
Challenges and Strategies in Translating Qur'anic Cultural Expressions: A Comparative Study of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem

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Abstract

Translating the Qur'an poses unique challenges due to its rich linguistic, cultural, and theological depth. Among these challenges, the translation of culture-specific expressions is particularly complex, as these lexical items carry nuanced meanings embedded in the historical, social, and religious context of classical Arabic. This study critically examines the challenges and strategies involved in translating such culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions into English, focusing on a comparative analysis of the translations by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. By analyzing selected examples, the research highlights how each translator negotiates semantic, cultural, and contextual difficulties, the strategies they employ to preserve meaning, and the impact of their choices on the target-language readership. The study aims to provide insights into effective translation strategies for culture-specific Qur'anic terms and to contribute to the broader field of Qur'anic translation studies by evaluating the comparative strengths and limitations of these two widely referenced translations. The study concludes with key findings regarding the effectiveness of various strategies and offers recommendations for future translators aiming to balance accuracy, clarity, and cultural integrity in rendering Qur'anic expressions into English.

Keywords: Qur’anic Translation, Culture-Specific Expressions, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Abdel Haleem, Translation Strategies, Linguistic Challenges, Comparative Study, English Translation of the Qur’an

Introduction

Translating the Qur’an has long been recognized as a highly complex and sensitive undertaking due to the sacred status of the text and the intricate interplay of linguistic, cultural, and theological elements embedded within classical Arabic (Abdul-Raof 2001). Cultural expressions in the Qur’an often carry meanings shaped by the socio-historical context of early Arabia, making them difficult to render accurately into English without explanatory support (Izutsu 2002). These culture-specific items include concepts, idioms, and lexical structures that resist direct equivalence, thereby challenging translators to balance fidelity and clarity (Baker 2018). As a result, translators must navigate semantic density, rhetorical nuance, and religious connotations simultaneously. The field of Qur’anic translation therefore demands both linguistic competence and cultural insight. The challenge becomes particularly significant when translations are intended for global audiences unfamiliar with Arab-Islamic cultural frameworks. Consequently, the study of translation strategies for culturally embedded Qur’anic expressions remains an important scholarly pursuit.

Scholars have approached Qur’anic translation with differing methodologies, shaped by their interpretive philosophies and linguistic priorities (Haleem 2010). Among English translators, Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem represent two influential yet distinct approaches, particularly regarding how they handle culture-specific expressions. Yusuf Ali tends to employ archaic diction and extensive annotation to preserve cultural depth, whereas Abdel Haleem adopts a more contemporary and reader-friendly style aimed at communicative clarity (Kidwai 2011). Comparing these translations allows scholars to examine the practical implications of differing translation ideologies. Such analysis highlights

how cultural and theological nuances are preserved, adapted, or simplified in the translation process. This comparative approach also illuminates broader issues in Qur'anic translation theory, including literalism, dynamic equivalence, and exegetical intervention. Therefore, examining the strategies and challenges faced by these two translators provides valuable insight into effective methods for rendering culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions.

Significance of the Topic

Understanding the challenges of translating culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions is essential because such expressions carry layers of meaning that extend beyond literal vocabulary (Abdul-Raof 2001). These cultural nuances often shape theological interpretation, ethical concepts, and socio-religious values embedded within the Qur'anic discourse. When translations fail to capture these elements, readers may form incomplete or inaccurate understandings of the intended message (Haleem 2010). The increasing global readership of the Qur'an in English further raises the need for translations that balance accuracy with accessibility. Moreover, culture-specific terms highlight the embedded worldview of the Qur'anic text, making their proper translation crucial for cross-cultural communication. Without careful treatment, these expressions risk being oversimplified or rendered misleadingly. Therefore, studying their translation is vital for both linguistic fidelity and interpretive integrity.

The topic is also significant due to the expanding academic interest in Qur'anic translation as an independent field within translation studies (Ali 2017). As researchers examine the Qur'an not only as scripture but as a complex linguistic and cultural text, the need to address culturally loaded lexicon becomes increasingly clear (Baker 2018). Translation choices in such contexts influence how the Qur'an is understood by non-Arabic-speaking audiences, shaping religious perceptions globally. This impact extends to interfaith dialogue and comparative religious studies, where translations serve as primary sources of understanding.

