

Translation Assessment of the Verb "Yamhaqu" in the Usury Ayah of the Holy Quran into English

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to examine the translation of the Arabic verb "yamhaqu" in Surat Al-Baqarah, Ayah 276 of the Holy Quran. Various English translations of this term are studied, the translational strategies employed are analyzed, and their effectiveness in conveying the original Quranic meaning is evaluated. By conducting a comparative analysis of prominent English renditions based on translation theory, classical Arabic lexicography, and Quranic exegesis, this study endeavors to highlight the complexities deep-rooted in translating terms characterized by cultural and theological specificity. The findings of the study reveal that the use of the dynamic equivalence strategy and explicating translation tend to yield more accurate translations than literal translation approaches, particularly when terms are deeply embedded in the theological discourse of Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Translating the Holy Quranic text presents unique challenges because it is characterized by deep language, rich rhetoric, and profound theological implications. Each word denotes layers of meaning hard to convey thoroughly in another language. The present study focuses on the verb "yamhaqu" in Surat Al-Baqarah, ayyah 276, which states (Al-Baqarah 2:276). This ayah, occurring within the discourse on usury and charity (giving sadaqat), forms an interesting case study whereby the complexities of Quranic translation can be examined from a translation studies perspective.

The study is aimed at critically assessing various English translations of (yamhaqu) in this specific ayyah, exploring the translational strategies used, and assessing the scope of their effectiveness in conveying the intended Quranic meaning. It will also look at the nuances of the verb from linguistic and theological perspectives, hold comparisons between prominent English translations, and deal with the inherent challenges in achieving equivalence in semantic and pragmatic terms. The analysis will be carried out in the light of key concepts commonly known in translation theory, with insights gleaned from classical Arabic lexicography and the exegeses of the holy Quran.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quranic translation has received extensive scholarly inquiry, with special focus on the challenges posed by its unique characteristics, both linguistic and theological. Multiple studies have dealt with the complexities of translating Quranic terms and concepts into different target languages, often emphasizing the tension between linguistic accuracy and theological fidelity.

A.J. Arberry and Marmaduke Pickthall were pioneers in fulfilling the early works in the translation of the Quran, laying the foundation for subsequent scholarly endeavors. In spite of the great value of their pioneering efforts, their works have also been met with critical analysis as to the approaches used for rendering specific terms and the strategies used in their translations. For instance, the various approaches to translating the Quran were discussed by Abdel Haleem, who emphasized the importance of context and the challenges encountered in conveying the rhetorical force in the Quran. He states that "the Qur'an is a text that is meant to be heard, and its oral qualities are often lost in translation" (2004, p. 12). His words emphasize the inherent difficulty in translating it, as the translator is entitled to convey not just the meaning but also the performative load of the Quranic text.

More recent research has delved deeper into specific linguistic phenomena and their translational indications. For instance, there were studies on polysemy and synonymy in the Quran that have shown how a single Arabic word can carry numerous layers of meaning, making the decision of choosing the most appropriate equivalent in the target language challenging to translators. Moreover, the notion of lexical equivalence in Arabic-English translation is examined by Morini (2013, 15), who argues that the intended effects of the original must be fully comprehended and recreated by text translators, both semantically and pragmatically, reinforcing the idea that translation is an

interpretive and creative process. His statement is particularly applicable for a term like "yamhaqu," whose semantic field is rich and nuanced.

Besides, utilizing the modern theories of translation to Quranic texts has provided promising frameworks for analysis. Scholars, for instance, have made use of Nida's formal and dynamic equivalence, Skopos theory, and Chesterman's translation strategies for the evaluation of performed translations and for proposing new methodologies. Hatim and Mason (1997: p. 9), for instance, elaborate on the role of pragmatics in translation, highlighting how such factors as culture and context can influence the understanding and rendition of texts, especially the religious ones. Their work indicates that the translation of a term like "yamhaqu" includes not only linguistic transfer alone but also a profound recognition of the communicative function it performs within the Quranic discourse.

Further studies on controversial Quranic terms have also added to the literature. While relevant studies on the translation of the Arabic verb (yamhaqu) into English may not exist to the best of the researcher's knowledge, studies on other problematic terms, such as (jihad), (riba), or (barakah), constitute relevant precedents. These studies often consist of a multi-faceted approach, comprising linguistic analysis, exegetical review, and comparative analysis of existing translations. Research conducted on the translation of riba (usury) itself often discusses the implications of its prohibition and the opposite concept of barakah, which has a direct link to the meaning of yamhaqu. This body of literature represents a useful background for the present research, paving the way for a thorough and theoretically well-grounded assessment of the translational problems associated with the translation of the verb (yamhaqu).

