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Cultural and Linguistic Context in Lexical Equivalence: A Comparative Study of Five English Translations of the Holy Qur'ān

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the role of context in the selection of equivalents by translators with diverse worldviews, following the framework of Lotfi Gaskaree et al. (2023). A qualitative research design was employed, and verses were selected using purposive sampling. Five widely known English translations of the Holy Qur'ān were analyzed. The data encompassed nine Surahs, which were semantically analyzed to investigate the variation in lexical equivalents across the selected versions. The study focused on understanding the translators' perspectives in selecting English equivalents for Qur'ānic vocabulary. Specifically, translations of Surah Al-Baqarah were examined, as rendered by Arberry, Shakir, Pickthall, and Yusuf Ali. Selected excerpts from each version were analyzed to explore differences in the Arabic-to-English lexical choices. Findings revealed notable differences in the translators' degrees of familiarity and intimacy with Islamic and religious concepts. Translators influenced by Western worldviews tended to favor literal translations at the morphemic level, while those with Eastern perspectives leaned toward more meaningful or communicative translations. These variations highlight that English lexical choices in Qur'ānic translations are heavily context-bound and influenced by the translators' cultural and ideological affiliations. The study acknowledges a limitation in the sample size, noting that a broader dataset exceeding nine Surahs could yield more comprehensive insights. Nonetheless, the findings offer valuable implications for cross-cultural translation theory, demonstrating that translators from different cultural backgrounds select lexical equivalents based on their worldviews. This study serves as a preliminary contribution to further semantic and contextual research in Qur'ānic translation.

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1. Introduction

Context plays a vital role in the comprehension of language and communication. In the realm of translation, a deep understanding of the context in which a word or sentence appears is essential for accurately conveying the intended meaning. This process involves not only analyzing the linguistic elements but also considering the cultural, social, and historical factors that shape interpretation. By thoroughly examining the background of the source text (ST), translators can capture the nuances and subtleties embedded in the original message. Such attention to contextual detail distinguishes a successful translation from a mere word-for-word rendering.

In essence, context serves as a bridge between the source and target languages, enabling a more accurate and meaningful transfer of information. Linguistic context, in particular, refers to the surrounding linguistic elements that influence the interpretation of a word, phrase, or sentence. No word exists in isolation; rather, words interact within a broader textual framework, and this interaction ultimately shapes meaning. For example, consider a word from Surah Al-Imran, verse 185 (see Excerpt 1). Arberry translates the term as "wage", while Shakir uses "reward", highlighting how different linguistic contexts inform lexical choices. The key distinction between "wage" and "reward" lies in the nature of compensation. A "wage" typically refers to a fixed payment given for work over a specific period, whereas a "reward" implies compensation based on merit or performance. Thus, the choice of one term over the other carries different connotations, emphasizing how context guides translators in capturing both literal and implied meanings.

A sentence is often regarded as the basic unit of translation. However, this does not imply that sentence-for-sentence translation equates to element-for-element substitution (Lotfi Gaskaree et al., 2023). According to Lotfi Gaskaree et al., context-bound translation equips translators with both semantic and pragmatic cues, enabling them to render precise or near-equivalents in the target text (TT). Linguistically relevant features may not always contribute directly to the communicative function of an utterance, but they still reflect the structural characteristics of the source or target language. A context-bound translation framework proves particularly effective in cross-cultural translation, where literal renderings may fail to capture cultural nuance. Other translation theories have also highlighted the importance of context in determining equivalents. Nida's (1964) theory of dynamic equivalence and Toury's (1995) descriptive translation studies both stress the pragmatic dimension of language in translation. Nida and Taber (1969) emphasized meaning and effect over formal correspondence, advocating for translations that reflect the intended impact on the target audience. Similarly, Toury's descriptive translation studies theory adopts an empirical, target-oriented approach that analyzes existing translations, viewing translation as a culturally and socially embedded practice rather than a prescriptive process.

According to Peachy (2013), translating any literary text, such as the Holy Qur'ān, from its original language into another requires not only advanced proficiency in both languages but also a deep understanding of their respective literatures and cultures. Each language functions as a unique relational system, wherein linguistic units (such as sounds, words, and meanings) derive their identity and significance from their relationships with other units within the same language system. These units do not possess inherent or independent meaning outside of this network. Rather, they serve as points of reference within a structured system of relations, and their interpretation is contextually bound to the linguistic and cultural framework in which they operate.