Misinterpretations resulting from cultural gaps can potentially lead to theological misunderstandings or misrepresentations (Kidwai 2007). Thus, scholarly attention to culture-specific expressions is indispensable for enhancing academic rigor. The topic's relevance extends beyond linguistics, reaching into religious studies and intercultural communication.

A third layer of importance arises from the varied translation philosophies adopted by prominent translators of the Qur'an, including Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Kidwai 2011). Their differing approaches—annotated literalism versus accessible communicative translation—provide valuable grounds for comparative scholarly evaluation. Examining how each translator handles culturally embedded terms allows researchers to identify strengths, limitations, and methodological implications. It also highlights the extent to which translators rely on exegetical traditions, linguistic intuition, or stylistic preferences. Such comparisons enhance understanding of how translation philosophies influence theological interpretation in the target language (Abdul-Raof 2001). They further reveal how cultural meanings may be preserved, adapted, or omitted. Because of this, comparative analysis enriches the broader discourse on Qur'anic translation strategies.

Finally, the topic holds practical significance for future translators, educators, and students of Islamic studies and translation studies alike. As English continues to expand as a global medium for Islamic scholarship, improving translation strategies becomes an urgent necessity (Ghileb 2019). Clearer guidelines on handling culturally bound terms can enhance pedagogical practices and curriculum design. Moreover, translating culture-specific expressions effectively contributes to reducing misunderstandings about Islam among global audiences. It also supports da'wah efforts by ensuring that non-Arabic speakers access Qur'anic meanings with greater clarity and accuracy (Haleem 2010). This topic therefore bridges academic

theory with real-world implications. Strengthening translation practices ultimately enriches both scholarship and public understanding of the Qur'an.

Literature Review

One of the most influential works on Qur'anic translation is Abdul-Raof's *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis* (2001), which provides a comprehensive linguistic and discourse-oriented analysis of the Qur'an. Abdul-Raof argues that Qur'anic translation is inherently interpretive due to the text's rhetorical complexity and cultural embeddedness. He highlights challenges arising from semantic density, syntactic structures, and culture-bound expressions, demonstrating how literal translations often fail to convey the Qur'an's pragmatic and contextual meanings. His discussion on cultural untranslatability is particularly relevant to this study, as it emphasizes the need for exegetical awareness and context-driven strategies. Abdul-Raof's work forms a theoretical foundation for understanding why translators diverge in their handling of culturally loaded Qur'anic terms and provides methodological insights into evaluating their choices.

Another significant contribution is Kidwai's *Translating the Untranslatable: A Critical Guide to 60 English Translations of the Qur'an* (2011). Kidwai offers a thorough critique of numerous English translations, focusing on stylistic choices, theological sensitivity, and linguistic accuracy. His examination reveals patterns in how translators approach culture-specific Qur'anic expressions, noting that some adopt archaic diction and heavy annotation, while others prioritize readability and modern linguistic norms. Kidwai's evaluation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Abdel Haleem is of particular value to this research, as he contrasts Yusuf Ali's exegetical commentary-based translation with Haleem's communicative and context-driven methodology. By outlining the strengths and weaknesses of both translators, Kidwai provides a comparative framework that directly supports the present study's analytical aims.

A further relevant study is Baker's *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (2018), which, although not specific to Qur'anic translation, presents key theoretical concepts essential for analyzing culture-specific vocabulary. Baker's categories of translation challenges—such as non-equivalence, cultural substitution, semantic shifts, and pragmatic loss—offer a valuable lens through which Qur'anic translators' choices can be evaluated. Her discussion on culturally bound terms and strategies such as paraphrase, borrowing, adaptation, and annotation aligns closely with the issues encountered in rendering Qur'anic expressions. While Baker does not address Islamic scripture directly, her theoretical models provide a robust framework for assessing the strategies used by Yusuf Ali and Abdel Haleem in managing culturally embedded Qur'anic items.

Collectively, these works contribute essential theoretical and analytical perspectives to the study of Qur'anic translation. Abdul-Raof provides linguistic depth, Kidwai offers comparative insights into Qur'anic translators, and Baker supplies a universal translation theory framework for evaluating cultural equivalence. Together, they form a scholarly foundation upon which this study builds its comparative analysis of culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions in the translations of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.