RESEARCH METHODS

Linguistic and Quranic Context of (Yamhaqu) To uncover the translational challenges, it is essential to understand the multifaceted meaning of the verb (yamhaqu). It is derived from the trilateral root *م, ح, ق* (m-h-q), which in classical Arabic denotes such meanings as: eradication, diminution, obliteration, and the lack of blessing. (Mahaq) is defined by Ibn Mandhur, in his lexicon (Lisan al-Arab) , as "decrease and disappearance," referring that : "Allah mahaqa (eradicated) something, meaning He removed its blessing and annihilated it" (p.338) . This indicates that the core meaning is not limited to mere physical destruction but extends to include a moral loss of value and spiritual gift. Based on the context of the ayah (276) in Surat Al-Baqarah (2) : "Allah yamhaqu al-riba" it is signified that usury, despite any direct financial gain, is doomed to be devoid of "barakah " (divine blessing). This lack of barakah leads to its gradual diminution, final annihilation, or to removing any tangible benefit it might look to ensure . The ayah is in contrast with "yurbi al-sadaqat" (He causes charities to grow), where "yurbi" (يُرْبِي) indicates increase, growth, and blessing. This linguistic antithesis highlights the divine rule that as usury leads to spiritual and eventual material loss, charity creates real prosperity and blessing. He further elaborates on (mahaq), indicating the association of which with the waning phase of the moon, as it "gradually diminishes until it disappears" (Ibn

Mandhur: p. 339). This analogy is pivotal: since the destruction, the verb (*yamhaqu*) implies, may not be immediate but takes the form of a slow, prolonged erosion of real value and blessing, even if the physical aspect of wealth remains or prospers for a time. This kind of understanding of such nuances is essential for translators seeking to perform accurate rendition.

RESEARCH RESULT

Theoretical Framework

The translation of religious texts, particularly the Quranic ones, entails a thorough understanding of the theories of translation and their practical applications. Eugene Nida, for instance, made a distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence that remains fundamental to understanding the choices made and the decisions taken by the translators of the Holy Quran. According to him, "formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content," while "dynamic equivalence is based upon 'the principle of equivalent effect'" [Nida, 1964: p. 159]. This distinction is necessary when any analysis of the various renditions of (*yamhaqu*) is carried out.

Lawrence Venuti, on the other hand, provided the concept of the duality of "foreignization" versus "domestication," which gives valuable insight into applicable strategies for Quranic translation. He points out that "foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (Venuti, 1995: 20). On the one hand, as far as the verb (*yamhaqu*) is concerned, adopting a foreignizing approach might keep the Arabic term complex and ambiguous in the TL, while a domesticating approach, on the other hand, would seek to make the concept immediately accessible to English readers.

Semantic Field Theory and Quranic Translation

Semantic field theory, developed by Jost Trier and further refined by John Lyons, is of relevance to understanding the verb (*yamhaqu*). Lyons indicates that "the meaning of a word is determined by the set of semantic relations which hold between it and other words in the vocabulary" (Lyons, 1977: 230). In Arabic, (*yamhaqu*) falls within a semantic field that involves concepts of "barakah" (blessing), "fasad" (corruption), and "halak" (destruction), each with certain theological and cultural connotations for which no direct equivalents may exist in English.

Peter Newmark, a translation theorist, states that "The more culturally specific a text is, the more difficult it is to translate, and the more the translator has to explain or adapt cultural references for the target audience" (1988: 95). He acknowledges by his words the semantic complexity of some terms in any language. The Arabic verb (*yamhaqu*) is one example within Islamic economic and theological discourse that exemplifies this challenge.

Skopos Theory and Quranic Translation

Skopos Theory by Hans Vermeer, which focuses on the purpose or function performed by translation, is a further lens whereby the translations

of (yamhaqu) can be analyzed. According to Vermeer (1989:20, cited in Nord, 1997:29), "the top-ranking rule for any translation is thus the 'skopos rule': translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it.

"Viewed from this perspective, the various translations provided of (yamhaqu) purport different skopos, or purposes. Thus Arberry's academics-oriented translations might give priority to scholarly precision, whereas devotional translations of the kind common in prayer books might be more spiritually impact-oriented. As for Yusuf Ali's translation, which adopts an explanatory approach, it appears more intended to serve readers seeking both accuracy and accessibility, targeting a (skopos) suitable for religious pedagogy and interfaith dialogue.

