




An Error Analysis of Translation of Qur'ānic Verses: A Case Study of Surah Al-Kahf

Mohammad Reza Pirnia¹ and Ebrahim Davoudi Sharifabad^{*2} 

1. Department of English Language, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran

2. Department of English Language, Baqir Al-Olum University, Qom, Iran

* Corresponding author: e.davoudi@bou.ac.ir

 <https://doi.org/10.22081/ttais.2025.71084.1053>

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 11 February 2024

Revised: 23 May 2024

Accepted: 9 June 2024

Keywords:

Error analysis,

Khazaefar's model,

The Qur'ān Translation,

Translation quality assessment.

ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the quality of two English translations of Surah Al-Kahf, produced by two prominent translators: Pickthall (1930), a native English speaker, and Qarai (2018), a non-native translator. The assessment was based on Khazaefar's (2012) error analysis model. To determine the accurate meanings of key terms, two Qur'ānic commentaries and two dictionaries were consulted. This facilitated a comparative analysis between the Arabic source text and its English renderings, allowing the identification of translation errors. Furthermore, macro-level translation issues—such as sentence structure, coherence, cohesion, and stylistic choices—were also examined. The findings revealed that the non-native translator made fewer errors and produced a higher-quality translation than Pickthall. The study concludes that a translator's proficiency in Arabic and understanding of its contextual and structural nuances play a crucial role in the accurate translation of the Qur'ān. In this regard, the non-native translator effectively met these demands.

How to cite this article: Pirnia, M. R. and Davoudi Sharifabad, E. (2024). An Error Analysis of Translation of Qur'ānic Verses: A Case Study of Surah Al-Kahf. *International Journal of Textual and Translation Analysis in Islamic Studies*, 2(3), 318-333. doi: 10.22081/ttais.2025.71084.1053

© 2024 The Authors. Published by Ākhünd-e Khorāsāni Center for Graduate Studies affiliated with Baqir al-Olum University of Qom.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



1. Introduction

The English term “*translation*”, first attested around 1340, derives either from the Old French *translation* or more directly from the Latin *translatio* (meaning “transporting”), which itself comes from the past participle of the verb *transferre* (“to carry over”) (Munday, 2016, p. 8). Nida and Taber (1982, p. 12) define translation as the reproduction of the closest natural equivalent in the target language—first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. According to this view, meaning takes precedence over style, although both are important. In other words, a translated text should correspond as closely as possible to the original in terms of both content and style (Manafi Anari, 2014, p. 1).

The academic discipline known as *Translation Studies* was introduced by James Holmes in the 20th century (as cited in Munday, 2016, p. 11). He described the field as being concerned with “the complex of problems clustered round the phenomenon of translating and translation” (p. 11). One of these problems is the assessment of translation quality.

To address this issue, scholars have employed theoretical frameworks within Translation Studies, as any translation theory inherently includes a model for assessing translation quality. In other words, different translation theories yield different approaches to evaluating translation quality. The earliest theories were based on linguistic models. Initially, Translation Studies was regarded as a sub-discipline of traditional philology or linguistics (Neubert & Shreve, 1992, vii). Within this framework, literal or word-for-word translation was considered the most accurate. This approach dominated for much of translation history.

In recent decades, the concept of “text type” has significantly influenced the field of Translation Studies, following its introduction by Reiss (as cited in Munday, 2016, p. 114). This marked a shift in focus from the translation of individual lexical and syntactic units to a broader consideration of entire text types. Reiss categorized texts into four main types: informative, expressive, operative, and audio-medial (pp. 115–116). Each text type requires a different translation strategy based on its primary communicative function, thereby enriching the theoretical framework and practical application of translation.

This classification was based on Bühler’s theory that language serves three main functions: informative, expressive and appellative (pp. 115–116). According to this approach, translators may deliberately adapt the translation according to the text type and its intended function in the target language. Consequently, translation quality assessment (TQA) shifts from a focus on individual words to the evaluation of the entire text. Linguistic approaches to translation focus primarily on words and the relationship between the ST and TT. However, they often fall short in providing detailed procedures for assessing and evaluating translated texts. More promising are approaches that consider the interconnectedness of text and context (House, 2001). While text analysis concentrates on the structure of the text itself, discourse analysis examines meaning in relation to the context of the situation (Munday, 2016, p. 142).

The assessment and analysis of translation errors has long been a topic of interest in translation studies. Varying perspectives on the nature of errors have led to the development of different analytical frameworks. One such framework was introduced by Khazaefar (2012), who proposed a model for evaluating translation quality. Based on error analysis, this model is particularly useful for translation training in academic settings. Khazaefar’s theoretical framework can also be applied to the error analysis of Qur’ānic translations. Among the chapters of the Holy Qur’ān, Surah Al-Kahf (the 18th chapter) provides a

suitable sample for analysis due to the richness of its content. In this study, the researchers aim to assess the quality of two English translations of this chapter using the model proposed by Khazaefar (2012).

