
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Elective Affinity and the Domestication of Islamic Discourse in English Translation

Abdullah Saleh Aziz MOHAMMED

Assistant Professor of Translation Studies, College of Science and Humanities in Dawadmi, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia;

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Tamar University, Yemen

Corresponding Author: Abdullah Saleh Aziz MOHAMMED **E-mail:** a.mohammad@su.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

The translation of Quran provides access to the Word of Allah for non-Arabic speakers. This study explores the role of how elective affinities, a term made popular by Goethe and Max Weber, guide the translators' choices in four translations of the Quran, i.e. George Sale (1734), Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), Abdullah Usuf Ali (1934) and M.A.S. Abdel Heleem (2004/2010). The study focuses on Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2), and draws on Lawrence Venuti's domestication/foreignization dichotomy. Using elective affinities as an explanatory framework, the study adopts a close comparative, hermeneutic analysis of key Quranic concepts. The paper argues that translators' lexical, stylistic and interpretive choices are not merely linguistic but reflect deep ideological, theological and cultural resonance between their worldviews and the dominant epistemic norms of the Anglophone target culture. The findings reveal four distinct domestication profiles: Sale's Protestant-Orientalist domestication, Pickthall's foreignized content in Biblical English aesthetics (stylistic domestication), Yusuf Ali's universalist moralist domestication fed by early 20th century interfaith and Victorian ethics, and Abdel Haleem's contemporary academic domestication that prioritises clarity and post-9/11 apologetic concerns. The findings also show that such domesticating tendencies can enhance readability and familiarity but they often entail semantic shifts and doctrinal flattening, and at times imply subordination of the Quranic concepts to target culture's theological expectations. This study fills an underexplored gap in Translation studies, definitely unexplored in the translation of Quran. It offers a nuanced understanding of how ideological presuppositions give shape to the transmission and reception of sacred discourse in English.

KEYWORDS

Elective affinities, domestication, Quran translation, Surat Al-Baqarah

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Introduction

The Quran, the holy book of Muslims, is regarded as the Word of Allah revealed in the Arabic language. While reciting it in its original form is an integral part of every Muslim's religious duties, understanding its meanings by the majority of non-Arabic speaking Muslims requires translation. But the translation of the Quran remains one of the most intricate and ideologically charged ventures because the Quran is not seen as merely a textual object but as a sacred, performative, unalterable, unadulterated and spiritually resonant utterance with linguistic, rhetorical and theological implications intricately woven and sophisticatedly embedded in its original form. The translation of this text into English, which is a language historically shaped by Christian (and Judeo-Christian) traditions, Enlightenment rationalism, and modern secularism, has reflected traces of translators' choices, in some cases leading to interpretative prospects that would inevitably reshape target readers' understanding of the Islamic discourse. The notion that Islam, Christianity and Judaism are Abrahamic religions has perhaps motivated some translators – encouraged by the Quranic edict 'Say, "O People of the Scripture [i.e. Christians and Jews], come to a word that is

equitable between us and you..." (Quran 3:64; *Saḥeeḥ International*) – to search for interrelated concepts, and adopt domestication driven by elective affinity to conceive and present ideological alignments.

Domestication refers to the translation strategies translators adopt to adapt the source text (ST) to the cultural norms of the target language (TL) to ensure fluency and familiarity, bringing the TT closer to the reader sometimes at the cost of preserving the original "foreign" message (Venuti, 1995/2008). With the translation of the Quran in mind, this often manifests in the rendition of key Islamic terminology (for example, *īmān*, *taqwā*, *ribā*, *jihād*, *zakāt*, etc.) into English equivalents that emanate from Christian theology, resulting sometimes in epistemological changes. Such choices may, on one hand, enhance readability for Western Muslim or non-Muslim readers, but they also risk diluting the Quranic distinct theological structure, on the other hand, by substituting the original conceptual framework with one that is thought to resonate more comfortably with the cultural expectations of Anglophone readership.

