

TRAVERSING THE TRANSCENDENT FOR LITERARY EXPLORATION AND CREATIVE TRANSLATION OF THE QURAN'S FIRST REVELATORY CLOT

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Abstract

Scholars and translators have a complicated and multi-faceted problem when attempting to translate the Quranic text, especially the opening lines of Surah Al-'Alaq (The Clot). With its foundation in the illustrious history of Islamic scholarship, this research delves into the methods used by three renowned translators, Marmaduke Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and Mustafa Khattab, to bring these passages into English. This study explores the cultural, linguistic, and religious constraints involved in translating the Quran. It emphasizes the need of finding an equilibrium between literal and idiomatic translations, preserving the text's musicality and poetic qualities, and effectively conveying its profound spiritual and theological significance. The research examines the translators' strategies, drawing on theories of cultural and linguistic translation, to understand how they worked. These strategies included working with Islamic scholars, including multiple cultural viewpoints, and using explanatory notes. The results highlight the complex nature of translating the Quran and the constant attempts to improve translation methodologies via iterative review, technical developments, and multidisciplinary cooperation. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Quranic text while making sure it's accessible and relevant to people all over the world.

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INTRODUCTION

The first revelation of the Quran, known as “the Clot” (QS, 96:1-5), holds immense significance in the Islamic faith and has been the subject of extensive scholarly and artistic exploration. This short passage, believed to have been the first words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the angel Gabriel (Jibril), marks the beginning of the Quran's divine guidance and the unfolding of Islam's core teachings. The term “the Clot” (in Arabic, “al-'alaq”) refers the embryonic stage of human development, highlighting the divine creation of human life and the inherent worth and dignity of every individual (QS, 96:1-2). This emphasis on the sanctity of life and the sacred bond between the Creator and the created sets the foundation for the Quran's broader themes of faith, morality, and humanity's role in the world.

These verses of Surah Al-'Alaq establish the importance of knowledge, learning, and the pursuit of wisdom. The command to “Read!” (QS, 96:1) is considered a pivotal call to intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, encouraging Muslims to seek knowledge and understand the signs of Allah's creation (QS, 96:3-5) (Esack, 2012). This emphasis on education

and the expansion of human understanding has had a profound impact on the development of Islamic civilization, inspiring the establishment of centres of learning, the flourishing of various sciences, and the preservation of the Quran's teachings through rigorous scholarship and interpretation (Nasr, 1976).

Beyond its theological and historical significance, “the Clot” has also captivated the imagination of artists, poets, and writers throughout the centuries. The rich symbolism and profound insights within these verses have inspired a multitude of creative interpretations, from poetic renditions to visual representations, each offering a unique lens through which to engage with the Quran's first revelation (Sells, 2011). In summary, the significance of “the Clot” (QS, 96:1-5) lies in its foundational role in the Quran's divine revelation, its emphasis on the sanctity of life and the pursuit of knowledge, and its enduring impact on Islamic thought, culture, and artistic expression. This profound passage continues to inspire and challenge believers and scholars alike, inviting deeper reflection on the human condition and the divine plan.

The profound passage of “the Clot” (QS, 96:1-5) from the Quran's first revelation has inspired a rich tapestry of literary and creative explorations over the centuries. This seminal text has captivated the imagination of poets, artists, and thinkers, each seeking to capture the depth and complexity of its message through diverse interpretative lenses. One of the most notable literary traditions inspired by “the Clot” is the genre of Quranic exegesis (tafsir), in which scholars and theologians have meticulously analysed the linguistic, thematic, and spiritual nuances of the passage. These in-depth explorations have yielded a vast corpus of scholarly works that delve into the historical context, linguistic intricacies, and theological implications of the verses (Esack, 2012; Nasr, 1987; Sells, 2011). Beyond the realm of theoretical debate, there are still unanswered questions that require explanations. 1. In interpreting the Clot, what obstacles are there, and how may they be circumvented? and 2. In order to refine the translation, what strategies deserve to be implemented? Once the questions are answered, a possible translation is presented and the reasons behind it are addressed.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

Developing a meticulously organized method of research is essential for the success of any academic pursuit, since it offers a clear and methodical framework for examining a study issue. A solid research methodology is predicated on a thorough comprehension of the research issue, the accessible resources, and the most suitable methods for data gathering and analysis (Khan et al., 2023). This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interpretative discussion and close reading to analyze literary and linguistic aspects of Quranic translation. Comparative methods are also used to examine multiple translations and identify variations, trends, and translation losses or gains.