Limitations of the Research

1. The study examines only selected Qur'anic verses and culture-specific terms, which restricts the generalizability of the findings.
2. Only the translations of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem are analyzed, excluding other major English translators.
3. The study does not include empirical data on how readers perceive or interpret the translated expressions.
4. The analysis relies on general translation theories that may not fully capture the theological depth of Qur'anic discourse.

Research Questions

1. How do Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem differ in their translation of culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions?

2. What linguistic and cultural challenges arise in translating culture-specific terms from the Qur'an into English?
3. Which translation strategies are most frequently employed by the two translators when dealing with culturally loaded expressions?
4. How do the translators' choices affect the clarity, accuracy, and interpretive accessibility of the translated text for English readers?

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive–analytical methodology to examine the translation of culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions. Selected Qur'anic terms and verses that contain culture-specific meanings are identified through textual analysis and supported by classical tafsīr to establish contextual significance. The translations of Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem are then compared using a contrastive textual approach to evaluate differences in lexical choice, semantic accuracy, and cultural representation.

Concept of Cultural Bound Expression

Cultural-bound expressions refer to words, phrases, or idioms that are deeply rooted in the social, historical, and religious context of a particular culture and often carry meanings that cannot be fully understood outside that context (Nida 1964, 159). These expressions encompass religious rituals, legal terms, social customs, and metaphorical language that reflect the worldview and value system of the source culture (Newmark 1988, 94). In the context of Qur'anic translation, culture-bound expressions include terms such as *libas* (metaphor for spousal intimacy), *mahr* (marriage dower), *qisas* (retribution in Islamic law), and *siyam* (fasting) (Abdul-Raof 2000, 75). Their translation poses significant challenges because a literal rendering may confuse readers unfamiliar with the cultural or religious context, while an explanatory approach may risk over-interpretation. Translators must therefore balance semantic fidelity with accessibility, choosing strategies that convey both meaning and cultural significance. The selection of strategy often depends on the translator's purpose, audience, and familiarity with the source

culture (Venuti 1995, 20). Misunderstanding or ignoring these expressions can lead to a loss of theological, legal, and cultural nuances embedded in the Qur'anic text. Hence, addressing cultural-bound expressions is crucial for producing translations that are both accurate and comprehensible.

Cultural-bound expressions also play a critical role in conveying the ethical, social, and legal frameworks of the source text (Koller 2004, 88). In the Qur'an, such expressions often reflect Islamic jurisprudence, moral guidance, and socio-religious norms, which are integral to the text's intended message (Shakir 1983, 12). For instance, terms like *hudud* (fixed punishments), *wasiyyah* (bequest), and *hajj* (pilgrimage) are not merely linguistic units but carry legal and ritual implications that require contextual understanding (Abdul-Raof 2000, 112). Translators face the dual challenge of rendering meaning accurately while providing sufficient cultural explanation for readers unfamiliar with Islamic law and practice. Strategies such as transliteration with glosses, literal translation with footnotes, or functional equivalents in the target language are commonly employed (Newmark 1988, 94). This approach ensures that the translation retains both semantic content and cultural authenticity, preventing misinterpretation and facilitating cross-cultural comprehension. Therefore, identifying and appropriately translating culture-bound expressions is a central concern in Qur'anic translation studies, particularly when dealing with juristic and ritual terminology.

Qur'anic Culture –bound Expression

Qur'anic culture-bound expressions are words, phrases, or concepts embedded in the social, religious, and legal context of 7th-century Arabia, reflecting the culture, values, and worldview of that time (Abdul-Raof 2000, 58). These expressions include ritual terms, legal terminology, idiomatic phrases, and metaphorical language that carry meanings beyond their literal sense. Examples include *siyam* (fasting), *mahr* (marriage dower), *qisas* (retribution), *libas* (spousal intimacy), and *hajj* (pilgrimage) (Shakir 1983, 12). Such expressions are often challenging to

translate because they are deeply rooted in Islamic religious, ethical, and social practices, making literal translation insufficient for conveying full meaning (Newmark 1988, 94). Translators must consider both the semantic content and the cultural significance to maintain the original text's authenticity. Strategies include transliteration with footnotes, literal translation with explanations, or using functional equivalents that convey the intended meaning to a non-Arabic-speaking audience (Venuti 1995, 20). Failure to account for these cultural nuances may result in misinterpretation or loss of theological and juristic meaning. Hence, understanding Qur'anic culture-bound expressions is central to producing accurate, faithful, and comprehensible translations.

