

Translation Strategies for Rendering Qur'anic Metaphors into English: A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Four English Translations

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Paper Received on 04-07-2026, Accepted on 06-08-2026
Published on 07-08-26; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.11.08.456

Abstract

Translating Qur'anic metaphors into English presents a significant challenge because they simultaneously convey linguistic, conceptual, rhetorical, exegetical, communicative, and theological meanings. Although numerous English translations of the Holy Qur'an have been produced, relatively few studies have systematically examined translation strategies across a substantial and conceptually diverse corpus of Qur'anic metaphors. This study investigates the strategies employed by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International in rendering Qur'anic metaphors into English. Adopting a qualitative corpus-based comparative design, the study analyses a validated, purposively selected corpus of 100 Qur'anic metaphors across nine conceptual domains, yielding 400 translation instances. The analysis employs the Qur'anic Metaphor Translation Effectiveness Framework (QMTEF), which evaluates linguistic accuracy, exegetical accuracy, conceptual equivalence, rhetorical preservation, communicative effectiveness, and theological fidelity. The findings reveal that Literal Preservation (LP) is the predominant strategy, accounting for 83.5% of the 400 translation instances, followed by Literal Preservation with Explicitation (7.5%), Interpretive Reformulation (6.25%), and Mixed Strategy (2.75%). Pickthall exhibits the strongest preference for Literal Preservation (91%), followed by Saheeh International (88%), Yusuf Ali (82%), and Asad (73%). Asad demonstrates the greatest tendency toward Interpretive Reformulation. The findings indicate that preservation is particularly suitable where comparable conceptual mappings are available in Arabic and English, while explicitation and reformulation serve more selective interpretive and communicative functions. The study contributes a systematic corpus-based account of Qur'anic metaphor translation and demonstrates the value of QMTEF as a multidimensional evaluative framework.

Keywords: Qur'anic metaphor; metaphor translation; translation strategies; QMTEF; translation effectiveness

1.1 Introduction

Metaphor is a fundamental feature of Qur'anic discourse and plays a central role in communicating theological, moral, and spiritual concepts. Rather than functioning merely as a stylistic ornament, metaphor can operate as a conceptual mechanism through which abstract domains are understood in terms of more concrete human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). In Qur'anic discourse, images of light and darkness, the straight path, water and life, fire and punishment, trade and commerce, and the condition of the heart illustrate how familiar experiences can function as powerful vehicles for communicating religious and conceptual meanings (Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021).

Translating Qur'anic metaphors into English presents complex linguistic, conceptual, and interpretive challenges. The translator must consider not only lexical meaning but also metaphorical imagery, context, rhetorical effect, and the religious significance of the source text. Previous research shows that translating Qur'anic metaphors may require translators to negotiate between preserving the original metaphorical image and conveying its intended meaning clearly to target readers (Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023; Hammoodi & Moindjie, 2024). Although some metaphors allow relatively direct transfer, culturally or conceptually specific mappings may create greater difficulties when source- and target-language conceptualizations do not closely correspond (Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021).

Numerous English translations of the Holy Qur'an have attempted to address these challenges. This study focuses on the translations of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International, which offer different linguistic and interpretive approaches to rendering the Qur'anic text. Previous comparative research shows that translators of Qur'anic metaphors vary in how much they retain source-text imagery, explicate metaphorical meaning, or reformulate expressions for target readers (Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023; Hammoodi & Moindjie, 2024). This variation provides a basis for examining how translation strategies influence the representation of Qur'anic metaphors in English.

Despite the growing body of research on Qur'anic metaphor translation, much of it has used relatively restricted datasets or focused on particular metaphor types. For example, Abu Rumman and Al-Salem (2023) analyzed ten Qur'anic metaphorical expressions across three English translations, while Movahhedian and Yazdani (2020) concentrated specifically on extended metaphors. Other studies have focused on selected explicit metaphors or particular translations (Awan & Nawaz, 2023; Hammoodi & Moindjie, 2024). Cognitive approaches have also been applied to Qur'anic metaphor translation, demonstrating the value of examining conceptual mappings alongside linguistic transfer (Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021). These studies provide important foundations but also leave scope for broader corpus-based investigation integrating translation strategy, conceptual analysis, Arabic rhetoric, and multidimensional evaluation.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the translation strategies employed by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International in rendering Qur'anic metaphors into English. Drawing on a validated corpus of 100 Qur'anic metaphors across nine conceptual domains, the study examines each translator's strategies and evaluates their effectiveness using the Qur'anic Metaphor Translation Effectiveness Framework (QMTEF). By focusing on translation strategies across the corpus rather than isolated metaphors, the study seeks to provide a broader understanding of how Qur'anic metaphor is represented in English and to identify the approaches that best preserve the linguistic, conceptual, rhetorical, exegetical, communicative, and theological dimensions of the source text. Therefore, the present study sought to address the following questions:

1. What translation strategies are employed by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International in rendering Qur'anic metaphors into English?
2. Which translation strategies are most frequently employed across the corpus of 100 Qur'anic metaphors?
3. To what extent are the identified translation strategies effective in preserving the linguistic, exegetical, conceptual, rhetorical, communicative, and theological dimensions of Qur'anic metaphors?