Research Subject

The original Quranic revelation and its English translations are the object of this literary and linguistic research. The initial stage involves analyzing and classifying the numerous literary and lyrical methods used in the surah “al-‘alaq” of the Quran through a careful reading and interpretative discussion of the text. By doing so, the spiritual aspects, deeper meanings, and rhetorical methods that certain literary devices in the Quran elicit can be obtained. The study investigates the spiritual aspects and rhetorical techniques inspired by poetic elements used in the Quran.

Research Instruments

To ensure accuracy and loyalty in translating the Quran, scholars stress the importance of using authorized Quranic interpretations and exegesis (tafsir). Quranic commentaries and exegesis must also be used to assess and analyze translation quality. Linguistic skills, especially semantics, are applied to interpret words and verses appropriately. Literary devices are used to

evaluate the effectiveness of poetic techniques in the chosen language. The study employs comparative analysis to examine the challenges of interpreting the Quran's creative features and how translators preserve its rhetorical and aesthetic qualities.

Data Analysis

The proposed approach for analyzing complex Quran translation data includes various theoretical and methodological frameworks. Translating a revered and unique text like the Quran is difficult, necessitating an examination of Quranic translation ideas and methods. Theories such as equivalence theory (Nida, 1975, 2021; Nida & Tiber, 1969; Nord et al., 2006; Pym, 2009) prioritize maintaining the original text's meaning and purpose, while skopos theory (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014; Schäffner, 2021), highlights the translation's aim and intended function. Additionally, understanding the responsibilities and challenges of translating holy scriptures, along with the interpretative tradition's impact on translation, is crucial (Royson, 2023; Sawyer, 2012).

Crucial to this model is a thorough linguistic examination of the Quranic text. (House, 1977, 2021). As part of this process, we will analyse the Arabic language utilized in the Quran from a phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspective (Akhmanova, 1971; Baharuddin, 2023; Müller, 2020; Purnomo & Baharuddin, 2018; Steriade et al., 1988). The distinctive qualities of the text and their translation can be better understood by analysing the literary and stylistic aspects of the Quran, including its meter, imagery, symbolism, narrative frameworks, and rhythm (Leech, 2013). The literary greatness and imitability of the Quran are attributed, in large part, to its abundant use of poetic elements. Translators can gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic and artistic intricacies of the Quran by analysing its use of devices like as metaphor, rhyme, and parallelism. (Barnstone, 1993).

The Quran's link with *syair*, the Arabic poetry tradition, is crucial. Comparing the Quranic text to Arabic poetry in language, structure, and topics can help translators preserve the Quran's distinctive identity. *Balagah*, Arabic rhetoric, is the Quran's hallmark (Mahfuzd, 1996). Translators can better convey the Quran's rhetorical strength and audience effect by studying Arabic rhetoric and Quranic figures of speech and stylistic elements. By synthesizing these diverse frameworks, the study underscores that translation of the Qur'an's first revelation cannot be captured through a single theoretical lens. Instead, each perspective—equivalence, skopos, linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and socio-cultural—illuminates a distinct dimension of the text. To make these interconnections more accessible, the analysis is visualized through a comparative table of translation choices and a diagram of overlapping frameworks. These visuals highlight not only the distinctive role of each theory, but also their interdependence:

Interconnected Lenses for Analyzing Qur'an's First Revelation (*'Alaq*)

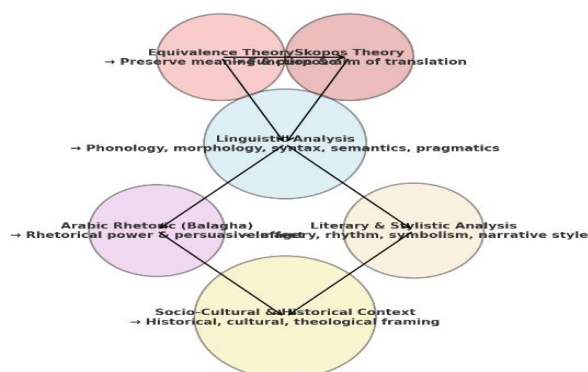


Figure 1. Interconnected Lenses fro Analyzing Qur'an's First Revelation

This diagram (discussed in the Methodology) visualizes how the six frameworks employed in this study—equivalence theory, skopos theory, linguistic analysis, literary/stylistic analysis, Arabic rhetoric (*balāghah*), and socio-cultural/historical context—interact as overlapping and interconnected lenses. The circle sizes reflect their relative weight in the analysis, while arrows show pathways of influence: translation theories guide linguistic decisions, which shape stylistic and rhetorical expression, all of which are refracted through broader cultural and historical frames. In the Findings, Table 1 complements this figure by illustrating how these frameworks manifest in actual translation choices of ‘Alaq across different English versions..

