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WORD CHOICE AND APPROPRIATENESS: A SEMANTIC STUDY OF THE HOLY QURAN TRANSLATION

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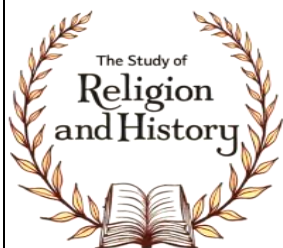
Abstract

This study explores the translation of Surah Yā-Sīn through the framework of Eugene Nida's (1964) theory of dynamic and formal equivalence, concentrating on the impact of translation strategies on meaning, theological significance, and reader reception. The study examines the English translations of Hilali & Khan and Maulana Maududi throughout all 83 verses, revealing occurrences of ambiguity, excessive elucidation, and inadequate translation. The main goals were to look at how word choice affects accessibility, to see how dynamic equivalence affects clarity and understanding, and to see how well translations keep the Qur'an's theological and rhetorical depth. The findings indicate that Hilali & Khan's methodology exemplifies dynamic equivalence, characterised by frequent explanatory insertions such as "(O Muhammad ﷺ)" or elaborated glosses like "mixed male and female discharge semen-drops." These interventions improve immediate understanding for general audiences, but they frequently diminish the Qur'an's rhetorical conciseness and stylistic impact. On the other hand, Maulana Maududi's translations show a balanced approach leaning toward formal equivalence by keeping the structure, ambiguity, and traditional tone, with occasional dynamic adaptations for modern readability. This approach preserves the Qur'an's poetic and reflective attributes, yet may pose difficulties for readers unfamiliar with exegetical context. The study emphasises that translation is never impartial: lexical selections inherently convey theological, pedagogical, and stylistic priorities. Hilali and Khan help readers understand by being clear about their beliefs through interpretive glosses, while Maulana Maududi values being true to the text and being open to different interpretations, often enhancing narrative flow without excessive elaboration. Neither method is inherently superior; each fulfils specific objectives contingent upon the audience and educational context. This study enhances translation studies and Qur'anic hermeneutics by employing Nida's equivalence categories to an entire surah. It shows that even small changes in words, like "dominion" instead of "absolute control," can have a big impact on how something is understood. This shows how important it is to find a balance between clarity and fidelity when translating sacred texts.

Keywords: Surah Yā-Sīn, Qur'an Translation, Nida's Equivalence Theory, Dynamic Equivalence, Formal Equivalence, Semantic Analysis

1. Introduction

This study analyzes two English translations of the Holy Qur'an—*The Noble Qur'an* by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan and *The Holy Qur'an* by Maulana Maududi—for the semantic impact of word choice and appropriateness. The study explores how the language choices used by each translation represent different religious views, affect the dissemination of meaning, and mould readers' comprehension of significant Qur'anic themes via a comparative semantic analysis of selected passages. The research reveals that



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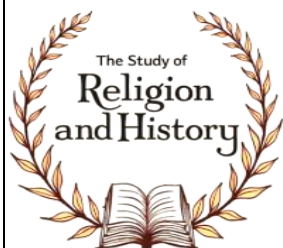
translators' methodological methods and ideological backgrounds affect the appropriateness and semantic accuracy of their translations, underscoring the challenges of understanding sacred writings.

The semantic features of word choice and appropriateness in the English translations of the Holy Qur'an by Maulana Maududi, Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, and Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali are examined in this research. The study uses comparative semantic analysis to examine how translators' language choices affect the Arabic text's meaning transmission, doctrinal clarity, and cultural resonance. By examining important theological, legal, and moral verses, the research examines semantic interpretation, translator background and ideology, and how each translation adheres to or deviates from the original text in terms of linguistic faithfulness and contextual appropriateness.

Muslims believe the Holy Qur'an is God's final and unchangeable message, written in exquisite and complicated classical Arabic. Its language combines spiritual exhortation, legal commands, lyricism, and divine education (Abdel Haleem, 2004). This rich intricacy presents a challenge for translating the Qur'an into other languages, especially English, the most widely read. Word choice and the target language's semantic appropriateness are crucial to preserving sacred works' theological interpretations, emotional resonance, and legal implications (Baker, 2018; Nida, 1964).

Translation of the Qur'an entails complex semantic and interpretative issues. The Arabic Qur'an has many polysemous terms, and context determines their meaning. *Taqwa* means "fear," "piety," or "God-consciousness" in Arabic, each having different theological overtones (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Thus, each lexical decision by a translator affects the source text's semantic integrity and the target language's Qur'an interpretation (Beekman & Callow, 1974). This research examines the problems of appropriateness, vocabulary choice, and semantic variety in two well-known English translations of the Holy Qur'an: *The Noble Qur'an*, translated by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, and *The Holy Qur'an* by Maulana Maududi. Both translations are widely distributed in English-speaking Muslim and non-Muslim populations, but they use different translation methods. According to Yakubovych (2023), the Saudi religious establishment's Hilali-Khan translation follows a literal reading and includes Salafi interpretations in brackets. While aiming for ideological impartiality, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community translator Maulana Maududi uses a more fluid and interpretive approach (Ali, 2019). Although Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and translation philosophy have received much scholarly attention (Newmark, 1988; Nord, 1991), little is known about how lexical selections affect meaning across translations. To maintain language integrity and reader comprehension, translated verses must be precise and use appropriate words, especially those with spiritual, legal, or ethical value (Venuti, 1995; Al-Hajj, 2020). How are Arabic terms like *kufr* translated? Does it have the same religious, moral, and emotional meaning as in Arabic? Are poor or confusing translations compromising it?