Elective affinity (in German, *Wahlverwandtschaft*) is basically a scientific term describing the tendency of some elements to combine with other specific elements. Goethe (1809) has a novel carrying the same title (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*) whose theme is based on this concept itself. It was Max Weber, however, who used it as a "process through which two cultural forms – religious, intellectual, political or economical – [with] certain analogies, intimate kinships or meaning affinities, enter in a relationship of reciprocal attraction and influence, mutual selection, active convergence and mutual reinforcement" (Löwy, 2004). It presents us with a critical lens to comprehend how and why certain domesticating strategies tend to be favoured over others. In the context of translation, it relates to how translators, consciously or unconsciously, lean towards interpretive choices that reflect their own ideological dispositions and those of their anticipated readers. In other words, translators may get tempted to frame Islamic concepts in terms compatible with liberal theology (e.g. *jihād* can be 'striving', devoid of political connotations; or *ribā* as 'usury', not 'interest', to evoke moral condemnation in line with Christian discourse).

This paper uses evidence from Surat Al-Baqara (The Cow, or the Heifer; Chapter 2), being the longest and most thematically diverse chapter in the Quran, which encompasses legal injunctions, theological disputes, prophetic narratives and ethical exhortations. It features key concepts that demand translators to take interpretive decisions that cannot be resolved solely through lexical equivalence. Four translations of the Quran – i.e. George Sale (1734), Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1934), and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2004) – are used here to ensure depth, diversity, manageability and variety of translator's perspectives.

Literature Review

The bulk of research on the translation of the Holy Quran has increasingly focused on the dialectic between domestication and foreignization, especially for the purpose of conveying religious or culture-specific words. This paper is intended to enrich the debate further by incorporating the concept of elective affinity, originally associated with Goethe, Weber, and later Benjamin, in an attempt to explain why translators gravitate towards certain interpretive or lexical choices. These frameworks can reveal how translators' linguistic and ideological orientations create patterns of selective attraction, thereby shaping the resulting translations of the Quran in significant theological and hermeneutic ways.

In this research, Venuti's (1995) dichotomy of domestication and foreignization plays a central role. Domestication is the strategy of adapting the source text to target-language norms to ensure fluency and cultural accessibility, and is widely used in many Anglophone translations of the Quran. Ramli and Baker (2021) demonstrate how translators render culturally loaded terms tied to the six pillars of *īmān* into familiar Judeo-Christian equivalents (*Allah* as 'God'; *al-Malā'ikah* as 'angels'; *al-Kitāb* as 'book'). Such choices create an elective affinity between Quranic terminology and dominant Christian-Western lexicons, apparently smoothing comprehension for TT reader but often at the expense of doctrinal precision. Using componential analysis, they demonstrate how such domesticated renderings truncate essential semantic features, and how compensatory footnotes are required to restore lost meaning.

Similarly, Abdul-Raof (2001) stresses that concepts such as *kufr*, *īmān*, *ṣadaqa* and *rahmah* (disbelief, belief/faith, charity and mercy, respectively) are too deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and *tafsīr* (exegesis) that they cannot be reduced to one-to-one English equivalents without semantic loss. Therefore, translators must be aware of the proper rendering techniques and choose between transliteration, paraphrase, analogy or doctrinal reframing. An example of that can be seen in the term *taqwā*: it is translated as "God-consciousness" by Abdel Haleem, foregrounding spiritual interiority, whereas Yusuf Ali renders it as "fear of God", aligned more closely with Biblical moral vocabulary. These decisions show elective affinities with particular theological and cultural sensibilities on the part of the translators.

Khan (2025) analyses Surat Al-Wāqī'ah in order to illustrate how domestication promotes clarity and emotional accessibility, i.e. adapting the text to TT reader's expectations, and, by contrast, how foreignization preserves Quranic rhetorical energy but at the cost of reducing readability. His comparison of *Saḥeeḥ International*'s domesticated clarity with Yusuf Ali's and Pickthall's

foreignized approaches demonstrates how translators' ideological and theological commitments shape their affinity stances. Pickthall, for example, adopts archaic diction to preserve the Quran's sacred and foreign aura while modern translations often sacrifice this aura to maintain readability to contemporary TT audiences.