Translation Strategies and Their Outcomes

The translation of the verb (yamhaqu), being a polysemous and context-dependent term, requires careful consideration of the various strategies of translation. In this case, "translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida and Taber, 2003: 12). The reader's comprehension of the Quranic message is significantly impacted by such choices made. The following is an analysis of several selected prominent English translations:

1. *Sahih International*: (Allah destroys interest...) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

In the above translation, the direct, formal equivalent (destroys) is used. As much as it is concise, the multifaceted meaning of (mahq) might be oversimplified, probably causing readers to expect immediate physical ruin rather than a gradual loss of divine care, guidance, or value. From a translation studies perspective, this is a case of literal translation, in which the semantic depth can be sacrificed in favor of lexical correspondence.

2. Pickthall: (Allah hath blighted usury...) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

(Blighted) suggests a sense of damage or destruction, especially in relation to growth. This choice denotes that aspect of the meaning of (mahq) that is related to the deterioration of growth and the loss of blessing. This is consistent with the belief that usury fails to produce true, blessed growth. Unlike "destroy," "blight" is a more dynamic equivalent, conveying a specific impact of usury.

3. *Yusuf Ali*: (Allah will deprive usury of all blessing...) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

This translation is much viewed as one of the most accurate renderings, as it indicates the removal of barakah (deprived of all blessing), which represents the core of the Quranic meaning of (mahq). Dynamic equivalence is utilized, and the conveyance of the intended theological and economic consequence is given priority over a literal word-for-word translation. It clarifies the nuanced meaning of (mahq) for the intended TL audience.

4. *Shakir*: (Allah does not bless usury...) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

Shakir provides a simple and direct translation, focusing on negating the process of blessing. His rendering, while partly accurate, fails to achieve the full conveyance of the ongoing process of eradication or diminution inherent in the meaning of (yamhaqu). Here, we come across a partial dynamic equivalence, where one aspect of the meaning is captured but not its total force.

5. *Muhammad Sarwar*: (God makes unlawful interest devoid of all blessings..) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

In a similar vein to Yusuf Ali's, this translation highlights the loss of blessings, as such a dynamic equivalence is successfully achieved. It clearly illustrates the moral and qualitative devaluation of usurious gains.

6. *Mohsin Khan*: (Allah will destroy Riba (usury)...) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

Like Sahih International, this translation uses "destroy," facing a similar challenge as to achieving a full coverage of the semantic range of (mahq). Here is another example of literal translation.

7. *Arberry*: (God blots out usury...) (Dukes, 2009–2017)

The phrase (blots out) conveys the sense of complete erasure or obliteration, which is closer in conveying the meaning aspect of the active removal of (mahq). This is a relatively more effective dynamic equivalent, implying the decisiveness of the heavenly action.

The Challenge of Equivalence in Quranic Translation

The variety and multiplicity of these translations emphasize the inherent difficulty of achieving equivalence in Quranic translation. The concept of non-equivalence at the word level introduced by Mona Baker (2011: p.18) is of particular relevance here, where the translator may come across a single word in the SL (Arabic) having no direct equivalent in the TL (English) capable of covering all its semantic features. (Yamhaqu) is a significant example, as the meaning of which is deeply connected with Islamic theological and jurisprudential contexts, where no direct or exact parallels may exist in English-speaking cultures.

Strategies such as "cultural substitution" (the replacement of a source-culture-specific item with a target-culture-specific item with a similar effect) or "explicitation" (the addition of information to the target text for clarity of meaning) are a good resort for translators. The strategy of cultural substitution, as defined by Mona Baker, "involves replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a target language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader, for instance, by evoking a similar context in the target culture" (Baker, 2011: p. 29). While explicitation, according to Blum-Kulka (1986:21), is "a universal strategy" deeply rooted "in the process of language mediation" that language learners, non-professional translators, and professional translators alike can practice. The strategy of explicitation used in Yusuf Ali's translation of (yamhaqu)

into "deprive usury of all blessing" is a prime example, where the implicit meaning of "mahq" (loss of barakah) is explicated so as to be grasped by the English reader. This is often a preferable strategy in academic and theological translations of the Quran whereby accuracy is ensured and misinterpretation can be avoided.