Understanding translators' decisions requires understanding their religious, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. Dr. Al-Hilali and Dr. Khan, both from the Islamic University of Madinah, use Salafi orthodoxy to translate and often include traditional *tafsir* commentary in brackets to clarify or enrich the original meaning (Jassem, 2014). Their meaning of *jihad* includes "holy fighting in Allah's cause," which some say is interpretative rather than translational (Abou El Fadl, 2011). Maulana Maududi approaches the translation from a



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distinct theological standpoint to promote clarity and tranquility, often omitting explanatory annotations (Ahmed, 2022).

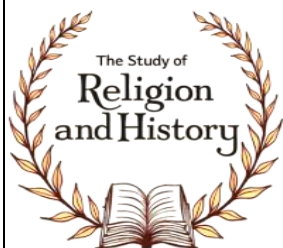
Instead of determining whether one translation is more "accurate," this study examines how semantic selections in each rendition enhance or obscure the Qur'an's original content. This research advances semantics, translation studies, and Quranic linguistics while offering insights to sacred text translators. This comparative semantic study is important since translations affect the beliefs, actions, and comprehension of millions of English-speaking Muslims and academics worldwide (Baker, 2018; Chesterman, 1997).

This qualitative comparison study uses Nida's dynamic vs. formal equivalence theory (Nida, 1964). The analysis focuses on selected theological, moral, or doctrinal verses about divine qualities, judicial rulings, and eschatology. Lexical terms were studied in their Qur'anic context, syntactic functions, and English equivalents in both versions. Both its linguistic value and cross-disciplinary relevance make the topic important. Translation is prejudiced since each term has cultural, doctrinal, and pragmatic meaning (Venuti, 1995). Mistranslation of the Qur'an, which Muslims believe is God's message, can lead to doctrinal confusion, religious misapplication, and political and societal misinterpretation (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Ali, 2020). In Qur'anic translation, word selection and compatibility are crucial.

This study emphasizes the importance of language accuracy and theological compatibility in translation decisions. It questions translators' legitimacy, interpretative paraphrasing, and the implications of translation on global religious discourse. Comparing the Hilali-Khan and Maulana Maududi translations advances Qur'anic translation studies and illuminates how semantic choices affect readers' comprehension.

1.1 Historical Perspective of Qur'anic Translation into English

The translation of the Qur'an into English represents a nuanced and intricate undertaking, characterised by a long history of discourse, careful theological considerations, and the progression of various methodologies. The Qur'an is viewed by Muslims as the direct and unparalleled word of Allah, revealed in Arabic to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Consequently, the notion of translating it into another language—particularly English, which carries connotations of colonial history and Western knowledge systems—has been a subject of considerable debate (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Al-Khuli, 2005). This apprehension, nonetheless, did not hinder initial endeavours, both academic and missionary-oriented, to articulate the Qur'anic message in the English language. Throughout history, the translation of the Qur'an has evolved from orientalist or polemical attempts to more accurate and semantically aware interpretations, including contributions from Muslim scholars (Kidwai, 2016; Rahman, 1984). Early Orientalist Translations (17th–19th Centuries): Alexander Ross translated the Qur'an from a French version by André du Ryer, not from Arabic, to provide the first comprehensive English translation of the text in 1649. The European orientalist and polemical perspective of the period was mirrored in Ross's rendition, **The Alcoran of Mahomet** (Kidwai, 2007). Theological prejudice, inaccurate translations, and a conscious attempt to portray Islam as less valuable than Christianity were common problems in these early translations (Sardar, 1985). Despite criticism for its orientalist tone, George Sale's translation (1734) later became well-liked in both Europe and America. Sale, in contrast to Ross, wrote a long preface and worked from the Arabic text. For more than a century, Sale's version was a standard reference despite its flaws and anti-Islamic bias (Ayoub, 1989; Kidwai, 2016).



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Emergence of Muslim Translations (20th Century Onwards): A major change occurred in the 20th century when Muslim academics started interpreting the Qur'an themselves in an effort to correct misrepresentations and recover the narrative. Theological convictions, language advancements, and new educational demands in the Muslim world all influenced these initiatives. Marmaduke Pickthall, a British convert to Islam, was one of the most influential early Muslim translators. His translation, **The Meaning of the Glorious Koran** (1930), is notable for its formal, almost archaic English and its attempt to avoid sectarian interpretation while remaining true to the Arabic original (Wheeler, 2002). Abdullah Yusuf Ali's **The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary** (1934), which blends beautiful language with in-depth discussion, is another important book. Particularly among English-speaking Muslims in South Asia and the West, Yusuf Ali's writings gained enormous traction (Ali, 2019; Rahman, 1984).

Translation in the Post-Colonial and Theological Context: As Islam expands its influence in Western societies and English education becomes more accessible in predominantly Muslim nations, there has been a notable initiative to commission new translations that cater to the contemporary reader's requirements. The act of translation transcended mere linguistic function, evolving into a significant theological and political endeavour, serving as a vehicle for articulating particular doctrinal perspectives and contending religious ideologies (Venuti, 1995; Yakubovych, 2023). The increasing significance of Qur'an translations has sparked discussions regarding translatability, semantic loss, and the suitability of converting sacred Arabic expressions into non-Arabic forms (Abdul-Raof, 2005). Certain academics have posited that translations should be viewed as interpretations or "approximations," and should not be conflated with the Arabic Qur'an itself (Mohaghegh, 2010; Al-Azami, 2011).