In the same vein, Maatoq (2023) finds that translators' religious and cultural backgrounds have a strong influence on the degree of domestication. He shows that Muslim translators tend to preserve key Arabic terms (e.g. *tayammum*, *jizyah*, *zakāt*) using transliteration whereas non-Muslim translators often replace them with generalised English equivalents (e.g. alms, charity) thereby flattening their legal and ritual dimensions. These tendencies reflect elective affinities shaped by the translators' theological identities and cultural affiliations, which create assumptions about the target readership.

The anthropological work of Talal Asad enriches this discussion by situating translation within power, secularity and cultural hegemony. In his book *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad (2009) maintains that terms such as *dīn*, *ummah* and *naṣīḥa* resist secular domestication because their meanings are inseparable from embodied communal Islamic practices (pp. 190-220). Western translators often domesticate these terms into secular-liberal or Christian-ethical categories, thereby bringing about elective affinities that obscure Islamic communal authority and implications. Again, in his book *Secular Translations*, Asad (2018) opines that translation is not merely a purely linguistic neutral operation but rather an "embodied", "sensorial" practice shaped by modern state ideologies (pp. 4-15), and thus domesticated translations frequently conform to secular expectations by downplaying ritual non-translatability and liturgical embeddedness (pp. 50-70).

The theoretical roots of elective affinity provide additional depth to the interpretive process. Weber (2001) uses the concept to explain the mutually reinforcing relationship between Protestant ethics and capitalist rationality, and in this way illustrates how cultural and religious ideas "translate" into new social environment (pp. 50-100). Benjamin and Löwy extend elective affinity into a dialectical process in which different traditions (e.g. theology and materialism) interact and reshape each other (Löwy, 2005, pp. 21-22). These perspectives can shed light on how translators, consciously or unconsciously, adapt Quranic meanings to TT-culture epistemologies whether through instinctive or culturally conditioned choices (ibid., pp. 21-22).

In Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008), the political stakes of domestication are emphasized, shown to reinforce dominant cultural norms by erasing linguistic and cultural differences (pp. 15-20, 120-130). He argues that foreignizing translation can serve as an ethical resistance to assimilation, a perspective which resonates strongly with the heated debates over Quran translation, in which Islamic conceptual integrity is deemed crucial.

These studies accentuate how domestication in Quran translation is not merely a linguistic or stylistic preference but a complex negotiation of theology, culture and ideology. With this in mind, elective affinity serves as an adequate framework for the understanding of why translators incline to using particular strategies and how these strategies shape the transmission and reception of Islamic concepts in translation.

Despite the bulk of scholarship on domestication and foreignization in Quran translation, no study has systematically investigated the role of elective affinity in shaping translators' domestication choices while rendering key Quranic concepts into English. Existing literature has identified patterns of cultural adaptation or ideological positioning or theological mediation but these studies tend to treat such choices as isolated strategies rather than outcomes of deeper affinities between translators' worldviews and the target culture's epistemic expectations. Besides, Weber's elective affinity has been investigated in some disciplines (sociology and religious studies) but hardly examined in translation theory. It has not been explicitly applied in the analysis of the translation of Quranic terms, more particularly the doctrinally dense items, into English. This paper, therefore, comes to fill this gap. Using examples from Surat Al-Baqarah, the largest in the Quran, this study sheds a new light on how several translators dealt with these choices and what the consequences of these choices are.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How does the concept of elective affinity account for the domestication strategies adopted by the translators of Quran into English, and how do their cultural, theological and ideological backgrounds shape their choices?
- 2) To what extent do translation decisions regarding key Quranic terms in Al-Baqara reflect domestication, and what are the resulting semantic and doctrinal implications?
- 3) How do translators deal with the tension between the preservation of the linguistic and theological specificity of the Quranic terms vis-à-vis making Al-Baqara accessible or relatable to English speaking audiences?