Throughout history, religious texts have played a vital role in human societies. For Muslims, the most important religious text is the Qur'ān, believed to be the miracle of the final prophet and a comprehensive guide for humankind. Translating the Qur'ān is one of the most complex and debated issues in translation studies. Millions of Muslims—both Arabs and non-Arabs—as well as non-Muslims around the world seek to understand God's message in their native languages. Therefore, translating the Qur'ān is essential for enhancing non-Arab Muslims' understanding of their faith and for spreading the knowledge and teachings of the holy book globally (Foroutan, 2019).

Some scholars argue that the Holy Qur'ān is untranslatable and provide various reasons for this view (Foroutan, 2019, p. 14). However, translation remains the only means by which the meanings and messages of the Glorious Qur'ān can be conveyed to non-Arabic speakers.

Numerous English translations of the Holy Qur'ān—including those examined in this study—often fail to accurately reflect the original text. These translations sometimes contain significant shortcomings that result in confusion or misinterpretation, making it difficult for the target audience to fully grasp the intended meaning (Al-Jabari, 2008). Applying a theoretical framework to analyze a specific chapter of the Qur'ān may offer deeper insights into the translation strategies employed by different translators. Errors made during the translation process can distort the content and meaning of the verses. This study seeks to identify and evaluate such errors in two English translations of Surah Al-Kahf—one by a native Persian speaker and the other by a native English speaker.

This research aims to assist translators in recognizing and correcting errors in their work, thereby contributing to the production of more accurate and potentially error-free translations. By comparing translations from native and non-native English speakers, the study also investigates whether the translator's linguistic background influences the frequency and nature of errors. For each identified issue, the researcher proposes possible solutions where appropriate. Despite the sincere efforts of many translators to provide faithful English renditions of the Qur'ān, some translations still fall short. Native English speakers may struggle to understand the intended meanings due to awkward phrasing, stylistic issues, or lack of fluency (Al-Jabari, 2008, p. 1). Such shortcomings highlight serious limitations in certain translations of the Holy Qur'ān. A translator of the Qur'ān must be attuned to its unique linguistic, rhetorical, and theological features in order to convey its meanings precisely. Mastery of both Arabic and English, along with a deep understanding of Qur'ānic interpretation and commentary, is essential for delivering God's message to the target audience with fidelity and clarity.

Many translators make errors when attempting to render the Qur'ān's verses into another language. This study seeks to identify these mistakes and offer recommendations for improving accuracy. According to Holmes's map of translation studies, TQA falls under the domain of applied translation criticism. Thus, this research also functions as a critique of existing translations, aiming to raise awareness among translators about the Qur'ān's distinctive features and the strategies needed for accurate translation. Surah Al-Kahf (The Cave), the 18th chapter of the Holy Qur'ān, was revealed in Mecca to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This chapter was selected for analysis due to its thematic richness and the variety of stories it presents. It includes the following five narratives:

1. A group of young believers who were forced to flee their city because of their faith in God.
2. A wealthy man with two beautiful gardens whose ingratitude led to their destruction.
3. The story of the angels' prostration before Adam and Satan's refusal to obey God.
4. The journey of Moses and Khidr, a mysterious and knowledgeable servant of God.
5. The story of Dhul-Qarnayn, a righteous and powerful king mentioned in the Qur'ān.

In addition to these narratives, the chapter contains important guidance on faith, righteous conduct, and preparation for the afterlife and the Day of Judgment.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: What errors are found in the translated texts based on Khazaeefar's Model?
- RQ2: Which translator has made fewer errors in the translation of this chapter?
- RQ3: What types of errors are most common, and which are less frequent or less noticeable?
- RQ4: What corrective strategies or solutions can be proposed to help translators reduce their errors?

2. Literature review

2.1. Translation of the Holy Qur'ān

The Holy Qur'ān is regarded as the most significant text in Islamic culture, and its translation has long been a subject of scholarly investigation within the field of translation studies. Scholars generally express two opposing views on the translatability of the Qur'ān (Maleki, 2011). One perspective holds that the Qur'ān is inherently untranslatable, deeming any attempt to translate it as illegitimate. In contrast, the other perspective emphasizes the necessity of translating the Qur'ān into other languages to ensure wider accessibility and understanding.

Foroutan (2019, pp. 14–16) outlines several reasons why some scholars argue that the Qur'ān cannot be truly translated. First, the Qur'ān is regarded as a divine miracle, placing it beyond the limits of human capability to reproduce in another language. Additionally, Arabic is viewed as a perfect and sacred language, capable of conveying meanings and stylistic subtleties that are extremely difficult—if not impossible—to capture in translation (Biazar Shirazi, 1376 Sh, 1:72, as cited in Foroutan, 2019, p. 15). The Qur'ān is also described as a “book of light”, and any attempt to translate it may risk diminishing its spiritual and sacred essence. Moreover, translations are inherently vulnerable to errors, including omissions and additions, which may lead to a distortion of the original message.