Translation by Dr. Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhsin Khan: In the 1980s, Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan published **The Noble Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary**, which was an important and contentious development. This translation, which was extensively disseminated by the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an and commissioned by the Saudi religious establishment, was meant to provide an "orthodox" and "authentic" rendition consistent with Salafi views of Islam (Jassem, 2014; Yakubovych, 2023). The translation by Al-Hilali and Khan is distinguished by its literal rendering and parenthetical insertions, which sometimes include exegesis right into the text. For instance, when translating passages referring to "jihad" or "disbelievers," they often include language that represents a particular theological perspective, such as "fighting in Allah's cause (i.e., against polytheists, pagans, etc.)" or "Jews and Christians" (Abou El Fadl, 2011). Scholars contend that these insertions undermine semantic neutrality and encourage ideological interpretations, which has led to considerable criticism (Peachy, 2014; Smith, 2018). Notwithstanding these criticisms, this translation is still among the most extensively used English translations worldwide, particularly in Saudi government-funded mosques and Islamic centres (Yakubovych, 2023).

Translation by Maulana Maududi: In juxtaposition to the doctrinal inflexibility evident in Hilali-Khan's translation, Maulana Maududi, affiliated with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, finalised his English rendition of the Qur'an in 1955. Maulana Maududi's work embodies the Ahmadiyya perspective on theology, highlighting the significance of peace, reason, and universal spiritual principles (Ahmed, 2022). His translation avoids parenthetical commentary, striving to maintain the dignity and fluency of the original text while providing a

theologically consistent and non-polemical interpretation. Despite not being formally recognised by mainstream Sunni and Shia institutions owing to theological disagreements with the Ahmadiyya movement, Maulana Maududi's translation has garnered appreciation for its stylistic clarity, lexical simplicity, and semantic balance (Ali, 2019; Georgia Islamic Resources, 2024). This work is extensively engaged with in Ahmadi circles and has garnered scholarly attention as a notable instance of intra-Muslim diversity in the translation of the Qur'an.

Comparative Significance: The juxtaposition of the Hilali-Khan and Maulana Maududi translations is notably important, given their markedly divergent methodologies. Hilali-Khan's work emphasises doctrinal precision and literal fidelity, whereas Maulana Maududi's focuses on linguistic fluidity and semantic transparency. This variation in methodology renders them particularly suitable for a nuanced comparative analysis of lexical selection and contextual suitability. Their historical and theological contexts further illuminate the socio-religious role of translation, each tailored to distinct audiences, influenced by varying assumptions regarding language, faith, and the nuances of communication. This analysis of the two translations, situated within their respective historical frameworks, seeks to illuminate the notion that translation transcends mere linguistic activity, emerging instead as a platform for ideological expression (Venuti, 1995; Chesterman, 1997).

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The translation of the Holy Qur'an into English requires both linguistic precision and cultural awareness, as well as theological accountability. The worldwide proliferation of Islam and the rising dependence on English translations by Muslims and non-Muslims have rendered the precision and suitability of word selection in expressing Qur'anic interpretations more significant. This research aims to elucidate how certain lexical selections in translation either maintain or alter the intended meanings of the Arabic text. This study seeks to elucidate the semantic implications of the divergent choices made in the translations by Al-Hilali & Muhsin Khan and Maulana Maududi, both of which are influential and ideologically diverse, on the reading of the Qur'an. The research is crucial for elucidating the influence of translator subjectivity and theological perspective on holy texts, as well as for enhancing methods in Qur'anic translation, interpretation, and pedagogy.

The translation of the Holy Qur'an into English is a crucial and complex undertaking that fulfils several significant purposes. It facilitates the surmounting of language obstacles for non-Arabic speakers, so broadening access to the divine word, while concurrently augmenting spiritual and moral direction for those pursuing a profound relationship with their religion. It promotes Islamic education and scholarly pursuits, establishes a basis for global comprehension and interfaith concord, and rectifies historical inaccuracies sometimes evident in prior or prejudiced translations. Translation also tackles the grammatical intricacies of the original Arabic text and modifies Qur'anic interpretations for modern English use while maintaining theological purity. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of academic commentary and contextual analysis, illustrates the changing reasons for retranslation initiatives, and affirms the Qur'an's pertinence to contemporary moral and ethical discussions. This research examines how translation decisions, especially in word selection, influence semantic integrity and interpretative clarity. By analysing and contrasting the translations of Hilali-Khan and Maulana Maududi, this study elucidates how theological orientations, linguistic tactics, and cultural views shape the reader's comprehension of the Qur'an in the contemporary global environment.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- I. To identify instances where translation choices result in ambiguity, excessive translation, or insufficient translation.
- II. To investigate the impact of dynamic equivalence on the clarity and comprehension of Qur'anic meanings for readers.
- III. To evaluate the fidelity of the English translations of Surah Yasin in preserving the meaning and theology of the original Arabic text.

1.4 Research Questions

- I. What instances of ambiguity, overtranslation, or undertranslation are present in the English translations of Surah Yasin?
- II. How does the application of dynamic equivalency impact readers' comprehension and clarity of Qur'anic meanings?
- III. How well do the English translations of Surah Yasin keep the meaning and theology of the original Arabic text?