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive textual analysis that derives insights from Translation Studies, sociology of knowledge and Quranic Studies. Indeed, the focus is not on the evaluation of the accuracy and precision of the translations themselves but rather on examining how the domestication strategies were manipulated by the translators' ideological orientations and cultural presuppositions as well as inherited lingo-theological frameworks. For this purpose, Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2) is selected, given its volume and abundance in culturally and theologically loaded terms. Basically, the concept of elective affinity – derived from the works of Goethe (1809), Weber (1905), Benjamin (1996) and Löwy (1998) – along with Venuti's (1995) theory of domestication and foreignization guided this research design. The former provides a theoretical foundation of the identification of patterned convergences between the translators' socio-cultural inclinations and the choices they made in translation; the latter accounts for the operational categories through which these patterns are detected in the target text. Therefore, this methodology is interpretive and hermeneutic in nature, seeking through comparison to understand how meaning is rendered and reconfigured across boundaries, linguistic, cultural, ideological and theological.

For this purpose, a corpus of key terms from Surat Al-Baqara was developed and compared across four key translations that span three centuries, providing a rich milieu for investigating the diversity of historical, cultural and theological orientation. The translation by George Sale (1734) represents an Enlightenment-saturated Orientalist rendering that is shaped by Protestant intellectual traditions. The second translation is that of Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), who is a British Muslim revert and strived in his translation to maintain fidelity to Islamic tradition while also adopting an English style typical of the Scriptures. The third translation is that of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1934) which, with its rich commentary, reflects interfaith ethics and moral universalism, not without a spirit of early 20th-century British-Indian reformism. The last is the translation of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2004/2010), which is a contemporary academic translation characterised by modern hermeneutics and rational clarity. It is to be emphasized here that this research does not aim to measure translation accuracy, for it is taken for granted that, as Abdel Haleem (2004/2010) asserts, any attempt to translate the Quran into another language (particularly English, which has its distinct epistemological and religious traditions) must be understood not as replication but rather as interpretation.

In addition to its length (being the longest in the Quran), Surat Al-Baqarah has been chosen due to its theological density and legal diversity. Key semantic domains have been identified, including theological concepts (*Allāh, taqwā, imān, kufr*), legal terminology (*qitāl, qisās, ribā, talāq*), metaphors and parables (e.g. verses 2:17-18, 2:26, 2:261), intercommunal relations (e.g. the narratives related to Banī Isrā'īl), and rhetorical structures (e.g. repetitions, direct address, oaths, etc.). These domains have been selected because they represent the loci where ideological tendencies are most likely to manifest. Relevant verses were extracted, and key terms and patterns were identified, followed by a process of thematic clustering to allow for cross-translator comparison within each conceptual domain.

The next procedure was analysis, which followed direct textual comparison supplemented by theoretical coding. Three steps were implemented. The first was the lexical and semantic analysis where translators' choices were compared to the Arabic text, taking into account the translational manoeuvres, such as additions and omissions of connotative meanings, semantic shifts, changes in doctrinal and legal implications, stylistic differences (e.g. archaism vs modern clarity, paraphrasing, and the search for interfaith equivalents). Then, the translators' choices were coded, following Venuti (1995), into domesticated choices (those that reflect naturalising, smoothing, simplifying, re-framing into TT-cultural categories) and foreignized choices (which aimed to retain the foreign conceptual structures and semantic opacity). Finally, an elective affinity mapping process was conducted to correlate translation patterns with each translator's religious identity, intellectual background, cultural-linguistic orientation, historical context, and documented ideological commitments (based on translator's notes and footnotes and parenthetical additions). These allowed for a reconstruction of each translator's affinity profile – i.e. Sale's domestication reflects Protestant rationalism and Orientalist discourse; Pickthall's archaic style identifies with the English style of the Scriptures; Yusuf Ali's commentary echoes a spirit of universalist ethics and interfaith; and Abdel Haleem's focus on clarity shows his desire for a contemporary academic discourse intended to counter misconceptions about and misreadings of Islam post-9/11.