Foroutan (2019) identifies three primary approaches to Qur'ān translation: literal translation, free translation, and translation of meaning, where the translator renders the source text (ST) sentence into a corresponding sentence in the TT (p. 18). Given the inherent complexities of the Qur'ānic text, translators must consult various exegetical sources and

commentaries to ensure an accurate representation of meaning. Foroutan (pp. 19–20) emphasizes that a reliable translation requires the translator to possess a profound command of both the source language and target language, as well as an in-depth understanding of Qur'ānic interpretation and sciences. Furthermore, the translator must maintain objectivity, avoid bias, and adhere to established principles of translation. In addition, Foroutan (p. 139) highlights two fundamental considerations in Qur'ān translation: the Qur'ān is composed in standard Arabic, and the translator's ultimate goal is to faithfully and fully convey the message of Allah.

2.2. Rhetorical dimension of the Qur'ān

The rhetorical features of the Qur'ān present unique challenges for translators. Hemmatian (2015) explores these dimensions in her analysis of Surah Al-Kawthar, identifying four key rhetorical components based on Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics and House's model:

1. The Speaker: Allah is the speaker. His omnipotence is reflected in the tone, stress patterns, use of imperative sentences, and prophetic declarations found in the text.

2. The Audience: The general audience includes both supporters and opponents of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), while the specific audience consists of the Prophet himself and those who criticized him. The verses address the Prophet's emotional state, including his anxieties and disappointments.

3. The Text: The content delivers glad tidings to the Prophet and warnings to his adversaries. The use of the past tense emphasizes the certainty of the events described. Furthermore, the tone and fluency of the language enhance both the clarity and accessibility of the text for a general audience.

4. Situational Context: This encompasses the cultural and social environment at the time of revelation, as well as the specific circumstances that prompted the chapter's disclosure.

Understanding these rhetorical elements is crucial for translators seeking to faithfully convey the intended meaning and emotional depth of the Qur'ānic message. These insights underscore the need for a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to translation.

2.2. Error analysis as a TQA model

Khazaeefar (2012) proposed a model for TQA based on error analysis, which is particularly useful in translation courses. This model identifies errors at two levels: micro and macro.

2.2.1. Micro-level errors

At the micro level, errors are categorized into four types: lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.

2.2.1.1. Lexical errors

Lexical errors involve mistakes in word choice and include:

1. Selecting an equivalent word with an incorrect meaning.
2. Choosing a word with the correct meaning but inappropriate usage.
3. Using the primary meaning of a word from the source language instead of its contextual or secondary meaning.
4. Choosing a word that violates the collocational norms of the TT.
5. Using a word that does not conform to the lexical conventions of the target language.
6. Selecting a hypernym (more general term) or a hyponym (more specific term) in the TT that does not match the specificity of the original word.
7. Choosing a word that carries a different emotional impact or connotation in the TT than in the SL.

2.2.1.2. Syntactic errors

Syntactic errors are related to sentence structure and include:

1. Unjustifiably transferring the original sentence structure to the TT.
2. Failing to transfer necessary original sentence structures into the TT.
3. Retaining the original word order in the TT when it is inappropriate.
4. Using incorrect verb tenses in the TT.
5. Misinterpreting the grammatical function of a word within the sentence.

2.2.1.3. Semantic errors

Semantic errors occur when the translator uses words that are dictionary equivalents but differ in meaning or nuance in context. For example, the English verb *expect* and the Persian “توقع داشتن” may appear equivalent in a bilingual dictionary but are not always interchangeable due to contextual differences.

2.2.1.4. Pragmatic errors

Pragmatic errors involve failing to convey the speaker's intended meaning within a specific context, often by translating too literally. Pragmatics considers indirect communication and cultural nuances. While a word-for-word translation may sometimes suffice, in many cases the translator must adapt the message to reflect the intended tone and cultural appropriateness in the target language.

2.2.2. Macro-level errors

Macro-level errors pertain to the overall structure, style, and coherence of the translation.

2.2.2.1. Stylistic errors

Stylistic errors occur when there is a mismatch in tone or style between the ST and the TT. For example, the TT might shift from formal to informal, literary to non-literary, humorous to serious, or conversational to non-conversational, diverging from the tone of the ST.

2.2.2.2. Errors in cohesion and coherence

These errors result in a translation that lacks fluency and logical flow, making the text difficult to read and understand. Often caused by excessive reliance on the original structure, such translations may appear disjointed or awkward, negatively affecting readability and the logical progression of ideas.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study investigated two English translations of the Qur'ān, produced by a native and a non-native English translator. The central premise was that each translation may exhibit shortcomings in conveying the intended meaning of the Holy Qur'ān into the target language. To identify and quantify translation errors, this research employed Khazaefar's TQA model. Subsequently, the two translations were compared to determine which exhibited a lower frequency of errors based on the TQA assessment. The methodological design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative elements. A quantitative approach was used to determine the number of errors, while a qualitative analysis was conducted to assess the nature and potential impact of these errors on the overall quality and accuracy of each translation.