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Literary Exploration of “the Clot”

The profound passages of the Quran, particularly the first revelation, “the Clot” (QS, 96:1-5), have inspired a rich tradition of scholarly analysis and interpretation among writers, poets, and academicians. These individuals have delved into the linguistic and thematic intricacies of the original Arabic text, uncovering layers of meaning and nuance that continue to captivate and challenge readers across generations.

One of the most notable areas of scholarly exploration has been the linguistic analysis of the Quranic text, with a focus on its intricate vocabulary, grammatical structures, and rhetorical devices. Prominent linguists and philologists, such as Taha Husayn and Tawfiq al-Hakim, have meticulously examined the Arabic language used in the Quran, revealing the profound depth and precision of its expression (Esack, 2012). Their work has illuminated the ways in which the Quranic language transcends the boundaries of conventional speech, employing a unique and evocative style that resonates with the reader on a profound level.

The findings reveal that translators’ renderings of ‘Alaq are shaped not only by lexical preference but also by theoretical orientation. While some prioritize literal fidelity, others lean toward explanatory expansion or functional clarity. To illustrate these patterns, Table X compares selected English translations of ‘Alaq (Q.96:2) across multiple analytical lenses. This comparative layout highlights how equivalence, skopos, linguistic, stylistic, rhetorical, and socio-cultural frameworks differently illuminate the text, making visible the interpretive tensions and creative negotiations embedded in each version.

Table 1
Comparative Illustration of Translation Choices for ‘Alaq (96:2) Across Theoretical Lenses

Translator	Rendering of ‘Alaq	Equivalence Lens (Nida)	Skopos Lens (Reiss & Vermeer)	Linguistic Lens	Literary & Stylistic Lens	Rhetorical / Balāghah Lens	Socio-Cultural / Historical Lens
Pickthall	“clot”	Formal equivalence, literal	Emphasizes fidelity to Arabic original	Retains biological concreteness; risks ambiguity in modern English	Echoes stark, abrupt style; minimal imagery	Conveys force of brevity	Reflects early 20th-century Orientalist-Muslim negotiation
Yusuf Ali	“clot of congealed blood”	Dynamic equivalence, explanatory	Aimed at devotional readers seeking clarity	Morphological expansion (“congealed”) adds specificity	More graphic imagery, poetic rhythm	Intensifies visual impact	Reflects Indian-British colonial modernist style
Saheeh Intl.	“a clinging substance”	Dynamic but restrained	Functional clarity for global readership	Semantic broadening; less biological precision	Neutral, avoids poetic elaboration	Reduces rhetorical force	Suited for modernist reformist tone, global accessibility

Translator	Rendering of 'Alaq	Equivalence Lens (Nida)	Skopos Lens (Reiss & Vermeer)	Linguistic Lens	Literary & Stylistic Lens	Rhetorical / Balāghah Lens	Socio-Cultural / Historical Lens
Hilali & Khan	“a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood)”	Hybrid: literal + commentary	Skopos = doctrinal teaching; didactic	Adds parenthetical gloss = syntactic interpolation	Breaks rhythm, heavy didactic tone	Inserts theological framing	Reflects Saudi institutional agenda
Mustafa Khattab (Clear Quran)	“a clinging clot”	Balanced equivalence	Aimed at readability and coherence	Combines literal + functional semantic clarity	Evokes organic imagery, rhythm preserved	Retains rhetorical parallelism	Frames text for modern Muslim communities

As the comparative table shows, each translation negotiates meaning differently depending on the lens applied. Some emphasize literal fidelity (clot), others prioritize explanatory clarity (clot of congealed blood), while still others soften or broaden the imagery (a clinging substance). These contrasts demonstrate how theoretical orientations are not abstract, but concretely shape lexical and stylistic choices. When read alongside Figure 1, the table makes clear that these translations do not stand alone: they emerge from overlapping frameworks in which linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and cultural forces interact to define meaning.