The interpretation of a sentence or utterance is shaped by the speaker's intended effect on the listener, often conveyed through adherence to social conventions (Obeidat et al., 2020). Intentional, communicative, and conventional speech acts are heavily influenced by the specific circumstances in which they occur. During social interactions, interlocutors face various constraints that affect their use of language. As a result, linguistic utterances may be interpreted differently depending on contextual factors and communicative goals. Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, examines elements such as implicature, presupposition, illocutionary force, and deixis. In essence, pragmatics incorporates both linguistic knowledge and extra-linguistic (encyclopedic) knowledge to fully interpret meaning in context. It bridges the gap between language form and language use, emphasizing how meaning is shaped by situational and cultural context.

Translators of the Holy Qur'ān must apply appropriate translation techniques and procedures when dealing with micro-translation units, whether at the word, phrase, clause, or sentence level. The acceptability of a Qur'ānic translation depends on fulfilling several key aspects: accuracy, clarity, naturalness, relevance, and the preservation of pragmatic meaning. Consequently, the translator bears the responsibility of ensuring acceptable equivalence between the source language and the target language, whether in terms of form, meaning, or intended meaning. Translation failure—or untranslatability—occurs when it becomes impossible to reproduce functionally relevant features of the original text within the contextual meaning of the target language. When the target language lacks formal or structural equivalents, certain texts or items become untranslatable, resulting from fundamental differences in the linguistic substance of the source language and the target language. To address this, the translator must grasp the essence of each sentence within its co-text and context—that is, in relation to the sentences that precede or follow it, as well as the broader physical and extra-linguistic factors. This understanding should then be expressed in the target language without resorting to element-for-element replacement or overly rigid adherence to the source form (Ahoud Aldhafeeri, 2022).

There is no direct one-to-one correspondence between elements of the source and target languages; in other words, source language units cannot simply be replaced by their supposed equivalents in the target language. This is due to inherent differences in linguistic form and substance, including variations in denotational and collocational ranges, as well as figurative and idiomatic usage. As Obeidat et al. (2020) note, different text types and translation purposes necessitate the use of different strategies. Cultural untranslatability arises when a situational feature that is functionally appropriate in the source language text does not exist in the culture associated with the target language. In such cases, the translator faces the challenge of rendering meaning in a way that preserves functional equivalence, even when a direct cultural counterpart is lacking.

The purpose of this study is to compare selected lexical equivalents of expressions in the Holy Qur'ān in order to examine translators' approaches to rendering appropriate translations. Among the various forms of language variation, not all are equally evident in the translation process. In particular, style, register, and social varieties play a significant role in shaping translation choices. To effectively represent the source language variety, a word-for-word translation is often insufficient. Once the translator identifies the variety present in the ST, they must determine how such variation can be appropriately realized in the target language. This is crucial because linguistic variety carries both meaning and sociocultural value. Therefore, the translator must strive to reflect the source language

variety in the target language to preserve the communicative and cultural significance embedded in the original (Imran Khan, 2016).

Denotatively identical lexical items across languages often differ in their lexical forms and layers of meaning. They vary in their lexicalization strategies and employ diverse grammatical devices to express the same concepts. These differences can be characterized in terms of connotative and stylistic meaning (Al-Awd, 2024). The quality of a translation improves as the number of situational features shared by both the ST and TT increases. The speaker's intended meaning is inherently tied to contextual meaning, and the choices and intentions of language users significantly impact effective communication.

The research gap addressed in this study concerns the underexplored influence of translators' worldviews on their selection of lexical equivalents in nine Surahs across five different English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Existing English translations often struggle to accurately convey the messages of the Arabic ST. This difficulty arises partly from translators' insufficient familiarity with either the source or target languages, resulting in a lack of mastery over the subject matter and content. Such deficiencies are evident in both the comprehension of the source language and the transfer of meaning into the target language. To investigate the variations in lexical equivalence across these well-known translated versions, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: How do translators' cultural worldviews influence lexical equivalence in Qur'ānic translations?

2. Methodology

A comparative, corpus-based approach was employed to analyze English and Arabic equivalents in nine Surahs of the Holy Qur'ān. This approach was chosen to investigate how translators' worldviews influence their strategies for rendering the same words in the TT. Data were selected through purposive sampling from among the 114 Surahs. Five widely used English translations of the Holy Qur'ān, all published in the 20th century, were non-randomly selected for this study: Rodwell (1974), Pickthall (1930), Yusuf Ali (1977), Arberry (1972), and Shakir (1982). These versions were chosen primarily based on their popularity in university translation courses. Students enrolled in courses such as "Review of Translated Islamic Texts I and II" study these translations to learn how to render Qur'ānic verses and critically evaluate the quality of equivalents across different versions. Rendering contextually and culturally appropriate equivalents is a central focus of these courses, making these five translations foundational teaching materials. Ethical considerations guided the selection process to ensure the inclusion of versions translated by both Eastern and Western translators, providing a balanced perspective for comparison.