3.2. Procedure

A descriptive and comparative procedure was employed in this study. The initial step involved the researcher's reading of the Holy Qur'ān in its original Arabic. To establish a robust understanding of the verses' intended meaning, two established Persian commentaries (Tafsir) and two Qur'ānic dictionaries were consulted. Following this interpretive groundwork, each verse translation was examined against Khazaefar's TQA model to identify potential errors. Furthermore, relevant Persian translations were reviewed to provide additional context and facilitate a deeper understanding of the nuances in meaning. This multi-faceted approach enabled the researcher to assess the relative success of each translator in accurately conveying the meaning of the Holy Qur'ān into the English language. Observed shortcomings in the translations were subsequently analyzed to identify the potential origins and causes of these errors.

3.3. Material

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design. The selected material for analysis was Surah Al-Kahf, the 18th chapter of the Holy Qur'ān. This chapter, comprising 110 verses, which contains reasonable data to be collected, revealed in Mecca to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is named "Kahf," meaning "cave," derived from verses 9-26 which recount the story of the Companions of the Cave. Beyond this central narrative, Surah Al-Kahf encompasses four additional significant stories: the

parable of a wealthy and impoverished individual with two gardens (verses 32-44), the account of Iblis and Adam (verses 50-51), the narrative of Moses and Khidr (verses 60-82), and the story of Dhul-Qarnayn with Gog and Magog (verses 83-98).

Translations of the Holy Qur'ān have been undertaken by a diverse range of translators, encompassing both native Arab speakers and non-Arabs, as well as native English and non-native English speakers. The translation texts used in this research comprise the work of both a native English speaker and a non-native English speaker. The translators are: Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930) (1875-1936): born in England, Pickthall (1930) was a Western Islamic scholar, journalist, novelist, and political and religious leader. He resided in Palestine and acquired proficiency in Arabic. His translation of the Qur'ān, entitled "The Meaning of the Glorious Koran," is widely recognized as a significant contribution to the field. Ali Quli Qarai (2018) (born 1947): born in India, Qarai (2018) graduated from Osmania University of Hyderabad in 1970. He subsequently moved to the U.S. and earned a degree from the University of Wisconsin. A prolific writer and translator, Qarai (2018) has translated numerous texts from Arabic and Persian into English. His most prominent work is a phrase-by-phrase English translation of the Qur'ān, first published in 2003.

To facilitate a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the Qur'ānic meanings, several key interpretive resources were consulted. Among these is Tafsir al-Mizan, an Arabic exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān by Allameh Tabatabai, later translated into Persian by Mousavi Hamedani. This work is notable for its methodological approach of interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān itself, known as the "Qur'ān by Qur'ān" method. Another significant source is Tafsir-e Nemooneh, a Persian commentary authored by Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, recognized for its clear and accessible language and its engagement with contemporary social issues. Lexical support was provided by Qamoos al-Qur'ān, a Persian Qur'ānic dictionary by Ali Akbar Qureshi, and Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'ān by Raghīb Isfahani, an authoritative Arabic dictionary offering concise definitions of Qur'ānic terms in a single volume. Additionally, two digital platforms were used to supplement the study. The website www.tanzil.net provides the Qur'ān in Arabic along with translations in numerous languages, including English and Persian. Another valuable resource is www.Qur'an.inoor.ir, developed by the Computer Research Center of Islamic Science, which offers various tools for Qur'ānic studies.

4. Data Analysis

The primary aim of this study is to pinpoint the mistakes found in both translations of Surah Al-Kahf. This section has focused on the data and its interpretation. The information includes the mistakes made by the translators in their translations. In order to identify the mistakes, the interpretations of the Arabic terms were first examined through these books: 1. Mofradat of the Qur'ān 2. Dictionary of the Qur'ān 3. Al-Mizan Exegesis 4. Nemooneh Analysis. Next, the Arabic and English lexicons were analyzed in comparison to one another to pinpoint the mistakes, and the categories of errors were organized based on the framework suggested by Khazaeefar. To enhance the comprehension of the verses' meanings, several Persian translations were analyzed (such as the translations by Ghomshei and Ansari). Furthermore, the base of every word was noted. If any word within these lexicons had multiple meanings, its context was analyzed with the help of the interpretation texts of Al-Mizan and Nemooneh to identify the appropriate secondary meaning. To aid in locating the mistakes and their translations, the errors have been highlighted.

To assess the translation qualities of the data research data, 110 verses were analyzed, a summary of sample are discussed.

Example 1:

مَكِّيِّينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا

Qarai (2018) 's translation:

To abide in it forever.

Pickthall (1930) 's Translation:

Wherein they will abide for ever.