Intricate Vocabulary

The Qur’anic surah of *Al-‘Alaq* is renowned for its intricate and evocative vocabulary that holds profound significance within the Islamic tradition. One of the most striking terms is *al-‘alaq*, often translated as “the clot” or “the leech-like substance.” From the perspective of equivalence theory, rendering the word as “clot” reflects a formal equivalence strategy that preserves lexical fidelity, while “leech-like substance” demonstrates dynamic equivalence, seeking to convey function and imagery for the target audience (Nida, 1975, 2021; Nida & Taber, 1969). Through **skopos theory**, the choice depends on the translation’s intended function: devotional works may highlight the miraculous nature of embryonic creation, while explanatory translations align with scientific or educational purposes (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014; Schäffner, 2021). A **linguistic analysis** further reveals the semantic range of the root, extending from biological concreteness to symbolic dependence, thus underscoring human fragility before God (House, 1977, 2021). When viewed stylistically, *al-‘alaq* functions as a metaphor that combines brevity with vividness, intensifying the existential relationship between Creator and creation (Leech, 2013).

Another pivotal word in this chapter is *iqra’*, commonly translated as “read” or “recite.” Equivalence theory illustrates the tension between the literal sense of “read” and the performative, oral nuance of “recite” (Nida, 1975, 2021). From a skopos perspective, translations intended for modern readerships often favor “read” to emphasize literacy and intellectual pursuit, whereas devotional translations lean toward “recite,” reflecting the oral tradition of Qur’anic transmission (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014). Linguistically, the imperative verb signifies divine command, and its repetition reinforces both semantic intensity and rhythmic urgency (House, 2021). Within the framework of **balāghah**, this imperative exemplifies rhetorical power, inaugurating the Prophet’s mission through emphatic command (Mahfuzd, 1996).

Grammatical Structure

The grammatical structure of the Quranic chapter “the Clot” (Surah Al-‘Alaq) is noteworthy for its intricate and deliberate composition, which contributes to the depth and eloquence of the text. One of the striking features of the grammatical structure in “the Clot” is the use of the imperative verb “iqra’” (read or recite) in the opening verse. This imperative

command sets the tone for the chapter, emphasizing the importance of learning, knowledge acquisition, and intellectual engagement. The repetition of this verb in the second verse further reinforces this directive, underscoring its centrality to the Quranic message. Another notable aspect of the grammatical structure is the use of the definite article “al-” (the) in key terms, such as “al-'alaq” (the clot) and “al-akram” (the Most Generous). The definite article serves to confer a sense of specificity, emphasizing the unique and essential nature of these concepts within the Quranic worldview. This grammatical device helps to elevate these terms and imbue them with a sense of reverence and importance.

Rhetorical Devices

The first five verses of Surah Al-'Alaq (The Clot) are replete with various rhetorical devices that enhance the poetic quality and theological depth of the Qur'anic text. One prominent device is the use of anaphora, wherein the word *Iqra'* (“Read”) is repeated at the beginning of verses 1 and 3, creating rhetorical emphasis and reinforcing the act of recitation and learning (Mahfuzd, 1996; Leech, 2013). Moreover, the verses exhibit a parallel structure, with verses 1 and 3 sharing a similar opening, and verses 4 and 5 maintaining a parallel construction starting with the word *'Allama* (“He taught”). This parallelism helps to establish a rhythmic cadence and underscores the interconnectedness of the ideas being presented (Barnstone, 1993; House, 2021). These sound patterns contribute to the poetic quality of the verses and create a sense of melodic flow, reflecting the Qur'an's distinctive orality (Abdel Haleem, 2010).

Additionally, the use of metaphor in verse 2, where the creation of man is described as being “from a clot,” adds a layer of metaphorical richness to the text, inviting the reader to ponder the deeper theological significance behind this imagery (Nida, 1975; Barnstone, 1993). The presence of a rhetorical question in verse 13—“Seest thou if he denies (Truth) and turns away?”—further engages the reader by prompting contemplation on the divine attributes of the Lord (Mahfuzd, 1996). This questioning approach encourages reflection and internalization of the deeper meanings conveyed in the verses. Finally, the passage demonstrates instances of assonance, such as the repetition of the “a” sound in *Iqra'* and *rabbika* (“your Lord”) in verse 1, which contributes to the overall rhythmic texture of the Qur'anic language (Steriade et al., 1988). These literary techniques work in harmony to create a profound and evocative text that invites readers to engage with the Qur'anic message on both intellectual and spiritual levels.