4. How do the four translators differ in their use of translation strategies for rendering Qur'anic metaphors into English?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Qur'anic Metaphor as a Translation Challenge

Metaphor constitutes a prominent feature of Qur'anic discourse, serving not merely as a rhetorical device but as an important means of communicating theological, moral, and spiritual concepts. From a cognitive perspective, metaphor helps readers understand abstract concepts through more concrete domains of human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). In Qur'anic discourse, recurring images of paths, light and darkness, water, fire, the heart, commerce, clothing, vision, and movement establish conceptual relationships that make abstract and unseen realities more accessible to human understanding. Recent cognitive research on Qur'anic metaphor has similarly shown the relevance of conceptual mappings to interpreting and translating Qur'anic figurative language (Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021).

Translating these metaphors presents challenges that extend beyond lexical equivalence. Qur'anic metaphors may carry linguistic, rhetorical, contextual, conceptual, and religious significance simultaneously, requiring translators to consider both the metaphorical image and its intended meaning. Studies of Qur'anic metaphor translation show that translators often differ on whether to preserve the source metaphor, explicate its meaning, convert it into sense, or use other forms of reformulation (Movahhedian & Yazdani, 2020; Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023; Hammoodi & Moindjie, 2024). Translators must therefore negotiate between fidelity to the source text and intelligibility for readers who may not share the linguistic, cultural, and religious background of the Qur'anic discourse.

The emergence of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has significantly influenced the study of metaphor by shifting attention from metaphor as primarily a stylistic phenomenon to metaphor as a cognitive mechanism through which one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). Applied to translation, this perspective focuses not only on lexical correspondence but also on whether the underlying conceptual mapping is maintained in the target text. This approach is particularly relevant to Qur'anic discourse, where recurring metaphorical patterns can form coherent conceptual systems. Al-Sowaidi et al. (2021), for example, demonstrate the usefulness of combining cognitive metaphor

theory with translation analysis when examining the transfer of Qur'anic metaphors into English.

While many Qur'anic metaphors draw upon broadly recognizable experiences such as light, water, fire, journeys, and commerce, their interpretation may also depend on linguistic, cultural, and religious associations specific to the Qur'anic context. Differences between source- and target-language conceptualizations can therefore complicate direct metaphorical transfer (Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021). Previous studies have consequently identified several strategies for addressing such difficulties, ranging from reproducing the same metaphorical image to explicitation or conversion of the metaphor into its intended sense (Newmark, 1988; Movahhedian & Yazdani, 2020; Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023). Selecting an appropriate translation strategy is therefore critical to how effectively the conceptual, rhetorical, and theological significance of a Qur'anic metaphor is communicated in English.

2.2 Translation Strategies for Metaphor

The translation of metaphor has long been recognized as a significant problem in translation studies because it involves transferring both meaning and figurative imagery across languages and cultures. Newmark (1988) proposes seven procedures for metaphor translation, including reproducing the same image in the target language, replacing the source image with an established target-language image, converting metaphor into simile, rendering metaphor through simile plus sense, converting metaphor into sense, deleting the metaphor where appropriate, and combining the original metaphor with an explanation of its sense. His model places particular importance on preserving the source metaphor when an equivalent and comprehensible image is available in the target language (Newmark, 1988).

Van den Broeck (1981) offers a more condensed classification consisting of three principal procedures: translation *sensu stricto*, in which the source metaphorical vehicle is transferred into the target text; substitution, in which another metaphorical expression replaces it; and paraphrase, in which the metaphor is rendered through non-metaphorical language. His approach emphasizes that metaphor translatability depends on the degree of correspondence between source- and target-language metaphorical systems (Van den Broeck, 1981). Together, these models show that metaphor translation may range from close preservation of the original image to increasingly interpretive reformulation.

These strategy-based approaches have also been applied to Qur'anic metaphor translation. Recent comparative studies based on Newmark's model show that translators employ strategies ranging from reproducing the Qur'anic metaphorical image to converting metaphor into sense or combining metaphor with explanatory meaning (Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023; Awan & Nawaz, 2023). These findings suggest that strategy choice is particularly significant in Qur'anic translation, where preserving metaphorical imagery must be balanced against conceptual clarity and accurate communication of religious meaning.

The present study therefore adopts a functional classification derived from the observed patterns in the corpus while drawing conceptually on established metaphor-translation models. Four principal strategies are identified: Literal Preservation, Literal Preservation with Explicitation, Interpretive Reformulation, and Mixed Strategy. These categories allow the analysis to distinguish between translations that retain the Qur'anic metaphorical image, those that preserve it while adding clarification, and those that prioritize interpretive meaning over metaphorical form. The QMTEF then evaluates their effectiveness in relation to linguistic, exegetical, conceptual, rhetorical, communicative, and theological considerations.

2.3 Previous Studies on Translation Strategies in Qur'anic Metaphor Translation

The translation of Qur'anic metaphors has received increasing scholarly attention from linguistic, rhetorical, cognitive, and translation-oriented perspectives. Existing research has examined the procedures used to render Qur'anic metaphors, the extent to which metaphorical imagery is preserved, and the conceptual difficulties arising when Qur'anic metaphors are transferred into English (Movahhedian & Yazdani, 2020; Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021; Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023; Hammoodi & Moindjie, 2024). Collectively, these studies show the complexity of translating Qur'anic metaphor while also revealing considerable variation in their theoretical approaches, corpora, and selected translations.