Error in coherence:

Tabatabai in Al-Mizan commentary states that in the previous verse “اجرا حسنا” means “heaven.” In this verse, it is stated that the reward of the believers is heaven, where they will live forever. The reference of the pronoun “it” is not clear for the target reader. There is ambiguity, which undermines the coherence of the text. Therefore, it is necessary for the translator to explain it in parentheses or footnotes; otherwise, the translation lacks coherence.

Example 2:

إِذْ أَوْى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا

Qarai (2018) 's translation:

When the youths took refuge in the Cave, they said, ‘Our Lord! Grant us a mercy from Yourself, and help us on to rectitude in our affair.’

Pickthall (1930) 's Translation:

When the young men fled for refuge to the Cave and said: Our Lord! Give us mercy from Thy presence, and shape for us right conduct in our plight.

Explanation of the verse:

Young people moved to a cave to be safe from the tyrant king and demanded help from God and prayed for guidance and asked for forgiveness from Him.

Error in collocation:

The translators, Qarai (2018) and Pickthall (1930) have rendered “اتنا رحمه” in “grant us mercy” and “give us mercy” respectively. According to Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary and Longman Dictionary, “grant mercy” and “give mercy” are not collocations. It is proposed that “have/ show mercy” be applied like: *God have mercy on us! They showed no mercy to their captives.*

Example 3:

هَؤُلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آِلِهَةً لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا

Qarai (2018) 's translation:

These—our people—have taken gods besides Him. Why do they not bring any clear authority touching them? So who is a greater wrongdoer than he who fabricates a lie against Allah?

Pickthall (1930) 's Translation:

These, our people, have chosen (other) gods beside Him though they bring no clear warrant (vouchsafed) to them. And who doth greater wrong than he who inventeth a lie concerning Allah?

Analysis of the word “سلطان”:

The word is a noun derived from the root “سلط”. According to Raghib, “سلطان” has two meanings. The first is “king”, referring to any powerful person who dominates others by force. The second meaning is “proof” or “reason”. In the verse under discussion, it is stated that those who do not believe in God and instead follow other gods cannot bring any “سلطان” because they blindly follow the beliefs of their ancestors. Based on the context, the second meaning—proof or reason—is the correct interpretation. Both translators have made errors. Qarai (2018) translated the word as “authority,” which can mean the power of an official position, an official organization, an expert, or formal permission, among other senses (LD). However, “authority” does not convey the meaning of “reason” or “proof.” Pickthall (1930) translated it as “warrant,” which refers to a legal document issued by a judge, permitting law enforcement to take specific actions. While this sense is somewhat closer to the meaning of “سلطان” it still does not capture the idea of “reason.” Therefore, both translations are inaccurate. This represents an error in coherence within the pattern of translation.

Syntactical error:

In Pickthall's (1930) translation, the sentence “لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ” is originally an interrogative sentence, but it has been rendered as a declarative sentence (“though they bring no clear warrant [vouchsafed] to them”). This sentence is actually a rhetorical question aimed at addressing those who do not believe in Allah. As previously discussed, a rhetorical question is used to impact and impress the audience rather than to elicit an answer. This important nuance is lost in the TT because the translator has rendered the Arabic particle “لو” as “though”, changing the original rhetorical question into a negative declarative sentence. According to the model, this constitutes an error because the original sentence structure and its rhetorical function were not preserved or appropriately transferred into the translation for no apparent reason.

Example 4:

وَكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا

Qarai (2018)'s translation:

He had abundant fruits, so he said to his companion, as he conversed with him: 'I have more wealth than you, and am stronger with respect to numbers.'

Pickthall (1930)'s Translation:

And he had fruit. And he said unto his comrade, when he spake with him: I am more than thee in wealth, and stronger in respect of men.

Error in cohesion (error in conjunction):

The verse states that the rich man who had gardens and abundant fruits, said to his friend: my wealth is more than yours and I have more men who help me. This verse is the continuation of the previous verse. At the first of this verse, the conjunction “و” (means: and) has connected the verses 33 and 34. Pickthall (1930) has conveyed it to the translated text but Qarai (2018) has not done this. It is an error that according to the model, it is an error in cohesion (conjunction).

According to the results, a total of 257 errors were identified across both translations. Qarai (2018) made 111 errors, while Pickthall's (1930) translation contained 146 errors. The percentage of errors for each translator is as follows: Qarai (2018) accounted for 43% of the errors, and Pickthall (1930) accounted for 57%. Therefore, despite being a non-native English speaker, Qarai (2018) committed fewer errors and produced a more successful translation compared to Pickthall (1930). In terms of cohesion and coherence, Qarai (2018) made 15 and 3 errors respectively, while Pickthall (1930) committed 7 errors in cohesion and 5 in coherence. In this category, Pickthall (1930), with a total of 12 errors, actually performed better than Qarai (2018), who made 18 errors overall. Regarding lexical errors, Qarai (2018) made 28 mistranslation errors compared to Pickthall's 45. Additionally, Qarai made 2 errors in recognizing secondary meanings, 23 in collocation, and 10 in conveying the appropriate emotional effect. Pickthall, on the other hand, made 3 errors in secondary meanings, 24 in collocation, and 28 in emotional effect. Both translators made 3 errors related to hyponyms and 4 errors concerning hypernyms. Altogether, Qarai (2018) committed 70 lexical errors, whereas Pickthall (1930) made 107 in this category. Therefore, Qarai (2018) demonstrated greater accuracy and produced a translation with fewer errors overall.