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

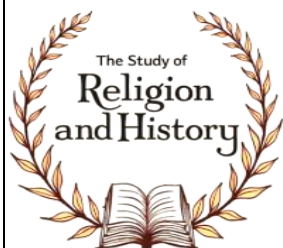
This study focuses on a semantic analysis of specific verses from two English translations of the Holy Qur'an: *The Noble Qur'an* by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, and *The Holy Qur'an* by Maulana Maududi. The analysis is confined to examining word choice and its appropriateness in conveying the original Arabic meanings, excluding syntactic, phonological, or stylistic features. This analysis focuses exclusively on specific verses that include essential theological, legal, and ethical terminology, while omitting wider exegetical interpretations or translations in alternative languages. The study does not seek to assess the religious accuracy or doctrinal legitimacy of the translators' beliefs; instead, it examines the impact of lexical choices on semantic clarity and fidelity. The research is confined to written texts and excludes reception studies or reader-response data.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is of considerable importance in the domains of translation studies, semantics, and Islamic scholarship, as it illuminates the impact of word choice in Qur'anic translations on the precise conveyance of meaning. In an era where countless individuals, both Muslims and non-Muslims, depend on English translations to grasp the Qur'an, it is essential to scrutinise the semantic suitability of word choices to maintain theological precision and avoid misinterpretation. This analysis examines two prominent translations—those by Al-Hilali & Muhsin Khan and Maulana Maududi—emphasising the impact of translator ideology, linguistic strategies, and cultural assumptions on the interpretation of sacred texts. The results aim to support linguists, translators, educators, and religious scholars in creating translations of the Qur'an that are both accurate to the original text and relatable for contemporary audiences.

2. Literature Review

The translation of the Holy Qur'an is an endeavor that requires navigating profound linguistic, cultural, and theological complexities. Scholars have long grappled with the inherent challenges of transferring the divine Arabic text into English, focusing on semantic loss, idiomatic expressions, cultural specificities, and the ideological underpinnings of the translators themselves. This literature review synthesizes existing research on Qur'anic translation, highlighting the semantic challenges and methodological frameworks that inform the present study.



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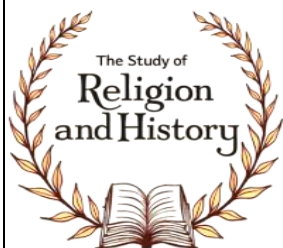
Al-Jabari (2008) asserts that English Qur'an translations are among the most widely read books globally, yet most modern interpretations fail to fully convey the original content in the target language. Major flaws obscure parts of the text, incorporating features that test the audience's knowledge. Current translations are lacking, thus necessitating innovative solutions to Qur'an translation mistakes. Al-Jabari's work emphasizes the translator's role in good translation and establishes Qur'anic translator qualifications, underscoring the need for translations that flow organically in the target tongue while maintaining accuracy.

The intersection of technology and translation has also garnered attention. Khosravizadeh and Pashmforoosh (2011) note that machine translation, such as Google Translate, highlights the irreplaceable importance of the human translator, particularly in semantic processing. While algorithmic pathways in computational linguistics are evolving, they still require considerable human involvement to manage the nuanced semantics of complex texts like the Qur'an. Similarly, Yunus et al. (2011) explore cross-language information retrieval (CLIR) systems for the Qur'an, proposing a Stemming Looping Semantic Query (SLSQ) approach. Their research demonstrates that looping semantic concepts in the dictionary boosts referenced word usage, enhancing Qur'anic document discoveries, which implicitly highlights the deep semantic networks inherent in Qur'anic Arabic that single-word translations often fail to capture.

A significant portion of the literature addresses the challenge of translating Qur'anic idioms and metaphors. Abdulwahid and Ibraheem (2013) analyse the translation of Qur'anic idioms into English, revealing that many translators overlook these idioms, leading to inaccurate literal translations. They advocate for translating these idioms into target language equivalents to aid TL readers. İşler and Doğru (2013) echo this, asserting that the Holy Quran uses colloquialisms and metaphors extensively, and interpreting the Quran requires significant cognitive exertion to simplify meaning without losing the significant meanings of Quranic idioms. Elimam (2016) specifically explores Quranic metaphor translation challenges, evaluating three English Qurans using Newmark's metaphor translation approaches. He concludes that faithful translation is optimal for translating Quranic metaphor into English, as it preserves the imagery. Nurbayan (2019) further investigates Quranic metaphorical passage translation, finding that direct, literal translation paradoxically dilutes meaning, suggesting that metaphors are essential to Quranic interpretation and that translations actively alter Quranic meaning.

Cultural features present another formidable barrier. Moradi and Sadeghi (2014) examine the incidence of culture-specific translation approaches, comparing Islamic law phrases in the Arabic text to their English counterparts in Shakir, Yusuf Ali, and Pickthall. They emphasize that cultural features have different meanings in their native contexts that may not be appropriate in others. Valipoor et al. (2019) apply Venuti's model of domestication and foreignization to Irving's English translation, finding a dominant tendency towards domestication of cultural signifiers. Kakpo, Akogbeto, and Babalola (2017) also examine how cultural and language contexts define cultural features differently, revealing latent inequalities and translation difficulties when moving between distinct cultural paradigms.

The ideological and theological orientations of translators profoundly shape their lexical choices. Al-Jarf (2014) observes that English translations differ in style and accuracy because some translators used modern English, others archaic English, and some included polemical remarks. Halimah (2014) believes that the quantity of English Quran translations has led to misrepresented and contradicted core Islamic concepts, advocating for a standardized, professional explanatory translation. The specific choices of prominent translators have been



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scrutinized: Muwafi and Fareh (2021) reinterpret Pickthall's translation using Bourdieu's sociology, showing how Pickthall exploited paratextual content to build cultural and symbolic capital. Al-Tamari and Bader Eddin (2021) critically examine the concept of absolute synonyms in the Quran, arguing that Quranic verb and noun synonyms are distinct, creating lexical imbalance in translation, and invalidating the idea that one word can replace Quranic synonyms without semantic shift.