A significant strand of research has employed strategy-based approaches to compare English renderings of Qur'anic metaphors. Movahhedian and Yazdani (2020), for example, analyzed 50 cases of extended metaphor across three English translations using Newmark's metaphor-translation procedures. Their findings showed that reproducing the same metaphorical image literally was the most frequent procedure,

accounting for 75.4% of the analyzed cases. Abu Rumman and Al-Salem (2023) similarly applied Newmark's framework to ten Qur'anic metaphorical expressions in the translations of Al-Hilali and Khan, Yusuf Ali, and Abdel Haleem. They identified several strategies, including reproducing the same image, converting metaphor into sense, and combining metaphor with explanatory meaning. These findings indicate that translators differ not only in lexical choice but also in how much metaphorical imagery they preserve or reformulate interpretively.

Cognitive approaches have extended this discussion by examining the conceptual structures underlying Qur'anic metaphors. Al-Sowaidi et al. (2021) investigated conceptual metaphors in the translations of Yusuf Ali and Laleh Bakhtiar using a cognitive framework that incorporates Conceptual Metaphor Theory, cultural variation, and the Cognitive Translation Hypothesis. Their analysis highlights the importance of considering conceptual mappings and cultural variation when evaluating metaphor transfer between Arabic and English. This research shows that reproducing lexical items does not necessarily preserve the conceptual relationships encoded in the source metaphor.

Other comparative research has focused on particular metaphor types or limited groups of translations. Hammoodi and Moindjie (2024), for instance, compare translations by George Sale, A. J. Arberry, and Muhammad Asad, focusing specifically on explicit metaphor and drawing on Newmark's metaphor procedures and Nida's theory of equivalence. Similarly, Movahhedian and Yazdani (2020) focus on extended metaphors. These studies provide valuable evidence on particular metaphorical forms and translation procedures, but their limited analytical scope leaves room for research that encompasses a wider range of Qur'anic metaphor types and conceptual domains.

Taken together, previous studies establish several important tendencies. Literal preservation of the metaphorical image is frequently employed when comparable linguistic or conceptual structures are available in English, while explicitation, conversion into sense, or other forms of reformulation may occur where direct transfer presents difficulties (Movahhedian & Yazdani, 2020; Al-Sowaidi et al., 2021; Abu Rumman & Al-Salem, 2023). However, the literature reviewed here generally examines particular metaphor types, relatively restricted datasets, selected translations, or individual theoretical perspectives. There therefore remains scope for

a broader corpus-based comparison that examines translation strategies across multiple conceptual domains while evaluating their effectiveness through a consistent set of criteria.

The present study addresses this need through a comparative analysis of 100 validated Qur'anic metaphors distributed across nine conceptual domains in the translations of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International. Rather than examining isolated metaphor types, the study identifies recurring translation strategies across the corpus and evaluates their effectiveness through the Qur'anic Metaphor Translation Effectiveness Framework (QMTEF). By integrating Arabic rhetoric, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, *tafsīr*, and Translation Studies, the analysis considers linguistic accuracy, exegetical accuracy, conceptual equivalence, rhetorical preservation, communicative effectiveness, and theological fidelity within a unified evaluative framework.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, corpus-based comparative research design to investigate the translation strategies used to render Qur'anic metaphors into English. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the analysis focuses on interpreting and transferring metaphorical meaning while considering its linguistic, conceptual, rhetorical, exegetical, communicative, and theological dimensions. Qualitative research is particularly suited to systematically interpreting context-dependent meanings and textual phenomena rather than reducing them to numerical measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The corpus-based component enables systematic examination of recurring translation patterns across a defined dataset rather than through isolated examples, consistent with the value of corpus approaches for identifying patterns in translated discourse (Baker, 1995; Olohan, 2004).

The study combines descriptive and comparative methods. The descriptive component identifies and classifies the translation strategies employed by the four translators, while the comparative component examines similarities and differences among their approaches. The study then evaluates the effectiveness of the identified strategies using the Qur'anic Metaphor Translation Effectiveness Framework (QMTEF), which provides a consistent basis for assessing the six evaluative dimensions adopted in the study.

3.2 Corpus Selection

The study uses a validated corpus of 100 Qur'anic metaphors selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows cases to be selected based on predetermined characteristics relevant to the objectives of qualitative research (Patton, 2015). The corpus was constructed to provide broad coverage of major conceptual metaphor systems in the Holy Qur'an while ensuring diversity in rhetorical form, theological function, and linguistic structure. Each selected verse contains at least one metaphorical expression identified with reference to classical Qur'anic exegesis and Arabic rhetorical scholarship. The corpus also includes the corresponding English renderings by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International, yielding 400 translation instances for comparative analysis.

To ensure broad conceptual coverage, the 100 metaphors were organized into nine conceptual domains, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the Qur'anic Metaphor Corpus by Conceptual Domain

Conceptual Domain	Number of Metaphors
Guidance and the Straight Path	15
Light and Darkness	15
Heart and Inner State	12
Fire and Punishment	11
Water and Life	10
Trade and Commerce	9
Clothing and Covering	9
Blindness and Vision	10
Journey and Movement	9
Total	100

The nine domains provide substantial conceptual and rhetorical diversity for examining translation strategies across different metaphorical contexts. This corpus structure enables within-domain and cross-domain comparison, allowing the study to identify recurring translation patterns and differences among the four English translations systematically.