The study aimed to achieve methodological rigour through triangulation (textual comparison, theoretical frameworks, and translators' own commentaries) in order to ensure reliability and validity. Also, referential transparency is ensured by linking every claim made in the analysis to specific verses of Surat Al-Baqara, the translators' explicit choices and/or documented scholarly commentary. However, it has to be noted that for ethical considerations, and given the sacred status of the Quran, this study avoids evaluative judgements about religious content, treats all translators with academic respect, focuses on interpretive mechanisms rather than theological correctness, and ensures neutrality in the comparison of translational decisions.

Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the study derives examples from the four translations of the Quran to demonstrate how elective affinity (as understood by Goethe, Weber and Benjamin, i.e. the mutual attraction between ideas, values and

interpretive orientations) feeds into the domestication strategies adopted by the translators, Sale (1734), Pickthall (1930), Yusuf Ali (1934) and Abdel Haleem (2004). In fact, each translator brings a distinct theological and ideological orientation. Such orientations serve as affinity matrices that guide the process of rendering culturally and doctrinally dense items into English. Abdul-Raof (2001) asserts that Quranic terms carry embedded interpretive history; therefore, their translation inevitably reflects the translator's worldview as well as intended audience. As a result, a pattern emerges in which certain renderings are assumed to be 'natural' not because they are linguistically inevitable but rather because they align with and echo the translator's own intellectual commitment – i.e. elective affinity. A few examples from Surat Al-Baqara are cited and discussed below to demonstrate and elaborate on this point.

An ideal example of elective affinity in terms of the key theological concepts is the term *taqwā* (originally from the verb *ittaqa*, 'to avoid' or 'to shield oneself against') and its inflections. This term is deeply embedded in Islamic ethics, and its meaning oscillates between piety, moral consciousness (God-consciousness) and protective fear. Sale translates it as 'fear God' and 'the pious', reflecting an elective affinity between this Islamic concept and the Protestant moral theology (which centres moral obedience around fear of divine judgement), thereby demonstrating a Christianizing domestication tendency typical of the Enlightenment era and Orientalist disposition. His choice, therefore, aligns Islam with Christian norms. Pickthall, on the other hand, translates the term as 'Fear (Allah)' and 'the righteous', thus oscillating between fear and righteousness, with an aim to demonstrate fidelity to traditional Islamic exegesis (combined with an archaic English style, typical of the Scripture). Despite his attempt to foreignize the text, his archaic diction is a testimony to an elective affinity with the literary Gothic style of the King James Bible – i.e. foreignized form clothed in a domesticated style. Yusuf Ali translates the term as 'righteousness' and 'God-consciousness', showing a tendency towards interfaith rapprochement, supplemented by footnotes that carry the tinge of Victorian moralism to extend Islamic concepts through comparative theology, reflecting a desire to present Islam as compatible with Christian ethics. Finally, Abdel Haleem translates the term as 'be mindful of God', avoiding 'fear', and arguing in his introduction that modern readers misinterpret the connotations of 'fear'. In response to post-9/11 sentiments, Abdel Haleem encourages spiritual mindfulness rather than fear of God, in an elective affinity to the historical context. Therefore, the translation of the term *taqwā* shows how theological terms become sites of ideological negotiations where translators, imbued with presuppositions of context and intended readers, make choices, intentionally or unintentionally.