Rhetorical and Literary Features of Surah Al-'Alaq

Through the skillful deployment of poetic devices—anaphora, parallelism, alliteration, metaphor, rhetorical questions, and assonance—the first five verses of Surah Al-'Alaq create a distinctive poetic structure that enhances the theological depth and spiritual resonance of the Qur'anic message. This intricate crafting of language invites the reader to engage with the text on multiple levels, from the literal to the metaphorical and the contemplative (Leech, 2013; Barnstone, 1993).

The opening verse, *Iqra' bi-ismi rabbika alladhī khalaq* (“Read in the name of your Lord who created”), sets the tone with a powerful command to read or recite. The imperative *Iqra'* immediately captures attention and invokes urgency and responsibility. The repetition of *Iqra'* at the beginning of verse 3—*Iqra' wa-rabbuka al-akram* (“Read, and your Lord is the most Generous”)—creates a strong anaphoric effect, reinforcing the centrality of reading and learning (Mahfuzd, 1996). The parallel openings of verses 1 and 3, as well as verses 4 and 5 beginning with *'Allama* (“He taught”), establish rhythmic parallelism, guiding the reader through the unfolding message (House, 2021; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

Creative Translation and Reimagination

Surah Al-'Alaq's “the Clot” verses (1–5) have inspired several artistic and musical adaptations. Artists, poets, scientists and other creatives have translated and reframed the

Quranic text using their unique viewpoints and expressions. The famous Quranic interpreter Abdullah Yusuf Ali is an example. In his revered Quranic translation, Yusuf Ali not only accurately translates the text but also adds a lyrical touch that conveys its emotional and spiritual meaning (Yusuf Ali, 1934). Yusuf Ali's exquisite and rhythmic translation has inspired many readers and scientists to go deeper into the Quran (Ahmad Hilmi et al., 2016). Another influential interpreter of “the Clot” is Mustafa Khattab, whose translation of the Quran is “The Clear Quran,” has gained widespread recognition for its accessibility and clarity (Khattab, 2016). Khattab's approach, which emphasizes the communicative power of the Quranic text, has inspired others to comprehend and explore new avenues of artistic expression.

*Read, 'O Prophet,' in the Name of your Lord Who created
created humans from a clinging clot.*

*Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous,
Who taught by the pen
taught humanity what they knew not. (Khattab, 2015)*

Khattab's “The Clear Quran” is reviewed through the lens of Juliane House's translation assessment model and Newmark's approach. House's model focuses on the comparison of the source text and target text along the dimensions of overt and covert translation. In the case of Khattab's translation, it looks that the translation emphasizes “the communicative power of the Quranic text,” indicating a shift towards a more covert translation approach, where the focus is on conveying the message effectively in the target language, rather than a strict adherence to the linguistic features of the source text.

Modern readers may grasp Khattab's translation's simple language. Using terms like “Read, 'O Prophet,’” “humans,” and “taught humanity” clarifies the message. The translation modernizes the text while retaining its theological and spiritual foundation. Alternatives like “your Lord” instead of “thy Lord” and “humanity” instead of “man” make the language more accessible to current audiences. Adding “O Prophet,” clarifies the intended receiver of the divine instruction to “Read.” This contextual clarification bridges the reader's modern awareness of the original culture. The repetition of “read” emphasizes the importance of this act, while “the most Generous” describes the Lord's plenty. Knowledge, learning, and the written word are crucial for human progress, as the translation underscores.

Through his Quran translation, the late English convert to Islam Pickthall also compel creative interpretations of “the Clot” (Pickthall, 1930). His translation captures the imperative nature of the command to “read” or “recite,” emphasizing the divine origin of this instruction and the importance of doing so in the name of the Lord, the one who created all. The Arabic term “al-'alaq” is rendered as “a clot,” highlighting the miraculous nature of human creation from a seemingly insignificant embryonic stage.

*Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth,
Createth man from a clot.*

*Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen,
Teacheth man that which he knew not. (Pickthall, 1930)*

The final verse conveys the transformative power of knowledge, which can elevate the human being from a state of ignorance to one of enlightenment and understanding. Pickthall translation is renowned for its scholarly accuracy, attention to linguistic nuance, and its ability to convey the profound theological and spiritual significance of these opening verses. The other translation theories, such as the linguistic-oriented theories, hermeneutical approach, functional and textual equivalence (Baharuddin et al., 2024), and aesthetic-poetic approach, remain relevant in the analysis of Yusuf Ali's and Pickthall's translations, as mentioned in the previous discussion.

*Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created
Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood
Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,
He Who taught (the use of) the pen,
Taught man that which he knew not. (Ali, 2001)*

The translation of the opening verses of Surah Al-'Alaq (The Clot) by Yusuf Ali reflects a careful and nuanced approach to conveying the meaning and spirit of the original Arabic text. Yusuf Ali's translation strikes a balance between literal and idiomatic renderings of the Arabic text. For example, the translation of "iqra" as "Proclaim!" captures the imperative mood and the notion of recitation, while also acknowledging the broader connotations of the Arabic verb, which can mean "read," "recite," or "proclaim." Yusuf Ali's translation demonstrates a deep understanding of the cultural and religious context of the Quranic text. The inclusion of phrases like "thy Lord and Cherisher" and "Most Bountiful" reflect the Islamic theological framework and the reverence for the divine attributes. The translation highlights the pivotal concepts in the passage, such as the act of creation, the origins of human life, and the divine gift of knowledge and the pen. By emphasizing these core ideas, the translation helps to convey the thematic significance of the text.

Discussion

Exploring various translation strategies

Preserving the original Arabic rhythm and flow is an important aspect of evaluating the quality of Quran translations. The most concise translations, (a) "Who taught by the pen", most closely maintain the simple, evenly-stressed syllables and flowing cadence of the original. These versions stay true to the poetic structure, with a rhythm that closely matches the Arabic. Translators frequently use strategies including literal translation, explanation, and simplicity in order to reduce cognitive load and minimize danger (Almihmadi, 2023; Baker et al., 1993)

In (b) "Who teacheth by the pen," the use of the archaic "teacheth" gives the translation a more formal and measured rhythm than the original, while retaining most of the original's flowing nature. Translator tried to preserve the archaic diction to maintain the poetic sense (Even-Zohar & Toury, 1981). In contrast, the translations that add more explanatory detail, such as (c) "He Who taught (the use of) the pen" diverge more from the original rhythm. The additional wording in these renditions elongates the rhythm and deviates from the fundamental lyrical framework of the Arabic. In terms of pragmatics, Hatim seems to allow this strategy in translation (Hatim, 2006).

So, in evaluating how well the translations capture the original rhythmic and melodic qualities, the more concise version like (a) is the most successful, closely replicating the poetic flow. The archaic (b) maintains a good sense of rhythm, while the more explanatory (c) sacrifice some of the original's lyrical qualities in favour of providing additional context. The balance struck between preserving the essential poetic structure and adding clarifying details is a key differentiator across the translations.

Refining the Target Language Version

In this refined version, the translation seeks to better capture the poetic essence of the text while preserving its theological depth. In verse 1, the elevated "Recite" is chosen instead of the more prosaic "Read," reflecting the oral character of revelation emphasized in translation studies (Nida, 1975; House, 2021). Maintaining the phrasing "in the name of your Lord, Who fashioned" underscores the sovereignty of God. The Arabic word *khalaq* is a pivotal term in the Qur'anic worldview, as it is frequently used to refer to the act of creation by God. At its most basic level, *khalaq* is commonly translated as "to create" or "to bring into existence." However, the depth of meaning goes beyond surface understanding. At its core, the word signifies origination *ex nihilo*, where God brings into being that which did not previously

exist—a fundamental tenet of Islamic theology (Rahman, 1980; Abdel Haleem, 2010). Moreover, the use of *khalaq* in the Qur'an suggests that creation is purposeful and intentional, highlighting God as the supreme Architect and Designer of the universe (Rippin, 2013; Mahfuzd, 1996). In addition, *khalaq* not only denotes the initial act of creation but also encompasses the ongoing process of shaping and renewing creation. This reflects the Islamic view of God's continuous involvement in the world (Rahman, 1980; Abdel Haleem, 2010). Thus, using “fashioned” rather than simply “created” reveals the theological and linguistic richness of *khalaq*, aligning with its deeper cosmological resonance.