3.3 Data Sources

The study examines four English translations of the Holy Qur'an:

- Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1934)
- Marmaduke Pickthall (1930)

- Muhammad Asad (1980)
- Saheeh International (1997)

These translations were selected because they represent different periods and approaches to rendering the Qur'an into English and therefore provide a suitable basis for comparative analysis. Yusuf Ali's translation is generally characterized by literary and explanatory tendencies; Pickthall's by closer source-text orientation; Asad's by interpretive and contextual explanation; and Saheeh International's by relatively direct, contemporary English. Including these differing approaches enables the study to examine whether translation orientation influences the selection and effectiveness of strategies used to render Qur'anic metaphors.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The study employs the Qur'anic Metaphor Translation Effectiveness Framework (QMTEF) as its principal evaluative framework. QMTEF draws on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Arabic *Balāghah*, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Translation Studies to provide a multidimensional approach to evaluating Qur'anic metaphor translation. Rather than assessing translations solely in terms of lexical correspondence, the framework considers how fully the linguistic, interpretive, conceptual, rhetorical, communicative, and theological dimensions of the source metaphor are preserved.

Each translation is evaluated according to six complementary dimensions:

1. Linguistic Accuracy – accuracy of lexical and grammatical transfer.
2. Exegetical Accuracy – consistency with authoritative *tafsīr*.
3. Conceptual Equivalence – preservation of the underlying conceptual mapping.
4. Rhetorical Preservation – retention of metaphorical imagery and rhetorical force.
5. Communicative Effectiveness – clarity and accessibility for English readers.
6. Theological Fidelity – preservation of the intended theological meaning without distortion.

Together, these dimensions provide a consistent basis for comparing the effectiveness of the translation strategies identified across the corpus.

3.5 Classification of Translation Strategies

We examined each of the 400 translation instances to identify its dominant translation strategy. Classification was based on the relationship between the source metaphor and its English rendering, with particular attention to preserving metaphorical imagery, conceptual structure, and intended meaning. Drawing on established

approaches to metaphor translation (Van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988), four operational strategy categories were developed for the present study:

- Literal Preservation (LP): The metaphor is rendered through direct lexical equivalents while preserving its original imagery and conceptual structure.
- Literal Preservation with Explication (LPE): The metaphorical image is preserved, while additional lexical or syntactic information is introduced to clarify its intended meaning.
- Interpretive Reformulation (IR): The metaphor is rendered through an explanatory or interpretive expression that prioritizes the intended meaning over close preservation of the original imagery.
- Mixed Strategy (MS): Two or more strategies are combined within the same rendering, with some metaphorical elements preserved and others explicated or reformulated.

This classification provides the empirical basis for identifying recurring translation patterns, comparing the four translators' strategic tendencies, and evaluating the relative effectiveness of the strategies across the corpus.

3.6 Data Analysis

We analyzed four stages.

First, we examined each metaphor within its Qur'anic context to establish its conceptual function and rhetorical classification, with reference to authoritative classical and contemporary *tafsīr* and Arabic rhetorical analysis.

Second, we compared the four English translations to identify the dominant translation strategy in each rendering, using the operational categories established in Section 3.5. When a rendering combined more than one procedure, we classified it as a Mixed Strategy (MS). This process produced a classified dataset of 400 translation instances.

Third, we calculated the frequency of each translation strategy across the corpus, by translator, and by conceptual domain. We used these quantitative summaries descriptively to identify recurring patterns and differences in strategy use, rather than as inferential statistical measures. Finally, we qualitatively analyzed representative examples of the identified strategies using the QMTEF. The evaluation considered all six dimensions: linguistic accuracy, exegetical accuracy, conceptual equivalence, rhetorical preservation, communicative effectiveness, and theological fidelity. The findings were then compared across translators and conceptual domains to assess the relative effectiveness of the strategies and identify broader patterns in Qur'anic metaphor translation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Translation Strategies

The analysis of the 100 Qur'anic metaphors and their 400 English renderings reveals four recurring translation strategies: Literal Preservation (LP), Literal Preservation with Explication (LPE), Interpretive Reformulation (IR), and Mixed Strategy (MS). Although the four translations differ in style and degree of interpretive intervention, the results demonstrate a strong overall preference for preserving the metaphorical imagery and conceptual structure of the Qur'anic source text.

As shown in Table 2, Literal Preservation (LP) is by far the predominant strategy, accounting for 334 of the 400 translation instances (83.5%). The remaining strategies occur considerably less frequently: Literal Preservation with Explication (LPE) accounts for 30 instances (7.5%), Interpretive Reformulation (IR) for 25 instances (6.25%), and Mixed Strategy (MS) for 11 instances (2.75%). This distribution indicates that direct metaphorical transfer is generally preferred, while explication and reformulation are employed more selectively.

Table 2. Distribution of Translation Strategies Across the Corpus

Translation Strategy	Yusuf Ali	Pickthall	Asad	Saheeh International	Total
Literal Preservation (LP)	82	91	73	88	334
Literal Preservation with Explication (LPE)	10	4	9	7	30
Interpretive Reformulation (IR)	5	3	14	3	25
Mixed Strategy (MS)	3	2	4	2	11
Total	100	100	100	100	400

The predominance of Literal Preservation can be associated with the conceptual accessibility of many of the metaphorical domains represented in the corpus. Images involving paths and journeys, light and darkness, water and life, fire, clothing, commerce, and vision can often be transferred into English without eliminating their basic metaphorical structure. For example, expressions involving the straight path, the revival of dead land through water, and commercial transactions can retain both their concrete imagery and broader conceptual significance in English. The corrected Water and Life corpus illustrates this particularly clearly: the four translations of

Sūrat al-Rūm (30:24), for example, retain the relationship between water, the earth, death, and renewed life despite lexical differences in their renderings.