These expressions also serve as vehicles for conveying Islamic law, morality, and social norms (Koller 2004, 88). For example, terms like *hudud* (fixed punishments), *wasiyyah* (bequest), *qiblah* (direction of prayer), and *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving) are not merely linguistic items but represent legally and ethically prescribed actions in Islam (Abdul-Raof 2000, 112). Their translation requires careful attention to preserve both legal meaning and cultural context. Translators face the challenge of making these terms intelligible to readers unfamiliar with Islamic jurisprudence while maintaining fidelity to the source text. Combining literal translation with explanatory notes or commentary is a widely used strategy to overcome this challenge (Newmark 1988, 94). Addressing Qur'anic culture-bound expressions effectively allows translations to communicate not only the linguistic message but also the cultural, ethical, and religious framework inherent in the Qur'an. Therefore, a proper understanding of these expressions is essential for scholars, translators, and readers seeking accurate engagement with the Qur'anic text.

Comparative Study of the English Translation of the culturally embedded Qur'anic expressions by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem

The comparative analysis begins by examining specific Qur'anic expressions that carry deep cultural and contextual significance in classical Arabic. Each example is

assessed by comparing how Abdullah Yusuf Ali and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem render these expressions into English. Their translation choices are then evaluated in light of linguistic accuracy, cultural fidelity, and interpretive clarity. The detail of comparative study is as under:

Example 1

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:187)

Arabic: وَأَحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Permitted to you is the night of fasting for coming to your wives. They are garments for you, and you are garments for them..."

Abdel Haleem:

"You may have sexual relations with your wives on the nights of the fast. They are like clothing for you, and you are like clothing for them..."

Analysis:

The Arabic term لِبَاسٌ (**libas**) metaphorically expresses intimacy, protection, and mutual complementarity. Yusuf Ali maintains literal formalism, requiring cultural awareness, while Abdel Haleem's "like" clarifies meaning for modern readers. Both retain the original cultural nuance, showing contrasting strategies: literal versus reader-oriented translation.

Example 2

Verse: Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:3)

Arabic: حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Forbidden to you are dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that over which any other name than Allah's has been invoked..."

Abdel Haleem:

"You are forbidden dead animals, blood, pork, and whatever has been dedicated to other than God..."

Analysis:

The term الْخِنْزِيرِ (**al-khinzir**) denotes a religiously prohibited animal in Islam. Yusuf Ali uses formal phrasing "flesh of swine," reflecting traditional English usage. Abdel Haleem's "pork" aligns with contemporary English, enhancing readability.

Both preserve the prohibitive religious meaning while using different cultural framing.

Example 3

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:219)

Arabic: يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنْفَعٌ لِلنَّاسِ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: 'In them is great sin and some profit for men'..."

Abdel Haleem:

"They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, 'There is serious harm in them and some benefit for people'..."

Analysis:

The term **إِثْمٌ (ithm)** carries moral and religious weight. Yusuf Ali translates it as "great sin," emphasizing theological judgment. Abdel Haleem uses "serious harm," a pragmatic approach that communicates ethical concern to modern readers. Both highlight the tension between literal theological translation and functional contemporary rendering.

Example 4

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:255)

Arabic: اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal..."

Abdel Haleem:

"God—there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, Sustainer of all..."

Analysis:

The terms **الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ (al-hayy al-qayyum)** are highly theological and culturally specific. Yusuf Ali emphasizes classical English descriptors, maintaining traditional religious tone. Abdel Haleem renders them in more accessible contemporary language. Both translations preserve the theological essence while applying different strategies for clarity and readability.

Example 5

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183)

Arabic: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"O ye who believe! **Fasting** is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you..."