The word order in the TT is similar to the word order in the ST. The sentence structure of the ST is transferred to the TT unnecessarily. The sentence structure of the ST is not transferred to the TT when it should be. The role of a word is incorrectly translated.

As shown, Qarai (2018) has produced a better translation in these respects. Qarai did not commit any errors in the first category—he maintained the word order in accordance with the ST. In contrast, Pickthall (1930) made 1 error here. Regarding the second category, Qarai transferred the ST sentence structure to the TT unnecessarily only once, while Pickthall did so 3 times. The third category is the opposite situation: Qarai failed to transfer the ST sentence structure to the TT twice, whereas Pickthall made this error 4 times. In the final

category, both translators made the same number of errors, with each committing 1 error related to incorrectly changing the role of a word. Overall, Pickthall (1930) made slightly fewer semantic errors, with his translation containing 18 errors compared to Qarai (2018)'s 19. The statistics in this section indicate that both translators' performances are very close.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the errors identified in the translations and explores the reasons behind the translators' mistakes. Given the crucial importance of macro-level errors, these are examined first, followed by an analysis of micro-level errors.

5.1. Macro-level errors

According to Khazaefar's error analysis model, errors in coherence, cohesion, and style fall under macro-level errors. These will be addressed in turn.

5.1.1. Coherence and cohesion

One of the key factors that engages readers is the fluency of the text. In translation, fluency and immediate comprehension are essential markers of success. The fluency and clarity of a translated text depend largely on its cohesion and coherence. Scholars studying the Holy Qur'ān widely acknowledge that it is a text with a high degree of both coherence and cohesion. In this study, Halliday and Hassan's theory of coherence and cohesion was reviewed. Cohesion relates to the "exterior beauty" of the text—how the surface elements connect—while coherence pertains to the "interior beauty," or the logical flow and meaningful connection of ideas. The translator's responsibility is to faithfully convey the cohesion elements present in the ST. For example, in Pickthall's (1930) translation, the Arabic conjunction "و" is generally rendered, but both Qarai (2018) and Pickthall omit some instances of it, such as in verses 27, 28, 29, 34, and others. It is important to recognize that in the Holy Qur'ān, every letter is purposefully placed; even the omission of a single letter can alter the interpretation of a verse.

Regarding pronoun references, the translator must carefully identify and preserve the referent if it is clearly specified in the ST. If the referent is unspecified or ambiguous, the translation should maintain that ambiguity rather than impose a specific interpretation. Coherence, meanwhile, plays a significant role in the reader's understanding of the text. While cohesion can be seen as a micro-level aspect, coherence operates at the macro level, ensuring that ideas are logically connected and the overall text makes sense. Certain errors classified as "mistranslations" in this study could also be considered coherence errors.

For instance, in verse 16, Pickthall translates the Arabic word "مَرْفَقًا" as "pillow," which is logically inappropriate. This verse addresses the Companions of the Cave, explaining that when the youths withdrew from society, sought refuge in the cave, and rejected other gods, God granted them mercy and made their hardship easier to bear. Pickthall's choice of the word "pillow" distorts this meaning, disrupting the logical flow and rendering the translation ambiguous and incoherent. In terms of coherence, Qarai (2018) delivers a better translation, while in terms of cohesion, Pickthall (1930) performs better. Most cohesion errors in both translations relate to the omission or mistranslation of conjunctions, with only three exceptions in each. Overall, Pickthall's translation demonstrates stronger cohesion.

5.1.2. Style of the translations

The Holy Qur'ān is neither purely prose nor purely poetry; rather, it is a unique combination of both. The translation's style should take this into account, specifically in two aspects:

1. Sentence length and word count: The number of words or the length of a verse and its translation should ideally be equal. For example, Saffarzadeh (2001) adopts an interpretive approach that often results in longer sentences in the translation. However, as much as possible, translators should avoid adding unnecessary words or synonyms that do not appear in the original text.

2. Rhyme: Most chapters of the Qur'ān are composed with rhyme, carefully organizing the syntax so that verses end with rhyming sounds. In Surah Al-Kahf specifically, nearly all verses end with the letter "aa", producing a consistent end rhyme that is a defining stylistic feature.