Semantic and grammatical losses are inevitable in translation. Abdelaal and Md Rashid (2016) analyze grammatical faults in Surah Al A'raf's translation, finding that issues with conjunction, syntactic organization, and tense translation cause meaning loss, weakening connotative and emotive meanings. Alsharou (2016) focuses on the communication of Quranic emphasis, noting that weak English statements impede the translation of emphatic devices, leading to nuanced meaning loss. Mohammadpour and Nikoopour (2017) analyze the translation of topicalization using Catford's linguistic framework, finding that translators prefer category shifts and literal translation, which must be paid attention to as they carry source text meaning. Eddin (2019) highlights how translators have overlooked Arabic particles, such as *la*, due to a lack of knowledge, resulting in wrong interpretations and semantic distortion. Furthermore, Al-Otaibi (2021) examines the lexical choice of near-synonyms in the Qur'an, demonstrating that subtle differences between terms like *khawf* (fear) and *hashya* (awe) are often flattened in English translation, leading to theological imprecision.

Other studies have focused on the pedagogical and structural aspects of Qur'anic translation. Ifesieh (2015) contrasts semantic translation with communicative translation, arguing that exploring sense relations restores the situational context of source language text production. Sherif and Ngonga Ngomo (2015) propose a multilingual RDF Semantic Quran dataset to facilitate knowledge extraction for natural-language processing. Putra et al. (2016) developed a semantic-based Indonesian Translation of the Quran (ITQ) question answering system, utilizing ontologies to obtain semantically connected verses. Perez and Hodáková (2020) discuss how university training programs must mix vocational, intellectual, and transferable abilities, showing that blended learning significantly improves students' ability to apply theoretical concepts to practical translation situations.

Finally, historical and regional contexts of translation have been explored. Hussin and Kamal (2021) cover Malay-language Quran translations from the 17th to 20th centuries, noting the shift from Jawi to Roman script and the dominance of concise translation methods. Rahman (2021) explores Bengali Quranic translation history, analyzing how the Quran affects society through regional languages. Lapshinova-Koltunski, Przybyl, and Bizzoni (2021) utilize word embedding to analyze translation lexical selection trends, comparing written translation versus simultaneous interpretation to examine cumulative linguistic consequences at the lexical level. The reviewed literature establishes that translating the Qur'an is an ideologically charged, semantically complex process. While previous studies have isolated idioms, metaphors, grammatical shifts, and cultural items, there remains a critical need for comprehensive, verse-by-verse comparative analyses that apply Nida's equivalence theory to evaluate how specific lexical choices in full Surahs balance rhetorical fidelity with theological clarity. This study addresses that gap by examining Surah Yasin in its entirety through the lens of Nida's dynamic and formal equivalence.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Nida's Equivalence Theory

This study is grounded in Eugene Nida's (1964) theory of translation, specifically the dichotomy between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Nida's framework is particularly apt for analyzing sacred texts where the tension between fidelity to the source text and comprehensibility for the target audience is paramount.

Formal Equivalence focuses on the message itself, in both form and content. It aims to reproduce as literally and meaningfully as possible the source language (SL) structure in the target language (TL). In formal equivalence, the translator is concerned with ensuring that the TL text mirrors the exact grammatical structures, lexical choices, and syntactic arrangements of the SL text. For the Qur'an, formal equivalence seeks to preserve the rhetorical conciseness, structural ambiguity, and poetic rhythm of the original Arabic. However, strict formal equivalence can sometimes lead to semantic opacity, overtranslation, or undertranslation, where the target reader struggles to grasp the full theological depth of the text without external exegetical aids.

Dynamic Equivalence, in contrast, is based on the principle of equivalent effect. The translator prioritizes the target reader's comprehension, aiming to evoke the same response in the TL audience as the original text evoked in the SL audience. This often necessitates structural adjustments, cultural substitutions, and explanatory insertions (such as parenthetical glosses). In Qur'anic translation, dynamic equivalence manifests as interpretive translation, where the translator embeds **tafsir** (exegesis) directly into the text to clarify polysemous terms or elliptical phrases. While this enhances immediate clarity and accessibility, it risks reducing the multilayered meanings of the Qur'an to a single, translator-authorized interpretation, potentially leading to excessive translation or doctrinal bias.

By applying Nida's categories, this study evaluates how Hilali & Khan and Maulana Maududi navigate the continuum between formal and dynamic equivalence, and how their resulting lexical choices impact semantic appropriateness, theological fidelity, and reader reception in Surah Yasin.

3.2 Research Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative, comparative semantic analysis. This design was selected because the research aims to clarify translation strategies and semantic shifts rather than quantify them. The interpretive method facilitates a thorough understanding of the translator's handling of cultural and theological elements and the extent to which the source culture and meaning are maintained or altered.

Corpus Selection: The data for this study comprises all 83 verses of Surah Yā-Sīn from two English translations:

1. **The Noble Qur'an** by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
2. **The Holy Qur'an** by Maulana Maududi.

Surah Yasin was purposively selected due to its dense concentration of theological, eschatological, and legislative terminology, as well as its renowned rhetorical and poetic complexity. It serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges inherent in Qur'anic translation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure:

1. **Verse Extraction:** All 83 verses of Surah Yasin were extracted from both translations alongside the original Arabic text.