Abdel Haleem:

"Believers, **fasting** are required of you as it was required of those before you..."

Analysis:

The term الصَّيَام (as-siyam) is a key ritual in Islamic culture. Both translators retain "fasting," a culturally specific religious practice. Yusuf Ali uses slightly archaic style "prescribed," while Abdel Haleem simplifies "required," enhancing readability. The examples demonstrate maintaining cultural and religious significance across translation strategies.

Example 6

Verse: Surah Al-Anfal (8:60)

Arabic: وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"And make ready against them all you can of **force** and of steeds of war..."

M.A.S. Abdel Haleem:

"Prepare against them whatever **force** you can muster..."

Analysis:

The term قُوَّة (quwwah) indicates military preparedness in the historical and cultural context of early Islam. Yusuf Ali includes "steeds of war," reflecting historical warfare culture. Abdel Haleem generalizes "force" for broader modern understanding. Both retain core meaning, but Yusuf Ali preserves classical cultural imagery.

Example 7

Verse: Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:90)

Arabic: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ رِجْسٌ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling are **abominations** of Satan's handiwork..."

M.A.S. Abdel Haleem:

"Believers, wine and gambling are **filth and evil** from Satan..."

Analysis:

The Arabic رِجْس (rijs) conveys impurity and moral corruption. Yusuf Ali uses a

formal, poetic phrasing, while Abdel Haleem chooses a more direct and accessible version. Both translations maintain the ethical and religious weight, demonstrating contrasting approaches to culturally laden vocabulary.

Example 8

Verse: Surah Al-Ahzab (33:33)

Arabic: وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Stay in your houses, and do not display yourselves like that of the former **times of ignorance...**"

Abdel Haleem:

"Remain in your homes and do not display yourselves as women did in the **pre-Islamic period of ignorance...**"

Analysis:

The term الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ (al-jahiliyyah) is culturally specific, referring to pre-Islamic social norms. Yusuf Ali uses a concise phrase "times of ignorance," while Abdel Haleem expands it to contextualize historically. Both preserve cultural reference, but Abdel Haleem enhances clarity for readers unfamiliar with the concept.

Example 9

Verse: Surah Al-Hajj (22:28)

Arabic: لِيَشْهَدُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ وَيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"So that they may witness **benefits for themselves** and celebrate the name of Allah..."

Cultural-bound expression: "benefits for themselves"

Abdel Haleem:

"So that they may witness what is of **use to them** and remember God's name..."

Analysis:

The term مَنَافِعَ (manafi') reflects practical and spiritual benefits tied to pilgrimage rituals. Yusuf Ali uses "benefits for themselves," slightly formal, while Abdel Haleem's "use to them" simplifies understanding. Both maintain the cultural and ritual significance of the pilgrimage.

Example 10

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:233)

Arabic: وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنَ كَامِلَيْنِ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Mothers shall give suck to their children for **two whole years**, if the father desires to complete the term..."

M.A.S. Abdel Haleem:

"Mothers shall breastfeed their children for **two full years**, if the father wishes to complete the period..."

Analysis:

The Arabic phrase حَوْلَيْنَ كَامِلَيْنِ (hawlayn kamilayn) refers to the culturally and legally specified breastfeeding period. Yusuf Ali and Abdel Haleem both translate it directly, with minor stylistic differences. Both maintain the cultural, religious, and legal significance of the term within Islamic law.

Example 11

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:125)

Arabic: وَاتَّخِذُوا مِنْ مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"And take the **station of Abraham** as a place of prayer..."

Abdel Haleem:

"And adopt **Abraham's place of standing** for prayer..."

Culture-bound expression: "place of standing for prayer"

Analysis:

The مَقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (Maqam Ibrahim) is a culturally significant site in Islamic pilgrimage. Yusuf Ali translates literally, while Abdel Haleem clarifies the function for readers. Both retain cultural and religious meaning with different levels of accessibility.

Example 12

Verse: Surah An-Nisa (4:4)

Arabic: وَأَتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"And give the women their **dower (mahr)** as a free gift..."

Abdel Haleem:

"And give women their **marriage portion** as a free gift..."