Both translations respect the first element well, with sentence lengths in the translations closely mirroring those of the original Arabic verses. Neither includes superfluous words or unnecessary synonyms. Regarding the second element, Qarai (2018) presents a simple prose translation. Although clear and accessible, his translation does not preserve the Qur'ān's rhyming style. It focuses on conveying the meaning and content rather than the poetic form. This approach is common in most Qur'ān translations. It highlights the difficulty of maintaining both form and content simultaneously—emphasizing meaning often means sacrificing stylistic elements like rhyme. Similarly, Pickthall's translation is also prose and lacks rhyme. However, he uses an archaic, literary style of English, which can be challenging for many readers, particularly non-native speakers. His translation does not replicate the rhyme scheme of the original Qur'ān and may be less accessible due to the older language. In summary, neither translation preserves the Qur'ān's distinctive rhymed style, though both maintain close fidelity to sentence length.

5.2. Micro-level errors

In Khazaefar's error analysis model, micro-level errors are categorized into: lexical errors, syntactical errors, semantic errors and pragmatic errors. Notably, no pragmatic errors were found in either translation.

5.2.1. Lexical errors

The first and most obvious type of lexical error is mistranslation—when a word is translated incorrectly and there is little or no similarity between ST and TT words. In this area, Qarai (2018) produced a more accurate translation, committing 28 errors compared to Pickthall (1930), who made 45 errors. Mistranslation errors generally occur when translators fail to consult essential resources like Qur'ānic dictionaries and commentaries to understand the word's meaning and context. Though Qarai is a non-native English speaker, he made fewer errors in this regard. Some errors stem from translators relying more on interpretation books than dictionaries. For example, in verse 79, the word "البحر" simply means "sea", but was translated as "river". This reflects a translator's misstep in rendering interpretation rather than literal translation. The translator's primary task is to translate, not interpret.

Another type of lexical error arises when the translator chooses a word's primary meaning while the secondary meaning is contextually intended. Here, interpretive books play a vital role in discerning the correct sense of polysemous words. For instance, in verse 6, Pickthall translated "آثار" as "footsteps" (its primary meaning) instead of "deeds", which better fits the context. This underscores the importance of consulting Qur'ānic dictionaries and commentaries to recognize intended meanings. Qarai made fewer such errors (2 errors) compared to Pickthall (3 errors).

Collocation is another important linguistic feature impacting the naturalness and coherence of a translation. Some errors in collocation occur not due to unfamiliarity with the target language, but because translators prioritize conveying exact meanings over natural phraseology. This can sacrifice the natural flow and idiomatic usage of the target language. For example, in verse 10, the words "آتتنا" and "رحمة" form a collocation in Arabic. Both translators rendered it as "grant mercy" and "give mercy," whereas "have mercy" would be a more natural collocation in English without altering the meaning. Both translators use natural collocations, when possible, but minor errors remain: Qarai made 23 collocation errors, and Pickthall made 24, indicating very similar performance.

The Qur'ān often uses words and structures to convey emphasis and emotional impact. According to Foroutan (2019, pp.132-137), there are five Arabic emphatic structures that convey this sense, along with emphatic words like "لَنْ" and "أحدا" (appearing in verses 47 and 49). Properly conveying this emphasis in translation requires a deep familiarity with Arabic emphatic forms. Failure to do so results in altered emotional effects and thus an error. Qarai's translation fares better in this respect, with 10 errors compared to Pickthall's 28, demonstrating greater sensitivity to emphatic structures and words.

Hyponym and hypernym errors sometimes arise from misrecognizing word meanings, lack of direct equivalents, or cultural differences. For example, both translators used "son" as the equivalent of "ولد". The phrase "Son of God" is familiar in English religious texts and is considered a collocation, so it resonates with English readers. Both translators made the same number of errors here: 4 hypernym errors (using overly general terms) and 3 hyponym errors (using overly specific terms). Thus, their performance on this aspect was equal.

5.2.2. Syntactical errors

Syntax refers to the arrangement of words to form sentences or phrases, governed by grammatical rules. In English, a simple sentence typically follows the order: subject + verb + (possibly) object. Occasionally, translators fail to follow this order correctly.

This error appears only once in Pickthall's (1930) translation, where the positions of the verb and subject are reversed. Sometimes translators attempt to mirror the structure of the original Arabic verse in the translation. According to Khazaefar, this is an error because it violates the grammatical rules of the target language. Although the syntax and word arrangement of the Qur'ān conveys special meaning—especially considering it is not simple prose—translators must use structures that are familiar to English readers, enabling fluent reading and immediate comprehension. When possible, translators should adapt sentence structure to fit the target language conventions. Consequently, transferring the ST structure

to the TT unnecessarily is considered an error. Qarai (2018) committed one such error, while Pickthall (1930) made three.

Conversely, sometimes translators fail to transfer the ST structure when necessary, resulting in a change in the verse's function. For example, in verse 15, the Arabic particle "لو" in the phrase "لَوْلَا يَأْتُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِسُلْطٰنٍ بَيِّنٍ" is used for reprimand, as noted by Qureshi. Qarai (2018) translated it as "why," preserving the interrogative function of the original sentence. However, Pickthall (1930) rendered it as a declarative sentence, altering its function. In this category, Qarai made two errors, while Pickthall made four, indicating a more successful translation by Qarai.