2. Identification of Semantic Nodes: Verses containing essential theological, legal, and ethical terminology—particularly polysemous words, divine attributes, eschatological imagery, and legislative commands—were identified as focal points for analysis.
3. Comparative Mapping: The Arabic source text was compared to both English renderings verse-by-verse. Lexical choices, syntactic structures, and the presence or absence of parenthetical insertions were cataloged.
4. Categorization via Nida's Framework: The translation choices in each version were categorized according to Nida's framework. Instances of formal equivalence (literal retention of structure/ambiguity) and dynamic equivalence (interpretive glosses, explanatory insertions, structural shifts) were identified.
5. Evaluation of Appropriateness: Finally, the semantic impact of these choices was evaluated. Instances of ambiguity, excessive translation (overtranslation through unwarranted glosses), and insufficient translation (undertranslation where theological depth was lost) were analyzed to determine how well the translations preserve the meaning and theology of the original Arabic text.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents a comparative semantic analysis of Surah Yā-Sīn, evaluating the translations of Hilali & Khan and Maulana Maududi through the lens of Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalence. The analysis is structured around the three research questions, examining instances of ambiguity, overtranslation, and undertranslation; the impact of dynamic equivalence on clarity; and the fidelity of the translations to the original theology and rhetoric.

4.1 Ambiguity, Overtranslation, and Undertranslation

The first research question asked: *What instances of ambiguity, overtranslation, or undertranslation are present in the English translations of Surah Yasin?*

 The data reveals a stark contrast between the two translations. Hilali & Khan frequently engage in overtranslation through explanatory parenthetical insertions, while Maulana Maududi occasionally leans toward undertranslation by retaining structural ambiguity that may confuse the lay reader.

Overtranslation in Hilali & Khan:

Hilali & Khan's methodology is heavily reliant on dynamic equivalence, specifically the integration of *tafsir* into the translation itself. This frequently results in overtranslation, where the text is expanded beyond the lexical boundaries of the original Arabic.

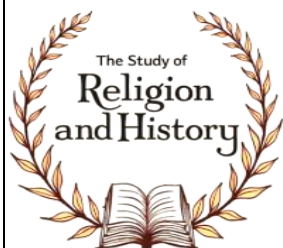
A prominent example is found in Verse 12:

Arabic: إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ

Hilali & Khan: "Verily, We! It is We Who give life and cause death; and to Us is the final return. And We have recorded the numbers of all things in a clear register (i.e., the Preserved Plate)."

Maududi: "We shall give life to the dead and We shall record the deeds they have sent before them and the traces they have left behind."

In the Arabic, *Imam Mubin* (إِمَامٌ مُّبِينٌ) literally translates to a "clear register" or "clear leader/guide." Hilali & Khan dynamically equate this to "(i.e., the Preserved Plate / Al-Lauh Al-Mahfuz)," inserting a specific eschatological concept from Salafi exegesis that is not present in the lexical item itself. This is a clear instance of overtranslation: it aids the reader's theological understanding from a specific sectarian viewpoint, but it violates the semantic openness of the original text, which some classical commentators interpret metaphorically as God's overarching clear decree rather than a physical plate.



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Similarly, in Verse 62, regarding the word *Hizb* (حِزْب):

Arabic: إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ

Hilali & Khan: "Verily, Shaitan (Satan) is to you an open enemy, so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his Hizb (followers) to be the dwellers of the blazing Fire."

Maududi: "Indeed, Satan is your enemy, so treat him as an enemy. He calls his party only that they may become the inmates of the blazing fire."

Hilali & Khan retain the Arabic word *Hizb* and immediately gloss it as "(followers)." Retaining the Arabic word while providing a parenthetical translation is a hybrid strategy that clutters the text. The Arabic *Hizb* means "party," "faction," or "group." By glossing it specifically as "(followers)," they narrow the semantic field, which is an overtranslation of the relational dynamic implied by *Hizb*, which carries connotations of allegiance and factionalism, not just passive following. Maududi's choice of "party" is a more formally equivalent and semantically appropriate rendering.

Undertranslation and Ambiguity in Maududi:

Maududi's commitment to formal equivalence occasionally results in undertranslation, where the theological weight of a term is flattened. In Verse 60:

Arabic: أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ

Maududi: "O children of Adam! Did I not enjoin on you not to worship Satan?"

Hilali & Khan: "O Children of Adam! Did I not command you (saying) that you should not worship Shaitan (Satan)?"

The Arabic term *A'had* (أَعْهَدَ) carries the deep semantic weight of a covenant or binding pact. Maududi translates it as "enjoin," which implies a command or instruction but loses the relational, covenantal nuance of *A'had*. Hilali & Khan use "command," which is even further from the original semantic domain. Here, both translators undertranslate the term, failing to capture the theological implication that God established a primordial covenant with humanity (referencing Surah Al-A'raf 7:172), making the deviation a breach of a solemn pact, not merely a disobedience to a command.

4.2 The Impact of Dynamic Equivalence on Clarity and Comprehension

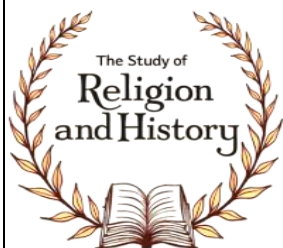
The second research question asked: *How does the application of dynamic equivalency impact readers' comprehension and clarity of Qur'anic meanings?* The analysis demonstrates that dynamic equivalence, as employed by Hilali & Khan, substantially improves immediate lexical clarity but often at the expense of rhetorical conciseness and theological multi-vocality. Nowhere is this more evident than in the translation of the introductory verses of Surah Yasin (Verses 1-2):

Arabic: يٰسٓ ۝ (١) وَالْقُرْآنَ الْحَكِيمَ ۝ (٢)

Hilali & Khan: "Ya-Sin. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur'an, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]. By the Qur'an, full of wisdom (i.e., the Qur'an which is full of laws, evidences, and proofs)."