2.1. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected based on the above-mentioned versions of the English versions of the translated Holy Qur'ān that are popular among other versions. They were regarded as the corpus that is compared and contrasted following Lotfi Gaskaree et al (2023). The comparison and contrast were made from linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives. The purpose of comparing the translated texts was to display the main differences in translations regarding meaning, style, and message. The selected verses for comparison were purposive, but all the verses were checked in the five copies by the researcher and his colleague to arrive at the reliance on qualitative comparisons with the intercoder reliability

index. The result of the intercoder reliability indicated an agreement with the value of 95 percent based on Pearson Correlation Analysis. Thus, the data were analyzed via two main criteria, including Western vs. Eastern cultural backgrounds and frequency of contested terms. All the bodies of the compared verses are not used in the excerpts of the article since the space of the article is very limited. More than 250 verses were examined to check the comparisons of ST and TT. But some of them are presented in the paper.

It should be noted that if the principles of translation can be taken into account, the most frequently translated texts use the literal translation. There are various types of translation, including literal, formal (grammatical), semantic, dynamic, communicative, and free. Most of the translations of the Holy Qur'ān (from literal to free) have remained unchanged in their literal translation. e.g., in the translation of the chapter 'Al-Kosar', Shakir translated it as 'the Heavy Fountain'. While Shakir presented its phonetic translation, 'Al-Kauthar'. Also, in finding the English equivalent for the Arabic word 'Aye', Arberry used the equivalent' Sigh'. But Shakir employed 'Communication'. Accordingly, we may regard the varieties of Islamic translation styles as types of translation continuum in Islamic text, ranging between literal, contextual, and free translations displayed in Figure 1.

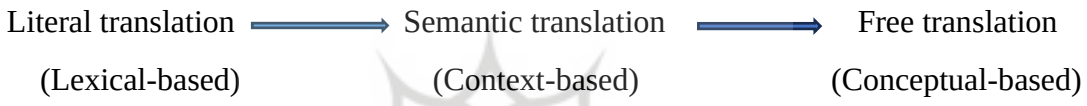

Figure 1. Types of Translation Continuum in Islamic Texts

3. Results

Tables 1 to 4 present several excerpts illustrating the variations in vocabulary equivalents related to the translators' Western and Eastern worldviews. These samples are drawn from nine Surahs. By examining the English translations of the Glorious Qur'ān by Rodwell, Arberry, and other translators who were not native Arabic speakers, we observe differing interpretations at both the sentence and text levels. This lack of native proficiency often leads to misinterpretations of key lexicons and results in literal translations. In this type of translation—considered a subfield of linguistics—translators transfer structural elements from the source language to the target language, frequently neglecting the semantic depth of the Qur'ānic texts. The following excerpts (see excerpts 1 to 4) have been selected to highlight the importance of preserving meaning within context. Bold-faced words and phrases emphasize the variety of lexical equivalents.

As Excerpt 1 illustrates, in the first example Arberry and Shakir translated "أَجوُرَكُم" as "be paid in full wages" and "paid fully your reward." In the second sample, they used "God-fearing" and "guard against evil" as verbs for "وَتَتَقُّوا", and "surely that is true constancy" and "surely this is one of the affairs which should be determined upon" for the original Arabic "فَانَ ذَلِکَ مِن عَزمِ الأُمُورِ". In the third example, they both use the same translation: "whenever you may be, death will overtake you" for the clause "أَينَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدرِكُكُمُ المَوتُ". For the fourth sample, Arberry translated "وَكَفَى بِالله شَهِيدًا" to English as "God suffices for a witness." He tends to use verbs rather than adjectives, as in Shakir's "Allah is sufficient as a witness." For the verse "وَعَسَى أَنتَكرَهُوا شَيئاً وَ هُوَ خَيرٌ لَكُم", Arberry gave the equivalent "Yet it may happen that you will hate a thing which is better for you," using a comparative adjective. But Shakir translated it as "And it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you." For the sixth sample, they used "upon those" and "those on whom" for the Arabic "أُولَئِکَ علَيهِم" in "... أُولَئِکَ

عَلَيهِم صَلَوَتٌ مِن رَبِهِم وَ رَحمَةٌ". In the last example, for the Arabic "رَفَعَ بَعضَكُم فَوقَ بَعضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ", Arberry employed "raised some of you in rank," and Shakir used the phrase "raised by various grades."