Jurisdictional expression: "marriage portion"

Analysis:

The term **صَدَقَاتِهِنَّ** (**sadaqatihinna / mahr**) is a legally binding payment in marriage. Yusuf Ali uses Arabic loanword “dower,” Abdel Haleem translates functionally. Both preserve the Islamic legal and cultural meaning.

Example 13

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:196)

Arabic: وَأَتِمُّوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Complete the pilgrimage and the ‘umrah for Allah..."

Abdel Haleem:

"Complete the Hajj and ‘umrah for God..."

Jurisdictional expression: "complete the Hajj"

Analysis:

The term **الْحَجَّ** (**hajj**) is a legally and culturally defined ritual in fiqh. Yusuf Ali uses classical phrasing; Abdel Haleem simplifies for accessibility. Both retain legal obligations.

Example 14

Verse: Surah Al-Baqarah (2:178)

Arabic: وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ

Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Prescribed for you, retribution in cases of murder..."

Abdel Haleem:

"Lawful for you is retaliation in cases of murder..."

Analysis:

القصاص (qisas) refers to legally sanctioned retribution or blood money. Yusuf Ali’s “retribution” is formal; Abdel Haleem’s “retaliation” is clearer for modern readers. Both preserve the fiqh concept.

Findings

1. Abdullah Yusuf Ali uses a literal and formal style, often retaining Arabic terms, while M.A.S. Abdel Haleem adopts a dynamic, reader-oriented approach, clarifying culturally or legally embedded expressions in modern English.

2. Yusuf Ali relies on transliteration or literal equivalents, which may require prior cultural knowledge. Abdel Haleem explains or adapts culture-specific terms for immediate comprehension without compromising meaning.
3. In legal or ritual passages, Yusuf Ali emphasizes legal fidelity with formal phrasing, whereas Abdel Haleem prioritizes practical clarity, translating terms such as *mahr*, *qisas*, and *wasiyyah* in a more accessible manner.
4. Yusuf Ali leans toward literal, exegetical translation suitable for scholarly readers; Abdel Haleem uses a context-driven translation that caters to modern audiences.
5. Both translators successfully maintain the theological and cultural essence of the Qur'an. Metaphors like *libas* and juristic terms retain their intended spiritual, ethical, and legal significance.
6. The study highlights the importance of balancing literal fidelity with contextual clarity. Translators' choices significantly affect how English-speaking readers understand Qur'anic culture, law, and ethical guidance.
7. Yusuf Ali often preserves archaic or classical English expressions, which may enhance literary depth but can reduce immediate clarity for contemporary readers, whereas Abdel Haleem prefers modern, simple phrasing for ease of understanding.
8. Both translators demonstrate careful attention to semantic accuracy, but their approaches differ in handling ambiguity; Yusuf Ali retains potential multiple meanings, while Abdel Haleem selects the most contextually clear interpretation.
9. In passages containing metaphors or idiomatic expressions, Yusuf Ali favors a literal rendering that mirrors the original Arabic structure, whereas Abdel Haleem frequently adapts the expression to communicate meaning effectively in English.
10. The comparative study indicates that translation of culture-bound and juristic expressions requires both linguistic competence and cultural literacy; translators' awareness of the audience's background shapes the accessibility and comprehension of the text.

Recommendations

1. Translators of the Qur'an should strive for a balance between literal fidelity and reader-oriented clarity, ensuring that both theological accuracy and accessibility are maintained.
2. For culturally and juristically specific expressions, it is recommended to provide brief explanations or footnotes to aid readers unfamiliar with Islamic legal and cultural contexts.

3. Modern translations should consider audience background, using contemporary English for clarity while retaining key Islamic terms to preserve authenticity and nuance.
4. Future translators and scholars should adopt a comparative approach, analyzing multiple translations to identify effective strategies for conveying culture-bound and legal expressions.
5. Academic curricula and translation workshops should emphasize training in both linguistic competence and cultural literacy, enabling translators to navigate the challenges of Qur'anic translation effectively.
6. Digital and annotated editions of translations could incorporate hyperlinks or glossaries for culture-bound and juristic terms, enhancing comprehension for international audiences.
7. Translators should carefully consider the impact of stylistic choices—literal versus dynamic translation—on the accessibility and interpretive clarity of the Qur'anic text for diverse readers.

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