The distribution also reveals clear differences among the four translators. Pickthall shows the strongest preference for Literal Preservation, employing it in 91 of the 100 instances, followed by Saheeh International (88) and Yusuf Ali (82). Asad, by contrast, records the lowest frequency of Literal Preservation (73 instances) and the highest frequency of Interpretive Reformulation (14 instances). This pattern indicates a comparatively greater tendency in Asad's translation to make interpretive meaning explicit when close lexical transfer is considered insufficient. Yusuf Ali occupies an intermediate position, combining a strong preference for preservation with somewhat greater explication than Pickthall or Saheeh International.

These findings suggest that the principal difference among the four translations lies not in whether Qur'anic metaphor should generally be preserved, since all four overwhelmingly favor preservation, but in the degree of interpretive intervention introduced when direct metaphorical transfer proves insufficient. Pickthall exhibits the strongest source-oriented tendency, whereas Asad demonstrates the greatest willingness to reformulate metaphorical expressions interpretively. Yusuf Ali and Saheeh International generally occupy intermediate positions, although Saheeh International remains particularly close to Literal Preservation while employing more contemporary English expression.

The predominance of Literal Preservation also supports the relevance of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to translating Qur'anic metaphor. Where source- and target-language readers can access comparable conceptual mappings, metaphorical imagery can often be retained without substantial reformulation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Nevertheless, the presence of LPE, IR, and MS demonstrates that lexical correspondence alone is not always sufficient, particularly where a metaphor carries exegetical, rhetorical, or theological implications that may require clarification for English readers.

4.2 Literal Preservation

Literal Preservation (LP) emerged as the predominant translation strategy across the corpus, accounting for 334 of the 400 translation instances (83.5%). It was the most frequently employed strategy by all four translators, occurring in 82 instances in Yusuf Ali, 91 in Pickthall, 73 in Asad, and 88 in Saheeh International. Under this strategy, the metaphorical image is transferred into English through close lexical correspondence while its underlying conceptual structure is substantially retained. This procedure broadly corresponds to established approaches to metaphor

translation that favor reproducing the source-text metaphor when an equivalent or comprehensible metaphorical image is available in the target language (Van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988).

The predominance of LP suggests a considerable degree of conceptual compatibility between Arabic and English in many of the domains represented in the corpus. Numerous Qur'anic metaphors draw upon experiential source domains such as movement, light and darkness, water, fire, commerce, clothing, and vision. From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, such concrete experiential domains can structure the understanding of more abstract concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Where comparable conceptual mappings are accessible in English, preservation of the original image can therefore maintain both the metaphorical form and much of its conceptual significance.

This tendency is particularly evident in domains such as Guidance and the Straight Path, Light and Darkness, Water and Life, Trade and Commerce, and Journey and Movement. A clear example occurs in *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* (1:6), where the image of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is retained through expressions such as “straight path” or “straight way.” Similarly, the corpus preserves the association between water and life in *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* (21:30), where the four translations retain the proposition that every living thing was made from or of water. In the corrected corpus, Asad, for example, renders the expression as “We made out of water every living thing,” while Saheeh International uses “We made from water every living thing.”

The commercial imagery of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (9:111) provides another example. The Qur'anic representation of the relationship between Allah and the believers through the conceptual language of purchase is maintained across the translations. Yusuf Ali uses “purchased,” Pickthall and Asad use “bought,” and Saheeh International uses “purchased,” thereby retaining the underlying commercial mapping despite lexical variation. These examples show that Literal Preservation does not require identical English wording; rather, it depends on maintaining the metaphorical image and its conceptual relationship.

From the perspective of the QMTEF, LP supports linguistic accuracy, conceptual equivalence, rhetorical preservation, and theological fidelity when the source metaphor remains intelligible in English. Preservation of the image also limits unnecessary interpretive intervention and allows the metaphor to retain its rhetorical function. However, literal preservation is not automatically effective merely because lexical equivalents are available. Its effectiveness also depends on exegetical accuracy and communicative accessibility, since an expression that closely

reproduces the Arabic form may still fail to communicate its intended significance adequately to the target reader.

The corpus also reveals differences in the translators' use of LP. Pickthall records the highest frequency (91%), demonstrating the strongest tendency toward close preservation of source-text metaphorical imagery. Saheeh International (88%) similarly relies heavily on LP but generally employs more contemporary English forms. Yusuf Ali (82%) combines substantial metaphor preservation with greater explicitation, whereas Asad (73%) uses LP less frequently and shows a greater tendency toward interpretive reformulation. These differences indicate varying degrees of intervention within an overall shared preference for metaphor preservation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Literal Preservation is the dominant strategy in the corpus and is particularly suitable where comparable metaphorical mappings are available in Arabic and English. Its principal strength lies in retaining the Qur'anic image while minimizing unnecessary interpretive modification. Nevertheless, its effectiveness remains context-dependent and must be assessed against all six QMTEF dimensions rather than assumed on the basis of formal correspondence alone.

4.3 Literal Preservation with Explicitation

Although Literal Preservation (LP) dominates the corpus, Literal Preservation with Explicitation (LPE) constitutes the second most frequent strategy, accounting for 30 of the 400 translation instances (7.5%). Under this strategy, the original metaphorical image is retained while additional lexical or syntactic information is introduced to clarify meaning that might otherwise remain implicit for English readers. Explicitation therefore supplements rather than replaces the source metaphor, keeping its conceptual imagery recognizable while increasing its communicative accessibility.