Table 1. Arberry's and Shakir's English Translations of Verses (Excerpt 1)

Arberry's Translation	Shakir's Translation	Verses
1. You shall surely be paid in full **wages** on the Day of Resurrection	1.**and** you shall only be paid fully your **reward** on the resurrection day	«...وَانَمَا تُوفَونَ أَجوُرَكُم يَومَ القِيَامَه...» (آل عمران: ۱۸۵)
2. but if you are patient and **God-fearing**, surely that is true **constancy**	2. and if you are patient and **guard against evil**, surely this is one of the affairs which should be **determined** upon	«... وَ ان تَصبِرُوا وَتَتَقُوا وَ فَانَ ذَلِکَ مِن عَزمِ الأُمُورِ...» (آل عمران: ۱۸۶)
3. Whenever you **may be**, death will overtake you	3.Whenever **you are**, death will overtake you	«أَينَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدرِكُكُمُ المَوتُ...» (النساء: ۷۸)
4. **God** suffices for a witness	4.and **Allah** is sufficient as a witness	«...وَكَفَى بِالله شَهِيدًا» (النساء:۷۹)
5. **Yet** it may happen that you will **hate** a thing which is **better** for you	5. **and** it may be that you **dislike** a thing while it is **good** for you	«...وَعَسَى أَنتَكرَهُوا شَيئاً وَ هُوَ خَيرٌ لَكُم...» (آالبقره: ۲۱۶)
6. **upon those** rest blessings and mercy from their Lord,	6. Those are they **on whom** are blessings and mercy from their Lord,	«...أوُلَئِکَ عَلَيهِم صَلَوَاتٌ مِن رَبِهِم وَ رَحمَةٌ...» (البقره: ۱۵۷)
7. and has raised some of you in **rank** above others, that He **may** try you in what He has given you.	7. and raised some of you above others by various **grades**, that He **might** try you by what He has given you.	«... وَ رَفَعَ بَعضَكُم فَوقَ بَعضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَبلُوَكُم فِی مَاأَ اتَكُم...»(الأنعام: ۱۶۵)

In the second excerpt, we observe that Arberry used "and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?'" while Yusuf Ali rendered it as "and made them testify concerning themselves, 'Am I not your Lord who cherishes and sustains you?'" for the Arabic "...وَأَشهَدَهُم عَلَى أَنفُسِهِم أَلَستُ بِرَبِكُم...". For the phrase "نُفَصِل الأيَاتِ" in the second sample, they provided the English equivalents: "distinguish the signs" and "explain the signs in detail." Arberry and Yusuf Ali translated the Arabic "لا تُضَارَ بِوَلَدِهَا" as "pressed for her child" and "treated unfairly on account of his child," respectively. As seen in the sixth sample, Arberry rendered the sentence "...لَا نُكَلِفُ نَفساً اِلَا وُسعَهَا..." as "We charge not any soul save to its capacity," whereas Yusuf Ali translated it as "No burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear." In the fourth sample, they translated the phrase "...تَستَرضِعُوا أَولادَكُم..." as "nursing for your children" and "foster-mother for your offspring," respectively. In the

seventh example, “God’s covenant” and “the covenant of Allah” were given for the Arabic phrase “بِعَهدِاللهِ”.

Table 2. Arberry’s and Yusuf Ali’s English Translations of Verses (Excerpt 2)

Arberry’s Translation	Yusuf Ali’s Translation	Verses
1. and made them testify touching themselves,” Am **I not** your Lord?”	1. and made them testify concerning themselves, “**Am I not** your Lord who cherishes and sustains you?”	«... وَ أَشهَدَهُم عَلَى أَنفُسِهِم أَلَستُ بِرَبِّكُم...» (الاعراف:۱۷۲)
2. So we **distinguish** the signs; and haply they will return.	2. Thus do we **explain** the signs in detail! and perchance they may turn unto us.	«... وَ كَذَلِكَ نُفَصِلُ الأياتِ وَ لَعَلَهُم يَرجِعُونَ...» (الاعراف: ۱۷۴)
3. a mother shall not be **pressed** for her child	3. no mother shall be **treated** unfairly on account of his child	«لَا تُضَارَ وَالِدِه بِوَلَدِهَا...» (البقره: ۲۳۳)
4. And if you desire to seek **nursing** for your children	4. If ye decide on a **foster-mother** for your offspring	«...وَ اِن أَرَادَتُم أَن تَستَرضِعُوا أَولادَكُم...» (البقره: ۲۳۳)
5. and that you slay not the soul God has forbidden, except **by right**.	5. take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except **by way of justice and law**	«... وَلَا تَقتُلُوا لنَفسَ الَّيحَرَمَ أَللهُ اِلَابِالحَقِ...»(الأنعام: ۱۵۱)
6. We charge not any soul save to its **capacity**.	6.No burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can **bear**.	«... لَا نُكَلِفُ نَفساً اِلَا وُسعَهَا...» (الأنعام: ۱۵۲)
7. And fulfil **God’s** covenant	7.and fulfill the covenant of **Allah.**	«... وَ بِعَهدِاللهِ أَوفُوا...» (الأنعام: ۱۵۲)

