving, and deeply rooted (Hosseini Shah Abdul Azimi, 1984). In this metaphor, mawaddah resides in the depths of the heart and does not waver or vanish easily.

Therefore, in real life, “mawaddah” is best understood as a combination of reciprocal love and sincerity, arising from genuine faith. Without sincerity, mawaddah ceases to exist in its true form. Mere verbal expressions of affection are insufficient if the heart harbors jealousy or resentment. As such, mawaddah contains a depth of meaning not present in similar terms like “مَحَبَّة” (mahabbah), “رَحْمَةً” (rahmah), or “أُلْفَةً” (ulfah).

In Tafsir Nemooneh, Makarim Shirazi (1995) addresses the question of why the two words “مودة” (*mawaddah*) and “رَحْمَة” (*rahmah*) appear together in verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum. He explains that these two concepts constitute the fundamental binding forces of human society. Just as a grand and magnificent building is made of individual bricks and stones, so too is society composed of individuals. Without a cohesive bond among these disparate parts, neither a building nor a society can exist. The Creator, who designed humanity for social life, has instilled this essential connection within the soul and nature of every human being.

From this commentary, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. Marriage and family formation are among the essential means by which a thoughtful and prudent individual may either attain or perfect a divine worldview and deepen their understanding of existence.

2. Verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum restricts the true privileges and spiritual benefits of marriage to a particular group: those who are reflective and thoughtful, or as the Qur’ān describes them, “يَتَفَكَّرُونَ” (those who reflect).

Furthermore, it may be inferred that, from the Islamic perspective, marriage serves multiple profound purposes:

- First, it is a path to knowing God and acquiring divine knowledge.
- Second, it is a means through which God grants peace and tranquility to the human heart.
- Third, it forms the foundation and essence of the family and perpetuates the love and affection that God places in the hearts of a man and a woman after marriage.

Therefore, one of the principal goals of marriage is to achieve a deep and abiding tranquility through the union of soul and body between the spouses. This tranquility, described in the Qur’ān as “سَكِينَة” (*sakīnah*), is the result of attaining mutual “*mawaddah*” between husband and wife. The one who instills this *mawaddah* in the hearts of human beings is none other than God Himself (Khazā’ī Neyshaburi, 1987; Ghorbani Lahiji, 1995).

## 6. Conclusion

The term *mawaddah* appears six times in the Holy Qur’ān. Five of these instances refer to various forms of love—towards the Ahl al-Bayt (the family of the Prophet), idols, believers, enemies, and Muslims. In one notable instance, it refers to the affection between spouses, in the verse concerning the philosophy of marriage. With the revelation of the Qur’ān, words took on new life, and this transformation can largely be attributed to the divine, monotheistic worldview of the Qur’ān. This perspective elevated the meanings of words by aligning them with a higher theological and anthropological framework. The semantic development of *mawaddah* illustrates this transformation. The root meaning of the word underwent a kind of divine refinement. Over time, and particularly through Qur’ānic interpretation and application, its use shifted. For example, the notion of love once associated with idol worship evolved into a concept denoting affection between spouses—reflecting its deepened spiritual and ethical dimension in divine discourse. This evolution

represents both a semantic development and an elevation in meaning. An analytical study of the philosophy of marriage, particularly in light of the verse 21 of Surah Ar-Rum, reveals that marriage and family are among the signs of God. The purpose of forming a family goes beyond fulfilling sexual desires or merely continuing the human race. Rather, marriage is intended to foster spiritual tranquility, and the true strength of the family lies not in social or legal structures, but in *mawaddah*, the love and affection instilled by God between spouses.

God has provided means in the Qur'ān to sustain and nurture this affection. One of the most important of these is *mawaddah*, a love expressed in a way that is perceptible to the other, creating a mutual and ongoing exchange of emotion. It is through this reciprocal dynamic that marital affection becomes enduring and spiritually enriching. Reflecting on the word *mawaddah* reveals its profound depth. It conveys a meaning and divine intention that no other synonymous term—such as *rahmah* (mercy), *ulfah* (intimacy), or *mahabbah* (love)—can fully capture. Though psychology views love as a vibrant, life-giving spring flowing through diverse channels, sustaining a shared life between two individuals of differing personalities and backgrounds requires a constant, multifaceted expression of love. This love must manifest in words, behaviors, and interactions—continually renewed and made evident.

It is striking to observe that over 1,400 years ago, the Qur'ān emphasized this very principle, highlighting the foundational role of *mawaddah* in marital life. The divine choice of this term underscores the richness and depth of meaning intended. None of the other commonly used terms for love carry the same theological weight or expressive capacity as *mawaddah*. Finally, while this discussion has focused on the semantic development of *mawaddah*, it is important to recognize that this is only one aspect of a broader semantic analysis. A more comprehensive understanding of Qur'ānic terminology would also require attention to its descriptive and cognitive dimensions—areas which lie beyond the scope of the present study.

Semantic analysis serves as a powerful tool for exploring the meanings of individual words and word combinations, ultimately enhancing the understanding of a text. In the context of the Holy Qur'ān, its importance lies in uncovering the deeper intentions and implications behind divine revelations. Through examining the relationships between words and meanings, semantic analysis reveals how specific vocabulary and phrasing in the Qur'ān engage with various semantic layers. In recent years, there has been growing discussion around the stability of married life and the factors that may threaten it. From an Islamic perspective, this semantic exploration highlights how God's deliberate use of the word *mawaddah* reflects what is essential for sustaining a loving and successful family life—namely, the active expression of love between spouses. The findings of this study have broader implications for both sociolinguistics and the psychology of marriage, as they emphasize the linguistic and emotional significance of affection within marital relationships. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that the root of *mawaddah* is closely linked to the Islamic understanding of the marital contract and the divine value placed on affection within the framework of married life.

Given the authenticity and originality of the content of the Holy Qur'ān, many content-rich words with profound meanings warrant careful exploration through semantic analysis. It is widely believed that the words of the Qur'ān are irreplaceable, and therefore, their selection is deliberate and purposeful—requiring thorough linguistic and contextual justification. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research related to the historical, descriptive, and cognitive semantic analyses of similar words and word combinations found

in the Qur'ān and broader Islamic sources. Accordingly, it is recommended that scholars undertake further research in this area to uncover Islam's genuine and appreciative perspective on the various roles humans fulfill in life—particularly within social and marital contexts. The present study employed historical semantic analysis to trace the development and transformation of the word *mawaddah*. In addition to the historical dimension, semantic analysis includes descriptive and cognitive components, which can offer further insight into the philosophy of marriage and the emotional and relational dynamics between spouses. Moreover, ongoing debates regarding gender equality in Islam, especially in relation to the Qur'ān, could be revisited through the lens of semantic analysis. Such investigations have the potential to challenge unfounded patriarchal interpretations and to highlight the humanitarian and egalitarian values embedded in Islamic teachings. Semantic analysis enables researchers to identify the distinctive features of Qur'ānic vocabulary that make each term uniquely suited to its context. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate modern, IT-based linguistic tools—such as computational language processing—to systematically examine the occurrences and co-occurrences of key terms in the Qur'ān. This approach would align Islamic scholarship with current trends in semantic and linguistic research worldwide.

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