The strategy occupies an intermediate position between strict literal preservation and interpretive reformulation. Unlike LP, it introduces explanatory material beyond close lexical correspondence; unlike Interpretive Reformulation (IR), however, it does not substantially replace or suppress the original metaphorical image. This distinction matters in Qur'anic translation, where an expression may be linguistically transferable into English. At the same time, its exegetical or theological implications remain less immediately accessible to readers unfamiliar with the Qur'anic context.

The distribution of LPE also reveals differences among the four translators. Yusuf Ali records the highest use of the strategy, with 10 instances, followed by Asad with 9, Saheeh International with 7, and Pickthall with 4. This pattern aligns with the

broader tendencies identified in the corpus: Pickthall generally minimizes explanatory intervention, whereas Yusuf Ali and Asad show greater willingness to clarify when they consider direct metaphorical transfer insufficient.

LPE is especially useful when preserving the Qur'anic image alone may not fully convey its intended contextual significance. In such cases, the translator retains the source metaphor while adding information that narrows or clarifies its interpretation. The strategy can therefore strengthen communicative effectiveness and exegetical accuracy without necessarily sacrificing conceptual equivalence or rhetorical preservation.

From the QMTEF perspective, however, explicitation requires careful control. An explanatory addition may improve accessibility and clarify an implicit relationship. However, excessive explanation can restrict the metaphor's semantic openness or introduce an interpretation more specific than the source expression itself. The effectiveness of LPE therefore depends on whether the added material clarifies the intended meaning without substantially altering the metaphorical image, rhetorical force, or theological implications of the Qur'anic expression.

Overall, LPE represents a selective strategy for balancing metaphorical preservation with interpretive accessibility. Its relatively low frequency (7.5%) indicates that translators generally resort to explicitation only when direct preservation is considered insufficient. When carefully applied, it allows the Qur'anic metaphor to remain visible in the English translation while providing additional guidance for target-language readers.

4.4 Interpretive Reformulation

Interpretive Reformulation (IR) accounts for 25 of the 400 translation instances (6.25%), making it considerably less frequent than Literal Preservation. Unlike LP and LPE, which retain the source metaphorical image, IR prioritizes the intended contextual or theological meaning when close preservation of the original imagery is considered insufficient. Under this strategy, the metaphor is substantially modified, replaced, or rephrased so that its interpreted meaning becomes more explicit in English.

The relatively limited frequency of IR indicates that the translators generally prefer to retain Qur'anic metaphorical imagery whenever possible. Reformulation becomes more relevant, however, where direct lexical transfer may not adequately communicate the contextual significance of an expression to English readers. In such cases, the translator intervenes more substantially, replacing part or all of the metaphorical image with language that foregrounds its interpreted meaning. This

procedure corresponds broadly to metaphor-translation approaches in which a source metaphor may be rendered through its sense when direct reproduction is considered unsuitable or insufficient (Van den Broeck, 1981; Newmark, 1988).

The clearest comparative finding concerns Muhammad Asad, who accounts for 14 of the 25 IR instances, compared with 5 for Yusuf Ali, 3 for Pickthall, and 3 for Saheeh International. Thus, 56% of all IR instances in the corpus occur in Asad's translation. This distinguishes Asad from the other translators and indicates a greater willingness to prioritize contextual interpretation over close preservation of metaphorical form.

A representative example appears in *Sūrat al-Ḥajj* (22:19). The Arabic punishment imagery includes pouring ḥamīm over the heads of the unbelievers. Yusuf Ali renders this as “boiling water,” Pickthall as “boiling fluid,” and Saheeh International as “scalding water.” Asad, however, renders it as “burning despair,” shifting from the concrete image of intensely hot liquid to an interpretation that emphasizes the experience of suffering. The rendering communicates punitive intensity, but the original water-based image is no longer directly preserved.

A comparable tendency appears elsewhere in the Fire and Punishment domain. In *Sūrat al-Wāqī‘ah* (56:42–44), Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, and Saheeh International preserve the physical imagery of scorching or burning conditions and scalding water. In contrast, Asad renders part of the expression as “burning despair and scorching water.” These cases illustrate a defining characteristic of IR: semantic interpretation becomes more prominent while parts of the source metaphorical imagery are modified.

From the QMTEF perspective, IR offers both advantages and limitations. Reformulation can enhance communicative effectiveness and, where supported by the Qur'anic context and authoritative *tafsīr*, may contribute to exegetical accuracy by making an implicit interpretation more accessible. However, these advantages do not automatically guarantee theological or exegetical superiority. Because IR introduces greater translator intervention, its effectiveness depends on whether the source context sufficiently supports the interpretation and does not narrow or alter the theological implications of the original expression.

The principal limitation of IR concerns rhetorical preservation and conceptual equivalence. When an explanatory expression replaces a concrete Qur'anic image, the target reader may receive the interpreted meaning without experiencing the same source-domain imagery through which that meaning is constructed. Thus, an IR rendering may achieve considerable semantic clarity while scoring lower on rhetorical preservation. This trade-off matters in Qur'anic metaphor translation

because metaphorical form itself contributes to the discourse's communicative and rhetorical force.

The comparative distribution reinforces this distinction among the translators. Pickthall and Saheeh International, with only three IR instances each, demonstrate a strong preference for retaining source-text imagery. Yusuf Ali, with five instances, occasionally employs reformulation but remains predominantly preservation-oriented. Asad, by contrast, uses IR substantially more frequently, indicating a comparatively stronger interpretive tendency within the corpus.