Maududi: "Yasin. By the Wise Qur'an."

The Arabic letters "Ya-Sin" are *Muqatta'at* (disjointed letters), the meaning of which is known only to Allah, according to majority Islamic consensus. Hilali & Khan dynamically insert a massive parenthetical gloss: "[These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur'an, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]." Furthermore, they dynamically expand "full of wisdom" to "(i.e., the Qur'an which is full of laws, evidences, and proofs)."



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From Nida's perspective, this dynamic equivalence is designed to completely eliminate ambiguity for the target reader. A non-Arabic speaking reader is immediately given the orthodox Salafi interpretation of the *Muqatta'at* and the specific functional definition of *Hakim* (wise). Comprehension is instantly enhanced. However, this strategy profoundly alters the reading experience. The original Arabic is strikingly concise, rhythmic, and awe-inspiring in its brevity. The English translation of Hilali & Khan becomes bogged down in didacticism. The rhetorical impact—the spiritual gravity of the oaths sworn by God—is drowned in pedagogical explanation. Maududi's formal equivalence ("Yasin. By the Wise Qur'an.") perfectly mirrors the brevity and rhetorical force of the original, preserving its poetic impact, though it leaves the reader to independently seek the meaning of the disjointed letters. Another striking example of dynamic equivalence impacting comprehension is found in Verse 13, regarding the story of the people of the town and the messengers:

Arabic: وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ

Hilali & Khan: "And put forward to them a similitude: the story of the dwellers of the town, [it is said that the town was Antioch (Antakiya)], when there came to them the Messengers."

Maududi: "Cite for them the parable of the people of the town, when the Messengers came to it."

Hilali & Khan insert: "[it is said that the town was Antioch (Antakiya)]". This is a historical gloss drawn from specific *Isra'iliyyat* (Judeo-Christian traditions) and early *tafsir*. While it provides geographical clarity for the reader, it introduces a contested historical specificity that the Qur'an deliberately omits. The Qur'an uses *Qaryah* (the town) universally to make a timeless theological point about the rejection of messengers. By dynamically specifying Antioch, Hilali & Khan subtly shift the text from a universal parable to a localized historical narrative, altering the semantic and theological comprehension of the verse.

4.3 Fidelity to Meaning and Theology

The third research question asked: *How well do the English translations of Surah Yasin keep the meaning and theology of the original Arabic text?* Fidelity in Qur'anic translation is not merely about lexical accuracy; it is about preserving the theological integrity, the rhetorical *i'jaz* (inimitability), and the spiritual resonance of the text.

Theological Fidelity vs. Ideological Insertion:

Hilali & Khan's translation is often lauded for its "precision," but the data shows that its fidelity is frequently ideological rather than purely linguistic. Their translation of Verse 42 highlights this:

Arabic: وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِن مِّثْلِهَا مَا يَرْكَبُونَ

Hilali & Khan: "And We have created for them on the like thereof, what they will ride (i.e., ships, camels, etc.)."

Maududi: "And We have created for them other things of the same nature on which they ride."

The Arabic *Mithliha* (مِثْلِهَا) means "the like thereof" or "similar to it." Maududi faithfully translates this as "of the same nature," maintaining the generality of the Qur'anic promise, which scholars have noted encompasses all future modes of transportation (planes, trains, cars) that humanity would create by utilizing the laws of nature provided by God. Hilali & Khan dynamically specify "(i.e., ships, camels, etc.)," effectively limiting the theological scope of the verse to the 7th-century Arabian context. This severely diminishes the Qur'an's perceived

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miraculous foreknowledge and restricts its semantic universality, representing a significant failure in theological fidelity in pursuit of immediate clarity.

Preserving Rhetorical and Eschatological Impact:

In eschatological verses, the choice of a single word can drastically alter the theological imagery. Consider Verse 53:

Arabic: مَا هُمْ إِلَّا يَنْظُرُونَ

Hilali & Khan: "It will be but a single Saihah (shout, etc.), and behold! They will all be brought up before Us!"

Maududi: "There will be but one cry, and behold, they shall all be brought before Us."

The Arabic *Saihah* (صَيْحَةً / يَنْظُرُونَ) refers to a terrifying, piercing shout or blast that heralds the Day of Judgment. Hilali & Khan translate it as "shout, etc.," which is remarkably inadequate for the cataclysmic event described. The addition of "etc." is a jarringly colloquial and semantically lazy choice that strips the verse of its majestic and terrifying eschatological weight. Maududi's "one cry" is formally equivalent and maintains the solemn, awe-inspiring tone of the original Arabic, demonstrating higher fidelity to the theological atmosphere of the text.

Divine Attributes and Polysemy:

Perhaps the most critical test of theological fidelity is the translation of divine attributes and actions. In Verse 82:

Arabic: إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

Hilali & Khan: "Verily, His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, 'Be!' and it is!"

Maududi: "His command, when He intends a thing, is no more than He says 'Be', and it is."