The third excerpt shows that Arberry and Pickthall had different lexicalizations in their translations. In the first sample, they used “wage and sorrow” and “reward and grieve” for the Arabic words “أَجرُ” and “يَحزَنُونَ”. In the next example, Arberry translated the sentence “...قَولٌ مَعرُوفٌ وَمَغفِرَةٌ خَيرٌ مِن صَدَقَةٌ يَتبَعُهَا أَذًى...” as “Honourable words and forgiveness are better than a freewill offering followed by injury,” while Pickthall rendered it as “A kind word with forgiveness is better than almsgiving followed by injury.” For the third sentence, “... وَاللهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ”, both translators used the same equivalent: “and God is All-embracing and All-knowing.” In sample four, Arberry and Pickthall translated the Arabic word “فَنِعِمَّا” as “excellent” and “well,” respectively. For the Arabic adverbs “سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً”, they used “secretly and in public” and “stealth and openly.” In the sixth example, they shared the same equivalent—“He is the best of providers”—for the Arabic “...وَهُوَ خَيرُ الرَّازِقِينَ”. In the final sample, for the Arabic verb “تُنفِقُوا”, Arberry used “expend,” while Pickthall used “spend”.

Table 3. Arberry's and Pickthall's English Translations of Verses (Excerpt 3)

Arberry's Translation	Pickthall's Translation	Verses
1.Their **wage** is with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they **sorrow**.	1.Their **reward** is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they **grieve.**	«...لَهُم أَجرُهُم عِندَ رَبِهِم وَ لَا خَوفٌ عَلَيهِم وَ لَا هُم يَحزَنُونَ» (البقره: ٢٦٢)
2.Honourable words and forgiveness, are better than a **freewill offering** followed by injury.	2. A kind word with forgiveness is better than **almsgiving** followed by injury	«...قَولَ مَعرُوفٌ وَ مَغفِرَةٌ خَيرٌ مِن صَدَقَةٌ يَتبَعُهَا أَذَىً...» (البقره: ٢٦٣)
3. and **God** is All-embracing and All-knowing	3. **Allah** is All-embracing and All-knowing	«... وَأَاللهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ» (البقره: ٢٦٨)
4. If you publish your freewill offering is excellent; but if you **conceal** them, and give them to the poor that is better for you.	4. If ye publish your almsgiving, it is well, but if ye **hide** it and give it to the poor, it will be better for you.	«اِن تُبدُوا الصَدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَاهِيَ وَ اِن تُخفُوهَا وَ تُؤتُوهَا الفُقَرَاه...» (البقره: ٢٧١)
5.Those who expend their wealth night and day, **secretly** and **in public**,	5. Those who spend their wealth by night and day, by **stealth** and **openly**,	«أَلَذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَموَالَهُم بِاليَلِ وَالنَهَارِ سِرَا وَ عَلَانِيه...»(البقره: ٢٧٤)
6.He is the **best** of providers.	6. And He is the **Best** of providers.	«... وَهُوَ خَيرُالرَازِقِينَ» (سبأ: ٣٩)
7. You will not attain piety until you **expend** of what you love.	7. You will attain unto piety until ye **spend** of that which ye love.	«لَن تَنَالُوا البِرَ حَتَى تُنفِقُوا مِمَا تُحِبُونَ...»(آل عمران: ٩٢)

Arberry and Rodwell translated the verb "يُقِيمُونَ" in the first example as "perform" and "observe," respectively. In the next, they used "Hereafter" and "the life to come" for the Arabic equivalent "بِالأخِرَةِ". In the third verse, "وَجَعَلنَاكُم شُعُوباً وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا", Arberry presented the translation "and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another," while Rodwell rendered it as "and We have divided you into peoples and tribes that you might know one another." The fourth example, "قُل لَئِنِ اجتَمَعَتِ الانسُ وَالجِنُّ عَلَى أَن يَأتُوا بِمِثلِ هَذَا القُرآنِ", was translated by Arberry as "Say: If men and jinn banded together to produce the like of this Koran, they would never produce its like," and by Rodwell as "And say: Verily, were men and Djinn assembled to produce the like of this Koran, they could not produce its like." For the sentence "وَقُل جَاءَ الحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ البَاطِلُ..."، Arberry translated it as "falsehood has vanished away," while Rodwell wrote "falsehood is vanished". For the verse "يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُم", both translators provided similar renderings: "O men, fear ye your Lord." In the final example, "وَمَا تَدرِى نَفسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرضٍ تَمُوتُ", Arberry translated it as "no soul knows what it shall earn tomorrow," while Rodwell offered "but no soul knoweth what it shall have gotten on the morrow."