Translating verbs in the Qur'ān poses particular challenges. Commentary books are valuable for understanding the contextual nuances of verb tense. Often, the grammatical tense in the Qur'ān does not match the real tense intended; for example, past tense verbs may refer to future events with certainty. The translator must recognize this through situational context and commentary insights. In this respect, both translations showed no errors. For instance, in verse 20, the present tense verb "تفعلوا" is appropriately translated into the future tense by both translators. Another syntactical error found in both translations involves the translation of the role of certain words. Both translators rendered the word "عدن" as a proper noun rather than translating its meaning, which may have facilitated better reader comprehension. Each translator made one error in this regard.

5.2.3. Semantic errors

Qur'ānic dictionaries are essential tools for accurately translating Qur'ānic lexicon. Semantic errors occur when the translated word and the original word are not exact equivalents and differ in their attributes. This error type is common in both translations, often due to the translators not considering all semantic features of the word. Words may appear equivalent but differ in nuances or connotations.

For example, in verse 48, the word "موعدا" is translated as "tryst." However, "tryst" carries connotations of love, secrecy, and humor that are absent in the original word. Such errors often stem from cultural differences between languages.

Another example is the translation of "اسجدوا" as "prostrate" or "fall prostrate" by both translators, which fails to fully convey the meaning of the Arabic verb. Using transliteration accompanied by a footnote might better convey its significance.

Moreover, words may carry intensified or special meanings due to their grammatical or morphological structure, which translators may overlook. For instance, the Arabic word "الغفور" in verse 58 is a "صيغة مبالغة" (intensive form) meaning "extreme forgiver," but Pickthall (1930) translates it simply as "forgiver". In this category, the performance of both translators is very similar: Qarai (2018) made 19 errors, while Pickthall (1930) made 18.

6. Conclusions

The present research was designed to identify and analyze the errors in two English translations of Surah Al-Kahf, Pickthall's (1930) translation and Qarai's (2018) translation, using Khazaefar's model of error analysis. To this end, several Qur'ānic dictionaries and

commentaries were consulted. However, the study faced certain limitations, such as being unable to cover all chapters of the Qur'ān or analyze errors in a wider range of English translations. By examining the translations of Qarai (2018) and Pickthall (1930), both considered among the more readable English versions of the Qur'ān, a significant number of errors were identified that impact the meaning and cause deviations from the original intent. The study concludes that the non-native English translator, Qarai, was more successful in conveying the Qur'ān's message in English compared to Pickthall. This success is attributed to Qarai's deeper knowledge of the Arabic language, effective use of Qur'ānic dictionaries and commentaries, and familiarity with Arabic culture, all of which positively influenced his translation.

References

- Abdelrazq, Y. I. (2014). *Problems of translating homonymy in the Glorious Qur'ān: A comparative analytical study* [Master's thesis, Middle East University].
- Al-Jabari, R. (2008). *Reasons for the possible incomprehensibility of some verses of three translations of the meaning of the Holy Qur'ān into English* [Unpublished manuscript]. European Studies Research Institute (ESRI), School of Languages, University of Salford.
- Foroutan, B. (2019). *A study of the lexicons and structures in the English translations of the Qur'ān*. Athare Sabz.
- Hemmatian, M. (2015). Rhetorical analysis of the factors influencing the textual structure of "Kawthar" in the Qur'ān. **Literary-Qur'ānic Research Quarterly*, 3*(3), 7–22.
- House, J. (2001). Translation quality assessment: Linguistic description versus social evaluation. *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 46(2), 243–257. <https://doi.org/10.7202/003597ar>
- Khazaefar, A., & Pakar, E. (2012). Introducing a model for evaluating translation quality and describing two methods of commenting in translation classes. *Journal of Linguistic Research*, 4(1), 53–66.
- Manafi Anari, S. (2014). *A study of Islamic texts in English translation (II)*. The Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities (SAMT).
- Maleki, A. (2021). Audience-oriented translation of Qur'ān-e Khandani: A new approach to Qur'ān translation. *Language and Translation Studies*, 54(4), 181–207.
- Munday, J. (2016). *Introducing translation studies* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Neubert, A., & Shreve, G. (1992). *Translation as text*. Kent State University Press.
- Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1982). *The theory and practice of translation*. Brill.
- Pickthall, M. M. (1930). *The meaning of the glorious Koran: An explanatory translation*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Qarai, A. (2018). *The Qur'ān: With a phrase-by-phrase English translation*. The Center for Translation of the Holy Qur'ān.

Saffarzadeh, T. (2001). *The Holy Qur'ān: English translation with Persian text*. Amir Kabir Publishing.

Vermeer, H. J. (1989). Skopos and commission in translational action. In A. Chesterman (Ed.), *Readings in translation theory* (pp. 173–187). Oy Finn Lectura Ab.