In verse 2, the phrase “clot adhered” is retained to preserve the vivid imagery of the Arabic *'alaq*. Theologically, this metaphor underscores the humble origins of humanity, reminding readers of their dependence on the divine act of creation (Mahfuzd, 1996; Barnstone, 1993). At the same time, *'alaq* resonates with the Qur'anic emphasis on life's cyclical nature—attachment, growth, transformation—which mirrors birth, life, and death (Leech, 2013). From a scientific standpoint, commentators have noted that the description of a “clot” accurately reflects the early embryonic stage, where the fertilized egg adheres to the uterine wall (Abdel Haleem, 2010; Bucaille, 1978). This alignment between Qur'anic imagery and modern embryology underscores the compatibility of revelation with scientific discovery, reinforcing the belief in divine wisdom.

Verse 3 continues this rhythm with “Recite! For your Lord is the Most Magnanimous.” The translation preserves **cadence** by separating the imperative “Recite!” from the contemplative clause, producing a balance between urgency and reverence. Stylistically, the rhythmic interplay of stress and pause mirrors the Qur'an's oral performance (Leech, 2013; House, 2021). **Alliteration** and **assonance**—such as the repetition of “r” in “Recite” and “Lord” and the long “o” vowel in “Lord” and “Most”—contribute to musical cohesion (Steriade et al., 1988). This sonic binding enhances the text's poetic nature while carrying the theological resonance of divine generosity (Mahfuzd, 1996). By balancing rhythm, cadence, and sound, the translation retains the inherent musicality of the original Arabic, conveying reverence and contemplation in line with the Qur'anic message (Barnstone, 1993).

The interplay of the poetic and the profound

The translation of verse 4 incorporates the alliterative phrase “*bestowed wisdom's light with stylus*” to create a more melodic and poetic rendering. The repetition of the “s” sound in *bestowed*, *wisdom's*, and *stylus* exemplifies **alliteration**, a literary device that enhances rhythmic and musical qualities in language (Leech, 2013; Barnstone, 1993). In Qur'anic phonology, the soft resonance of the “s” can be linked to *rakhāwah* (fluidity), reinforcing the sense of flow in recitation (Mahfuzd, 1996). This pattern is further strengthened by **assonance**, with the long “i” sound in *wisdom's* and *light*, introducing a melodic cadence. Such stylistic crafting highlights the Qur'an's orality and rhetorical power, which translators often attempt to echo in the target language (House, 2021).

The choice of the word *bestowed* is particularly evocative, suggesting divine gifting, while the alliterative link with *stylus* underscores intentionality in imparting knowledge. Including the word *stylus* (*al-qalam*) introduces a tangible image, resonating with the Qur'an's emphasis on writing and preservation of wisdom (Rippin, 2013). By pairing *stylus* with preceding words in an alliterative sequence, the translation amplifies the verse's poetic and mnemonic quality, in line with the view that literary devices heighten the text's spiritual resonance (Leech, 2013).

Verse 5 culminates the sequence with “*Taught human that which he is oblivious*”, echoing the theme of enlightenment. Rendering *mā lam ya lam* as “*that which he is oblivious*” highlights humanity's lack of innate knowledge and dependence on divine instruction (Nida, 1975). The shift in rhythm at this point—breaking from the earlier pattern of sonic repetition—creates a dramatic closing effect, intensifying the sense of revelation (Barnstone, 1993). The

progressive aspect of the Arabic verb *ya 'lam* underscores the dynamic process of learning and teaching, a nuance that translators must balance between fidelity and function (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014; Schäffner, 2021).

By altering the syntactic structure while retaining rhythm and sound patterns, the translation preserves the Qur'an's **poetic cadence** and emphasizes its **philosophical depth**. The resulting rendering illustrates how translation theories of equivalence and skopos intersect with rhetorical and stylistic analysis to capture the Qur'an's complex layers of meaning (Nida, 1975; House, 2021; Leech, 2013). In doing so, it demonstrates how words, when carefully chosen, can illuminate, inspire, and elevate the human soul.