Table 4. Arberry's and Rodwell's English Translations of Verses (Excerpt 4)

Arberry's Translation	Rodwell's Translation	Verses
1. who believe in the Unseen and **perform** the prayers,	1. who believe in the unseen, who **observe** prayers	«... لَذِينَ يُؤمِنُونَ بِالغَيبِ وَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَلَاتَه...»(البقره: ٣)
2. and have faith in **the Hereafter**;	2. and full faith have they in **the life to come**;	«وَ...بِالأخِرَتِه هُم يُوقِنُونَ» (البقره: ۴)
3. and appointed you races and tribes, that you may **know** one another.	3. and we have divided you into peoples and tribes that you might **have knowledge** one of another.	«وَ...جَعَلنَاكُم شُعُوباً وَ قَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا...» (الحجرات: ١٣)
4. Say: if men and jinn **banded together** to produce the like of this Koran, they would never produce its like.	4. Say: Verily, were men and Djinn **assembled** to produce the like of this Koran, they could not produce its like	«قُل لَئِن اِجتَمَعَتِ الانسُ وَالجِنُ عَلَى أَن يَأتُوا بِمِثلِ هَذَى القُرآنِ»(الأسراء: ٨٨)
5. and say: **The truth** has come, and falsehood has vanished away;	5. and say: **truth** is come and falsehood is vanished	«وَ قُل جَاءَ الحَقُ وَ زَهَقَ البَاطِلُ...»(الأسراء: ٨١)
6. O men, fear **your** Lord,	6. O men, fear **ye** your Lord,	«يَا أَيُهَاالنَاسُ اتَقُوا رَبَكُم» (القمان: ٣٣)
7. no soul knows what it shall **earn** tomorrow;	7.but no soul knoweth what it shall **have gotten** on the tomorrow;	«وَ مَا تَدرِى نَفسٌ بِأَيِ أَرضٍ تَمُوتٌ» (القمان: ٣۴)

5. Discussion

The research question explores how translators' cultural worldviews influence lexical equivalence in Qur'ānic translations. One significant challenge in translating the lexical items of the Holy Qur'ān lies in their context-bound nature. Factors such as time, place, and historical events can affect the selection of lexical equivalents by translators. Another layer of complexity arises from differing Islamic translation styles, which can be viewed as existing along a continuum, as illustrated in Figure 1. Additionally, translators with Islamic backgrounds may tend to select more accurate equivalents, although this may occur without accounting for certain confounding variables.

This distinction is reflected in the study's findings, where Western translators often favored literal translation more than their Eastern counterparts. Literal, context-bound, and free (or communicative) translations occupy different positions on a spectrum of strategies used to convey Islamic terminology in the target language. Among these, semantic translation is often regarded as a more reliable style of Qur'ānic interpretation, as it prioritizes conveying the meaning of the text over a word-for-word rendering. By focusing on contextual meaning, translators can ensure that the overarching message of the Qur'ān is effectively communicated to a broader audience, taking into account the specific circumstances in which the verses were revealed. The study's results suggest that a context-

bound approach can be considered a successful translation strategy, as it involves a careful analysis of each word's meaning within its original context, along with an awareness of how context shapes lexical choices in the target language. Through such deliberate consideration, translators are better positioned to maintain high translation quality and faithfully preserve the message of the Holy Qur'ān. Therefore, context-bound translation emerges as a highly appropriate method for rendering Qur'ānic expressions. In contrast, free or communicative translations—focused on conveying general concepts—may result in less accurate equivalents, as the interpretive nature of such translations can distort intended meanings. Arberry's translation, for instance, exemplifies a more communicative style in which meanings are conveyed without strict adherence to the original context of the words.

What makes the differences in the comprehension of Qur'ānic words and expressions more significant is the issue of lexical ambiguity. Analyzing various translations reveals that when translators encounter objective lexicons, they tend to choose denotative meanings over connotative ones. For example, in the case of the Arabic word "Al-'Ankabūt" (The Spider) in the chapter titled Al-'Ankabūt, all translators uniformly rendered it as "The Spider", reflecting a clear and unambiguous term. However, the main difficulty arises when translators face subjective or abstract terms. In such cases, they often resort to connotative meanings, primarily due to unfamiliarity with the deeper semantic layers of the word or uncertainty surrounding its ambiguity. This results in divergent translations, influenced by the translators' varying religious, cultural, or scientific backgrounds. A notable example is the word "Al-Qadr" in the chapter Al-Qadr. Arberry and Shakir provided different equivalents such as "Determination", "Power", and "The Majesty", reflecting the layered and interpretive nature of the term. In contrast, for more concrete and universally understood terms, such as "Al-Tīn" in the chapter Al-Tīn, all translators consistently agreed on the English equivalent "The Fig".