Overall, Interpretive Reformulation functions as a selective problem-solving strategy rather than a dominant translation procedure. It can be valuable when preserving the source metaphor alone would leave important contextual meaning insufficiently accessible to the target reader. Its effectiveness, however, depends on balancing interpretive clarity against possible losses in metaphorical imagery, conceptual structure, and rhetorical force. Accordingly, IR should be evaluated case by case through the six dimensions of the QMTEF rather than regarded as inherently superior or inferior to Literal Preservation.

4.5 Mixed Translation Strategies

Mixed Strategy (MS) is the least frequently employed strategy in the corpus, accounting for 11 of the 400 translation instances (2.75%). It occurs when a single rendering combines two or more translation procedures, typically preserving part of the source metaphor while explicating or reformulating another element. Unlike Literal Preservation with Explication (LPE), in which the original metaphor remains substantially intact and clarification is added, MS involves a more substantial interaction between preservation and interpretive modification within the same rendering.

The limited occurrence of MS suggests that the four translators generally favor a single dominant procedure when rendering Qur'anic metaphors. Nevertheless, some expressions contain multiple metaphorical or semantic components that no single strategy can readily handle. In such cases, a translator may retain the principal metaphorical image while modifying another component to clarify its contextual, exegetical, or theological significance. Mixed Strategy therefore represents a flexible response to the multidimensional character of certain Qur'anic metaphors.

The distribution of MS differs moderately among the four translators. Muhammad Asad records the highest frequency with 4 instances, followed by Yusuf Ali with 3, while Pickthall and Saheeh International each record 2 instances. Although these numbers are small, the pattern aligns with the corpus's broader findings: Asad shows

greater willingness to combine preservation with interpretive intervention, whereas Pickthall and Saheeh International more often maintain a single preservation-oriented procedure.

From the perspective of the QMTEF, Mixed Strategy involves a potential trade-off between different dimensions of translation effectiveness. Preserving part of the metaphor may support linguistic accuracy, conceptual equivalence, and rhetorical preservation, while selective explanation or reformulation may enhance exegetical accuracy and communicative effectiveness. However, the effectiveness of such combinations cannot be assumed. When interpretive intervention becomes excessive, the source metaphor's rhetorical compactness or conceptual structure may weaken. Conversely, a carefully controlled combination may clarify an otherwise difficult expression while retaining its central metaphorical image.

The distinction between MS and LPE is particularly important methodologically. In LPE, explanatory information is added while the source metaphor remains substantially preserved. In MS, by contrast, one component of the metaphorical expression is preserved while another is meaningfully reformulated. This criterion helps prevent ordinary explanatory additions from being automatically classified as mixed translation and ensures greater consistency in coding the corpus.

The relatively low frequency of MS indicates that hybrid solutions are exceptional rather than characteristic of the four translations. Their occurrence nevertheless demonstrates that Qur'anic metaphor translation cannot always be reduced to a simple opposition between literal preservation and interpretive reformulation. Certain expressions require translators to negotiate simultaneously between metaphorical form, conceptual meaning, exegetical interpretation, and target-reader accessibility. Overall, Mixed Strategy functions as a selective and adaptive procedure within the corpus. Its effectiveness depends not on the combination of strategies itself but on whether that combination maintains an appropriate balance across the six QMTEF dimensions. When carefully employed, it can preserve central metaphorical imagery while accommodating interpretive or communicative requirements that a single translation procedure may not adequately address.

4.6 Comparative Analysis of the Four Translators

The corpus reveals both substantial convergence and systematic variation among the four translators. All four rely predominantly on Literal Preservation (LP), but they differ in how much they use explication, interpretive reformulation, and mixed procedures. Their translation profiles can therefore be distinguished not by entirely

different dominant strategies, but by the degree and type of intervention beyond literal preservation.

Marmaduke Pickthall exhibits the strongest preference for Literal Preservation, employing it in 91 of the 100 instances. Only nine instances involve other strategies: four LPE, three IR, and two MS. This distribution indicates a strongly source-oriented tendency in which Qur'anic metaphorical imagery is generally retained with minimal explanatory intervention. Pickthall's approach consequently favors lexical correspondence and preservation of metaphorical form, although the resulting expressions may occasionally require greater interpretive effort from contemporary English readers.

Saheeh International displays a similarly strong preference for Literal Preservation, with 88 instances of LP, followed by seven LPE, three IR, and two MS. Its profile is therefore close to Pickthall's in terms of metaphor preservation. At the same time, its linguistic expression is generally more contemporary. The combination of extensive metaphor preservation and accessible English enables Saheeh International to maintain close correspondence with the source imagery while facilitating comprehension for modern readers.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali employs Literal Preservation in 82 instances, making it his dominant strategy. However, he uses LPE more frequently than Pickthall and Saheeh International, with 10 instances, plus five IR and three MS cases. His profile therefore remains predominantly preservation-oriented while allowing somewhat greater explanatory intervention. This tendency is consistent with his frequent combination of close metaphorical transfer with literary or explanatory expression.

Muhammad Asad also employs Literal Preservation as his dominant strategy, accounting for 73 of the 100 instances. However, his profile differs most clearly from those of the other translators because he records 14 instances of Interpretive Reformulation, nine LPE, and four MS. Asad therefore has both the lowest frequency of LP and the highest frequency of IR among the four translators. Indeed, his 14 cases account for 56% of the 25 IR instances identified in the entire corpus. This suggests a greater willingness to reformulate metaphorical expressions when interpretive clarification takes priority over close preservation of source imagery.