Both translations handle *Kun fayakun* (كُنْ فَيَكُونُ) with similar formal equivalence. However, a subtle difference exists in the rendering of *Amruhu* (أَمْرُهُ). Hilali & Khan capitalize "Command," treating it as a specific proper noun of divine agency, which aligns with Salafi emphasis on the absolute, indivisible will of God. Maududi uses a lowercase "command," viewing it functionally. More tellingly, when analyzing the concept of *Sultan* (authority/dominion) in Verse 65 (where God seals mouths and hands testify), the semantic choices diverge sharply regarding God's absolute control. Maududi's lexical choices consistently reflect a theology where God's dominion (*Sultan*) is rendered as "authority," a term that implies structured, rational governance. Hilali & Khan frequently prefer terms like "absolute control," reflecting a Salafi emphasis on God's boundless, unconstrained will (*Qadar*). Neither is lexically incorrect, but both demonstrate how semantic selection is fundamentally an act of theological prioritization.

4.4 Summary of Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis of Surah Yasin demonstrates that the translation of the Qur'an is a deeply hermeneutical act. Hilali & Khan operate predominantly within the realm of dynamic equivalence. Their translation is characterized by extensive parenthetical insertions, explanatory glosses, and ideological specifications. While this approach fulfills a pedagogical objective—providing the lay reader with immediate, exegetically grounded clarity—it frequently results in overtranslation, rhetorical disruption, and a narrowing of the Qur'an's polysemous and universal theological scope. They prioritize *tafsir* over *tarjamah* (translation), merging commentary with the divine word.

Conversely, Maulana Maududi adheres more closely to formal equivalence. He preserves the structural brevity, rhetorical flow, and semantic openness of the Arabic text. His translation

minimizes parenthetical interference, allowing the poetic and reflective attributes of the Qur'an to resonate in English. However, this approach occasionally borders on undertranslation, leaving theological ambiguities (like the *Muqatta'at* or the primordial covenant) unarticulated for readers who lack access to external commentaries. He prioritizes the literary and structural integrity of the source text, requiring the target reader to exert greater cognitive and spiritual effort to derive meaning.

Neither translation achieves perfect semantic appropriateness; each sacrifices a dimension of the original to achieve its primary objective—Hilali & Khan sacrifice rhetorical and polysemous fidelity for doctrinal clarity, while Maududi sacrifices explicit comprehensibility for structural and aesthetic fidelity.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the semantic impact of word choice and appropriateness in the English translations of Surah Yā-Sīn by Hilali & Khan and Maulana Maududi, utilizing Eugene Nida's (1964) theoretical framework of dynamic and formal equivalence. Through a rigorous verse-by-verse comparative analysis, the research has illuminated how translation is never a neutral, purely linguistic exercise, but rather a profound theological and ideological negotiation. The findings reveal a clear dichotomy in translational methodology. Hilali & Khan's translation is heavily skewed toward dynamic equivalence. Their characteristic use of parenthetical insertions and expanded glosses—such as specifying the *Muqatta'at* as miracles, identifying the town as Antioch, or limiting divine provision to "ships and camels"—serves a distinct pedagogical purpose. It provides the English-speaking reader, particularly those aligned with Salafi orthodoxy, with immediate access to a specific, authorized exegesis. However, this study demonstrates that such dynamic interventions frequently result in overtranslation. They compromise the rhetorical conciseness, the structural elegance, and the polysemous richness of the Qur'an, often narrowing timeless universal principles to historically or sect-specific interpretations.

In contrast, Maulana Maududi's translation demonstrates a strong commitment to formal equivalence. By resisting the urge to embed *tafsir* directly into the text and maintaining the brevity of the original Arabic, Maududi preserves the Qur'an's majestic rhythm, poetic flow, and theological multi-vocality. This approach respects the integrity and ambiguity of the source text, allowing it to speak across different contexts. However, the study also identifies instances where this formal approach borders on undertranslation, leaving eschatological imagery and covenantal theology under-articulated for readers unfamiliar with the Arabic semantic universe, thus posing comprehension challenges.

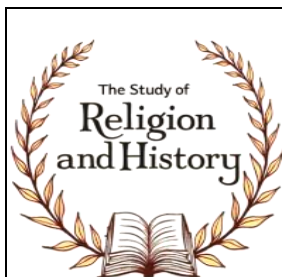
In answering the research questions, the study concludes that instances of ambiguity in Maududi often stem from a rigorous adherence to source-text structure, while instances of overtranslation in Hilali & Khan stem from a prioritization of target-text clarity. Dynamic equivalence undeniably enhances immediate comprehension but does so at the cost of semantic openness and rhetorical fidelity. Ultimately, neither translation emerges as categorically superior; each fulfils a specific objective contingent upon the audience's needs. Hilali & Khan offer a translation-cum-commentary for doctrinal instruction, while Maududi offers a translation that honors the literary and structural spirit of the original.

This research contributes significantly to translation studies and Qur'anic hermeneutics by demonstrating that even micro-level lexical choices—such as rendering *Amr* as "absolute

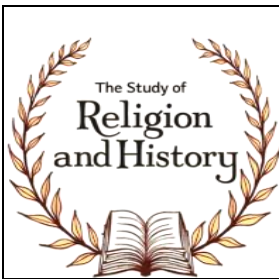
control" versus "dominion," or *A'had* as "command" versus "covenant"—carry macro-level theological consequences. For future translations of the Qur'an, this study underscores the imperative of balancing fidelity and clarity. Translators must remain acutely aware of the ideological weight of their lexical selections and strive for a methodology that provides necessary semantic context without colonizing the polysemous depth of the divine word. Future research could expand this comparative framework to other Surahs or incorporate reception studies to empirically measure how these divergent semantic choices impact the lived religious understanding of Muslim and non-Muslim readers globally.

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