Another key example is the translation of the terms *īmān* (faith, originally from the Arabic verb *amena* 'to feel safe') and *kufṛ* (disbelief or denial of God, originally from the Arabic verb *kafara* 'to cover or hide', here 'to deny or be ungrateful'), which are central to the Quranic theological structure and have extensive exegetical histories. Sale conceives *kufṛ* not as a technical theological term but as a kind of moral stubbornness, thus uses the term 'unbelievers', indirectly inserting Christian moral terminology. Pickthall, by contrast, retains a more literal exegetically grounded term, i.e. 'disbelievers'. His rendering aligns with Muslim theological framework while also maintaining archaic Biblical register. Yusuf Ali explicates the term – 'those who reject faith' – adding an interpretive frame, as 'reject' implies volition and ethical blame. His extensive intertextual footnoting also reflects an attempt to moralise and universalise such Quranic categories. Abdel Haleem uses the term 'the disbelievers' to maintain lexical neutrality and minimize doctrinal overtones. His targeting of clarity and avoidance of polemical tones are evidence of an elective affinity with the secular liberal target audience he intends to address. Overall, the movement from 'unbelievers' (Sale) to 'disbelievers' (Pickthall and Haleem) to 'those who reject faith' symbolise a shift from Christian polemical domestication to neutral academic domestication, which is influenced by evolving Western encounter with Islam and the translators' personal commitment.

An additional example is the translation of *jihād* and *qitāl* (seen as struggle, striving or war) which appeared in various verses concerning conflict, e.g. (2:190-3). Sale uses a militarised Christian framing and often exaggerates the militaristic sense by using terms such as 'fight' and 'warfare' even when not explicitly present. This reflects the Orientalist tendency in which Sale appears unwilling to give up his conviction that Quran is exotic but "inferior to Christian scripture", and brag about his claim that "The Protestants alone are able to attack the Koran with success and for them, I trust, Providence has reserved the glory of its overthrow" (Sale, 1734, pp. v-viii). Pickthall, by contrast, translates it as 'fight in the way of Allah', retaining Islamic terminology. Yusuf Ali uses 'fight ... in self-defence' (via footnotes); his use of the conventional and neutral verb 'fight' is further supplemented by extensive footnotes insisting on ethical limits and defensive justification, in line with Victorian moralism. Abdel Haleem translates it as 'fight ... only if ... do not transgress', emphasising the need for restraint, and in so doing, reflecting elective affinity with liberal ethics and what Asad (2018) observes as 'non-threatening' portrayals of Islam.

The list goes on and on, and terms assumed under *sharīa* (Islamic law) and *ribā* (usury), for example, unmistakably demonstrate the translators' tendencies to reflect elective affinity patterns in alignment with inherited epistemologies, cultural values and/or political concerns. For the sake of expansion, however, the argument now goes above word level to show elective affinity patterns at other levels.

At the level of intercommunal relations, a considerable part of Surat Al-Baqara deals with Banī Isrā'īl (Children of Israel; 2:40-86), which means there is an intersection between Islamic and Judeo-Christian theologies which translators need to check for elective affinities in order to view the complete picture of the lexical, semantic and theological scenarios. Here, George Sale regards these passages from a Christian polemical tradition, viewing Islam as derivative and inferior, typical of the Orientalist disposition. In verse 2:47 ('O Children of Israel, remember My favour...'), he renders it as 'call to mind my favour...', which is subtly reminiscent of the prophetic rebuking tone of the Old Testament. Additionally, Sale uses extensive polemical footnotes (which other later Muslim translators don't) to frame Jewish disobedience in line with Protestant discourse about Jews' hard-heartedness. Therefore, Sale's Bible-based Orientalist worldview gravitates towards a rendering of Quranic content in a way that reflects Christian theology which reduces the Quran to an extension of Biblical morality, even though the Quranic verse diverges widely.

Contrastively, Pickthall's attempt to preserve the Quranic register through the use of archaic English reminiscent of King James Bible ('O Children of Israel! Remember My favour...') reflects an elective affinity pattern strongly domesticated despite seeming foreignization efforts of the content. His style, marked by rhetorical elevation, signals sacredness in a Christian way, in the same vein of the English Biblical discourse. The result is a hybrid style with foreignized content and domesticated aesthetics.