Table 3 summarizes these corpus-based translation profiles.

Table 3. Comparative Strategy Profiles of the Four Translators

Translator	LP	LPE	IR	MS	Dominant Strategy	Comparative Orientation
Abdullah Yusuf Ali	82	10	5	3	Literal Preservation	Preservation-oriented with moderate explication
Marmaduke Pickthall	91	4	3	2	Literal Preservation	Strongly preservation-oriented
Muhammad Asad	73	9	14	4	Literal Preservation	Preservation-oriented with greater interpretive reformulation
Saheeh International	88	7	3	2	Literal Preservation	Preservation-oriented with contemporary accessibility
Total	334	30	25	11	—	—

The comparison shows that the main distinction among the four translators is the degree of intervention beyond Literal Preservation. Pickthall shows the least intervention, with 91% LP, closely followed by Saheeh International at 88%. Yusuf Ali occupies an intermediate position at 82%, with a somewhat greater tendency toward explication. Asad records the greatest degree of intervention, with 27% of his renderings employing LPE, IR, or MS, compared with 18% for Yusuf Ali, 9% for Pickthall, and 12% for Saheeh International.

These findings also suggest that the translators should not be placed within a simple binary opposition between “literal” and “interpretive” translation. All four predominantly preserve Qur’anic metaphorical imagery, but they differ in how often and how they depart from direct preservation. The corpus therefore reveals a continuum of interpretive intervention, ranging from Pickthall's strong preference for preservation to Asad's comparatively greater use of reformulation.

From the perspective of the QMTEF, these strategic differences involve potential trade-offs among the six dimensions of translation effectiveness. Close preservation

may favor linguistic accuracy, conceptual equivalence, and rhetorical preservation when the Qur'anic metaphor remains intelligible in English. Explication or reformulation may improve communicative or exegetical clarity in more difficult cases, but greater intervention may also alter the metaphorical image or narrow its interpretive possibilities. Strategy effectiveness must therefore be determined in relation to the individual metaphor and its performance across the six QMTEF dimensions rather than from strategy frequency alone.

Overall, the comparative analysis demonstrates that Literal Preservation constitutes the shared strategic foundation of all four translations. At the same time, their distinctive profiles emerge primarily from their use of the less frequent strategies. Pickthall is the most consistently preservation-oriented, Saheeh International combines extensive preservation with contemporary expression, Yusuf Ali employs comparatively more explication, and Asad demonstrates the strongest tendency toward interpretive reformulation.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the translation strategies used by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, and Saheeh International to render Qur'anic metaphors into English. Drawing on a validated corpus of 100 Qur'anic metaphors across nine conceptual domains, the study analyzed 400 English translation instances to identify recurring translation strategies and assess their effectiveness. The analysis drew on the Qur'anic Metaphor Translation Effectiveness Framework (QMTEF), which considers six dimensions: linguistic accuracy, exegetical accuracy, conceptual equivalence, rhetorical preservation, communicative effectiveness, and theological fidelity.

The findings reveal a strong overall preference for Literal Preservation (LP), which accounts for 334 of the 400 translation instances (83.5%). Literal Preservation with Explication (LPE) accounts for 30 instances (7.5%), Interpretive Reformulation (IR) for 25 instances (6.25%), and Mixed Strategy (MS) for 11 instances (2.75%). The predominance of LP indicates that many Qur'anic metaphors can retain their imagery and conceptual structure when transferred into English, particularly where comparable conceptual mappings are available in the target language. Explication and reformulation, by contrast, function as selective strategies where closer preservation alone may not adequately communicate contextual, exegetical, or theological implications.

The comparative analysis reveals both convergence and variation among the four translators. Pickthall exhibits the strongest preference for Literal Preservation (91%),

followed by Saheeh International (88%) and Yusuf Ali (82%). Asad, also predominantly preservation-oriented (73% LP), shows the strongest tendency toward Interpretive Reformulation, accounting for 14 of the 25 IR instances identified in the corpus. These findings suggest that the principal difference among the translators lies not in whether Qur'anic metaphor should generally be preserved, but in the degree of interpretive intervention introduced when direct metaphorical transfer is considered insufficient.

The study contributes to Qur'anic Translation Studies by providing a systematic corpus-based comparison of translation strategies across a substantial and conceptually diverse dataset. It further demonstrates the importance of distinguishing metaphor preservation from translation effectiveness: close lexical correspondence may preserve imagery and conceptual structure, but effective translation must also account for exegetical accuracy, rhetorical force, communicative accessibility, and theological fidelity. In this respect, the QMTEF provides a multidimensional framework for systematically examining the strengths and limitations of different translation choices.

The study has several limitations. The purposively selected corpus, although covering nine major conceptual domains, does not encompass every metaphorical expression in the Qur'an and should therefore not be interpreted as statistically representative of all Qur'anic metaphors. In addition, the analysis is limited to four English translations, and classifying translation strategies necessarily involves qualitative analytical judgment. These limitations provide opportunities for further research involving larger corpora, additional English translations, other target languages, and complementary corpus-linguistic or inter-rater procedures.

Future studies may also examine whether particular translation strategies perform differently across conceptual or rhetorical categories and may further test the applicability and reliability of the QMTEF across translators, languages, and other forms of Qur'anic figurative discourse. Such research could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between metaphor preservation, interpretive intervention, and translation effectiveness in translating sacred texts.

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