Corpus Analysis of (Yamhaqu) Translations

The researcher conducted a systematic analysis of how (yamhaqu) has been translated across different English versions. This has revealed that distinct patterns and preferences were used. The table below illustrates the key translations and the theoretical approaches followed :

Translator	Translation	Theoretical Approach	Strengths	Limitations
Sahih International	Destroys	Formal Equivalence	Concise, direct Oversimplifies semantic range	Oversimplifies semantic range
Pickthall	blighted	Dynamic Equivalence	Captures corruption aspect	May not convey complete obliteration
Yusuf Ali	deprive...of all blessing	Explication	Dynamic	Theologically accurate, Longer, may seem interpretive
Shakir	does not bless	Partial Dynamic	Simple, accessible	Lacks active force of original
Muhammad Sarwar	devoid of all blessings	Dynamic Equivalence	Clear qualitative meaning	Similar to Yusuf Ali
Mohsin Khan	Destroy	Formal Equivalence	Direct translation	Same limitations as Sahih
Arberry	blots out	Dynamic Equivalence	Strong active verb	May suggest immediate action

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of English Translations of the Qur'anic Verb *yamḥaqu* (يَمْحَقُ) in Surah al-Baqarah 2:276

The analysis illustrates that translations that employ the two strategies of dynamic equivalence and explication tend to produce renditions of (yamhaqu) with more accuracy in theological and semantic terms.

DISCUSSION

Tafsir and Its Indispensable Role in Translation

In the translation of Quranic texts, consulting and making use of authoritative exegesis (tafsir) is both helpful and indispensable. Through Tafsir, the historical, linguistic, and theological context required for understanding the intended meaning of Quranic ayyahs can be provided, especially for such terms with deep implications as (yamhaqu). Underestimating the importance of tafsir risks misinterpreting key terms and would result in failure to convey an accurate or complete message.

The term (mahq) has extensively been discussed by classical exegetes. Imam Al-Tabari, in his exegesis (*Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Quran*), explains the meaning of "yamhaqu Allahu al-riba" as Allah brings destruction to usury and removes its blessing, causing its eventual ruin. He points out that "even if usurious wealth appears to multiply, it is devoid of Barakah and will ultimately be wiped out" [Al-Tabari, n.d.: p. 69]. This interpretation emphasizes the qualitative aspect of (mahq).

In a similar vein, Imam Al-Qurtubi (2019: 274), in *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Quran*, indicates that (mahq) refers to the annihilation of usury either by complete eradication of it or by nullifying its blessing, making it fruitless. He highlights the contrast with sadaqah (alms), which Allah doubles and increases its blessing. These insights by Quran exegetes confirm that the core meaning of (mahq) is the taking away of (barakah), bringing about a lack of real benefit and eventual destruction.

Modern exegetes like Sayyid Qutb (n.d.: 276), in *Fi Dhilal al-Quran*, further indicate that riba is a system that destroys human values, spreads selfishness, undermines cooperation, and leads to the exploitation of the poor. Muhammad Asad (2003:112), in *The Message of the Quran*, renders (yamhaqu) as (deprive of all blessing), elaborating that usury, in spite of its outward increase, is inherently unproductive and devastating, leading to economic inequality and societal disparity. These interpretations support the idea that (mahq) is an absolute obliteration impacting the individual and the group alike, reaching past tangible loss.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Translating the verb (yamhaqu) occurring in Surat Al-Baqarah (2:276) is a problematic task that emphasizes the presence of core challenges in Quranic translation. The verb's rich semantic field and broad spectrum of meaning, involving a slow erosion, obliteration, and crucially, the taking away of (barakah), entail a nuanced approach that goes further than literal equivalence. From a translation studies perspective, successful translations, as is the case with Yusuf Ali's (deprive usury of all blessing), should use the strategies of dynamic equivalence and explication for conveying the deep theological and socio-economic implications involved in specific religious terms.

Tafsir plays an indispensable role in guiding translation choices that cannot be underestimated. Based on the exegetical insights, (mahq) signifies a qualitative decline of blessing and intrinsic worth, leading to eventual destruction, not mere immediate physical destruction. This understanding is

pivotal for an accurate transmission of the Quranic message, which maintains that usury, in spite of its superficial gains, is essentially unfair and harmful to the well-being of individuals and societies alike. Future studies can further investigate the type of reception these different translational strategies get among TL receivers and what impact they have on grasping Islamic economic ideology.

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