There is no doubt that one of the fundamental principles of translation is mastery of the source language, the target language, and the subject matter of the text. In the case of Qur'ānic translation, accurate recognition and comprehension of the text require the translator to possess a high level of proficiency in both Arabic and English, as well as an understanding of the cultural and linguistic relationships between the two languages. Without such mastery, it becomes extremely difficult to convey the concepts of the Holy Qur'ān accurately and meaningfully. Beyond linguistic proficiency, the translator must also be well-versed in religious and Islamic texts, including prayers, divine commands, supplications, blessings, and classical Qur'ānic exegesis (tafsīr). Familiarity with these elements is essential for capturing the depth and spiritual nuance of the original. Additionally, the translator must be able to identify appropriate religious equivalents in the target language to maintain theological and doctrinal integrity (Alhaj, 2021).

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The adoption of appropriate lexical equivalents is closely tied to context-bound translation, which plays a crucial role in conveying the intended meanings of the Holy Qur'ān. The analysis of the excerpts suggests that many translators of the Qur'ān may lack sufficient background in religious, scientific, and interpretive Islamic traditions. As a result, they may fail to grasp the implicative or deeper meanings of certain words, often resorting to formal or literal translations, as observed in the work of Arberry. In such cases, the equivalents are translated word-for-word, and the broader contextual and cultural nuances are lost in the target language. In contrast, translators with Islamic backgrounds, such as Shakir and Yusuf Ali, tend to provide more accurate and appropriate equivalents. For instance, in translating the term "Al-'Asr" in the chapter Al-'Asr, Arberry and Shakir offer the renderings "Afternoon" and "Time," respectively—both literal interpretations that may fall short of capturing the full theological and temporal implications embedded in the original Arabic.

Another issue arises when different translators assign varying equivalents to the same word, resulting in inconsistent interpretations. For example, the word "Al-Takwīr" in the chapter "At-Takwīr" has been rendered as "The Folding," "The Darkening," "The Overthrowing," and "The Covering Up" by Arberry, Pickthall, and Shakir. Each of these translations reflects a different understanding and interpretation of the term. Consequently, for English-speaking readers, such inconsistencies can lead to confusion and make it difficult to discern the precise and intended meaning of "Al-Takwīr" in its Qur'ānic context.

These examples highlight how differing linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds of translators significantly influence their lexical choices. They also reinforce the importance of context-bound translation in ensuring that the richness and depth of the Qur'ānic message are faithfully conveyed to readers in the target language.

Context-bound translation offers a practical solution to the challenges posed by suggested meanings in Qur'ānic interpretation. This approach acknowledges the polysemous nature of certain Arabic words, which often leads to vagueness and ambiguity in translation. By taking into account the cultural and linguistic context of the original text, context-bound translation ensures a more accurate rendering of Qur'ānic expressions. One strategy employed within this approach is the use of phonetic transliteration, particularly for words that lack direct equivalents in English. For example, Shakir uses the phonetic form "Al-Takwir" instead of translating the term "Takvir", thereby preserving both the sanctity and original form of the word.

Although phonetics is not, in itself, a form of translation, it can serve an important supplementary function. Through the use of explanatory footnotes, the translator can provide readers with the intended meaning of the transliterated term. Proponents of this method argue that transliteration upholds the holiness and authenticity of Islamic and Qur'ānic concepts—especially in cases where a direct English equivalent is absent or inadequate. In such contexts, phonetics is not only inevitable but also respectful of the ST's sacred nature.

There is no doubt that one of the fundamental principles of translation is mastery of the source and target languages, as well as deep knowledge of the subject matter. In the context of Qur'ānic translation, this means that the translator must have a thorough command of both Arabic and English, including an understanding of their respective cultural frameworks.

Without such linguistic and cultural competence, accurately conveying the Qur'ān's complex meanings becomes exceedingly difficult.

Moreover, the translator should be well-versed in Islamic scholarship, including Qur'ānic interpretation (tafsir), prayers, divine injunctions, blessings, and the stylistic and performative dimensions of religious language. In the target language—here, English—the translator must be able to identify or formulate religious equivalents that convey not just the literal, but also the semantic, emotive, and performative aspects of the original expressions. As Abdelaal and Rashid (2015) argue, while it may be possible for a translator working from a foreign language into their native language to compensate for linguistic gaps with partial familiarity, translating from a native language into a foreign one requires complete mastery of both languages. This is particularly true in religious texts, where precision and nuance are essential.