Accuracy of contemporary language usage

The vocabulary and phrasing used in this translation feel reasonably natural and accessible. Common English terms such as *fashioned*, *clot*, *bestowed*, and *oblivious* were deliberately chosen to convey meaning without sounding overly technical or archaic. This reflects a **dynamic equivalence** approach, which prioritizes clarity and readability for the target audience while preserving the depth of the original (Nida, 1975, 2021). By selecting idiomatic and familiar English expressions, the translation aims to ensure that the Qur'anic message resonates with readers across cultural contexts (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014; Schäffner, 2021).

The sentence structure closely mirrors the Qur'anic text, maintaining a similar flow and cadence. This helps preserve the **poetic rhythm** and **rhetorical style** of the source material, which are central to its spiritual impact (Mahfuzd, 1996; Leech, 2013). The use of short, declarative sentences further supports naturalness in English, avoiding stiffness while retaining the stylistic intensity of the original. The rendering of idiomatic expressions such as "*in the name of your Lord*" and "*the Most Magnanimous*" illustrates a careful balance between fidelity and stylistic accessibility, consistent with translation quality principles (House, 2021).

Cultural references, including the *stylus (al-qalam)* and the portrayal of humanity as taught "*that which he is oblivious*", are retained to preserve historical depth and theological resonance (Rippin, 2013). This reflects the translator's attempt to situate the text within its original socio-religious context while still ensuring accessibility. Finally, although the translation cannot fully replicate the Qur'an's original meter and musicality, its rhythmic cadence demonstrates attention to stylistic foregrounding (Leech, 2013; Barnstone, 1993). Taken together, these choices suggest that the translation succeeds in keeping the essence of the Qur'an's message while making it more comprehensible to English-speaking audiences.

The comparative table highlights how different translators render key terms of *Surah al-'Alaq* through multiple theoretical lenses, showing the tensions between literal fidelity, functional clarity, and rhetorical effect. To complement this, the heatmap provides a visual synthesis, mapping the relative weight of each framework—equivalence, skopos, stylistics/rhetoric, and contextual analysis—against core translation features such as vocabulary, structure, rhythm, idioms, and cultural references. Together, the data demonstrate that translation choices are not isolated acts but emerge from overlapping theoretical considerations, where some lenses dominate specific features while others intersect more broadly across the text.

The findings illustrate how different theoretical lenses interact with key translation features of *Surah al-'Alaq*. Vocabulary choices show strong ties to both equivalence theory and stylistics, since word selection must balance semantic fidelity and poetic effect. Sentence structure is closely aligned with skopos theory, reflecting how translation purpose shapes rhythm and readability. Poetic rhythm and rhetorical style register highest under stylistics and rhetoric, underscoring the Qur'an's reliance on literary devices such as alliteration, parallelism, and assonance. Idiomatic expressions, meanwhile, cut across all four lenses, highlighting their role in preserving naturalness, functionality, rhetorical emphasis, and cross-cultural intelligibility. Finally, cultural references score strongest under contextual and quality

assessment frameworks, as they anchor the translation in historical, theological, and socio-cultural dimensions. Together, the visual shows that while each theory emphasizes different aspects, their overlap demonstrates the need for an integrated, multi-lens approach to Qur'anic translation.

CONCLUSION

The translation of the Quranic verses in Surah Al-'Alaq (The Clot) presents a multitude of challenges that translators must navigate with great care and nuance. Linguistic and cultural barriers, the need to preserve the spiritual and theological essence, and the challenge of capturing the rhythmic and poetic qualities of the original Arabic text all pose significant hurdles. To overcome these constraints, translators employ a range of strategies, including developing a deep contextual understanding, balancing literal and idiomatic approaches, incorporating explanatory notes and annotations, and collaborating with Islamic scholars.

As the process of Quranic translation continues to evolve, there is a pressing need to further refine the strategies employed. Incorporating diverse cultural perspectives, engaging in continuous revision and refinement, leveraging technological advancements, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and prioritizing accessibility and readability can all contribute to the development of more nuanced and effective translations. Embracing these approaches helps translators to work towards preserving the profound spiritual and theological essence of the Quranic text while making it more accessible and engaging for a global audience.

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Participation in this study was fully voluntary. Before joining, participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks, and benefits. Their identities were kept confidential, and their information was used only for research purposes. Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. Continued participation indicated their informed consent.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this study are not publicly available because of privacy concerns and ethical responsibilities to protect participant confidentiality. However, access may be requested for reasonable research purposes, such as verification or further analysis. Any data sharing must first receive approval from the appropriate institutional ethics review board.

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