Literal translation of the Holy Qur'ān, combined with a lack of mastery of the target language, often leads to significant problems. Translators who possess sufficient linguistic knowledge of Arabic—whether as their native or a second language—demonstrate a clearer understanding, as seen in the translations of Shakir and Yusuf Ali compared to those of Arberry and Rodwell. Literal translation faces challenges in accurately interpreting and conveying the messages of the Qur'ānic texts, regardless of whether the translator's language is Arabic or English, and even if they are not bilingual. A successful translator must consider all fundamental principles of translation. Their goal is to reproduce in the target reader the same impact that the original text's author creates in the source language reader. Achieving this requires multiple competencies, including linguistic expertise, subject-matter knowledge, familiarity with the conventions governing speech acts and language use, and sensitivity to social interactions, cultural norms, and values.

The results of the study indicate two distinct translation processes: first, reading and comprehending the ST (Arabic); second, conveying its message in the target language. The first process involves deep engagement with the text—structural, semantic, and performative comprehension occurs mentally within the translator. The second process requires reconstructing and expressing the understood message in the target language. These two stages are more complex and delicate in Qur'ānic translation than in literary or nonliterary translation because divine revelation and the speech of the Lord are considered fundamentally untranslatable. Interpretation inevitably depends on the translator's linguistic competence, even if this can only be achieved partially. Constructing and organizing the divine text in a language other than Arabic is a complex and challenging task. Interpreters and translators hold varying perspectives on how to comprehend the connotative meanings of the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. This Sacred Book was revealed over fourteen hundred years ago, and many of the difficulties stem from early interpreters and translators of the divine speech. Additional challenges arise from metalinguistic factors related to the reverence of the Qur'ānic revelation, as well as the regional, political, social, and economic contexts of the Muslim community fourteen centuries ago, along with their interactions with other religions—elements essential for understanding and accurately translating religious texts.

Literal and semantic translations that overlook these metalinguistic and pragmatic dimensions often cause confusion among English readers, hindering their comprehension of the Qur'ānic message. Another factor impacting the quality of English translations of the Glorious Qur'ān is the nature of performative expression. While the Sacred Book conveys an expressive tone in the source language, this is frequently replaced by a purely informative

tone in the target language. This discrepancy may be due to the unique stylistic features of the Qur'ānic text. Transferring the rhythm, emotional depth, and spiritual resonance of the original Arabic, experienced by Arabic or Persian Muslims, is nearly impossible in English translation. As a result, the emotive power and richness of historical and religious events are often diminished or lost. Many translations thus neglect the metalinguistic dimension essential to conveying the divine message fully.

Underlying these difficulties is often a lack of familiarity with the Islamic background, which profoundly affects understanding the ST's messages. This gap explains why many translators struggle despite their mastery of the target language. If the translator of the Holy Qur'ān is a bilingual Muslim equipped with the necessary qualifications, they must address a third critical challenge: the linguistic and metalinguistic differences between Arabic and English. Successfully overcoming these barriers is key to faithfully transferring all aspects of the Glorious Qur'ān's verses into the target language.

6. Conclusion

Since translators generally agree that no translation of the Holy Qur'ān is entirely complete, various styles and approaches to its translation exist. This aligns with the view of Lotfi Gaskaree et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of finding the closest meaning to the original equivalents. This perspective is particularly applicable to the translation of the Holy Qur'ān, a divine Book that transcends human speech. As a miracle from the LORD, it possesses a unique dignity of revelation, making translation especially challenging. Many experts maintain that the magnificent Qur'ān is ultimately untranslatable, and even when translated, some degree of deficiency is inevitable.

Some translators, such as Shakir, have focused primarily on transferring lexical structures, employing semantic translation approaches that have proven more successful than literal translations. However, communicative translations, which require greater creativity on the part of the translator, remain largely absent.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this study suggests that translation courses should emphasize lexical, structural, and discoursal equivalences between the ST and TT to enable comparison and critical analysis. Certain bilingual sourcebooks, such as Elahi Ghomsheie's (1991), expose students to translations by both native and non-native translators, though these materials are not without limitations. A significant problem lies in selecting appropriate methods and techniques for teaching these texts. Often, such sourcebooks lack guided translation exercises or creative activities, resulting in professors relying on personal teaching methods without a strong theoretical or empirical foundation in translation studies. Consequently, students may only identify lexical and structural differences without deeper engagement or qualitative evaluation. Moreover, the absence of guidebooks for instructors means that lessons are sometimes delivered without sufficient background knowledge of Qur'ānic and religious content.

The study's limitations include a small sample size—only five translated versions and nine Surahs—and a limited number of excerpts analyzed. These constraints can be addressed in future research. The findings may not be generalizable to other Surahs or to non-Arabic STs, highlighting the need for further studies involving a broader range of Qur'ānic chapters. Additionally, it remains challenging to find an English translation of the Holy Qur'ān that fully conveys the source language's messages due to prevalent errors in the translation process. Addressing these shortcomings requires continued efforts to develop new

theoretical and empirical frameworks aimed at producing a higher-quality English translation of the Holy Qur'ān.

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