Yusuf Ali's universalist attitude is evident in many stances, e.g. his translation of verse 2:62 ('Those who believe, and those who follow the Jewish, the Christian, and the Sabian faiths...') is supplemented by footnotes emphasising universal salvation, moral unity, and shared Abrahamic heritage. As a translator, he seems to hold an underlying message that presents Islam as compatible with Christian ethics (Kidawi, cited in Mohammed, 2005), and build bridges across faiths. Victorian morality and interfaith commitments influenced Ali's softening of exclusivist implications and producing of a domestication fuelled by universalism.

The translation of Abdel Haleem adopts a neutral modern academic register. For example, he translates the same verse 2:62 in plain modern English. Avoiding archaic and doctrinal phrasing, he renders it in a grammatically clear way and removes any theological embellishments. His post-9/11 context motivates strategies that seek to defuse Islamophobic interpretations and uphold straightforward rendering. Haleem is attracted by modern liberal academic ethos towards clarity, de-escalation and contextual explanation, and the result is a domesticated translation guided by secular academic expression norms.

Another domain demonstrating elective affinity here is the translation of metaphors and symbols in Surat Al-Baqara. For example, verses (2:17-18; 2:26; parables of light, fire, storm) describe hypocrites as people who 'kindled a fire' but lost its light. Here, Sale uses Enlightenment rationalist language such as 'their light is gone out', which reinforces a metaphor of moral ignorance tied to Protestant ethics. Pickthall preserves the imagery but adds archaic rhythm – ('their light hath departed from them') – thereby foreignizing the metaphor but domesticating it through the register. Ali adds interpretive comments in footnotes in which he connects the imagery to universal moral psychology, and Abdel Haleem uses streamlined modern English ('their light has gone out') in which clarity is prioritised and metaphor preserved.¹ Each translator is influenced by elective affinities that draws him towards metaphoric styles which he deems 'intuitively correct' within his cultural, linguistic aesthetic.

Moving on to another dimension, Surat Al-Baqara contains oaths, rhetorical repetitions and divine address ('O you who believe) as well as legal hortatory rhythms. Here, Sale often paraphrases or omits repetition, an attitude showing Enlightenment antipathy to what he perceives to be 'redundant' rhetoric. Pickthall, contrastively, preserves repetition, in line with the Quranic cadence, but he reflects an archaic English affinity in terms of style. Ali, too, preserves repetition but supplements it with moralising commentary. Haleem tends to streamline repetition for the sake of readability. Ultimately, the translators' choices reflect styles based on elective affinity determining what is 'acceptable style' in English religious discourse.

As for the legal passages and terms, their translation shows strong divergence, especially the verses 2:183-187 (of fasting), 2:178 (of *qīṣaṣ*, comeuppance) and 2:229-232 (divorce). Here, Sale renders legal injunctions in stiff legal English, often inserting Christian ascetic assumptions, while Pickthall preserves Islamic terminology and retains formal archaism. Ali infuses moral reflections in footnotes – e.g. fasting as an act of spiritual discipline. Haleem uses accessible English ('Fasting is ordained for you') and clarifies exceptions (i.e. travel, illness), thereby demonstrating elective affinity with modern ethical clarity.²

¹ Similar attitudes are reflected in several other metaphors, such as the mosquito metaphor (2: 26). Sale uses dismissive phrasing typical of Orientalist interpretations, stressing his attitude that Quran is inferior. Pickthall preserves the literal 'mosquito'. Ali softens the imagery through footnotes and rationalises the metaphor using natural theology. Haleem translates it plainly, using the term 'gnat'.

² In *qīṣaṣ*, Sale uses the term 'retaliation', drawing analogy from Old Testament law. Pickthall, too, uses 'retaliation' but also preserves religious solemnity. Ali comments extensively on that, emphasising mercy and forgiveness – i.e. a softening tone. Haleem uses 'fair retribution' and emphasizes proportionality, in line with modern legal thought.

Several other themes and points of comparison can be investigated, such as the theme of creation, Adam, and knowledge, where the translators draw analogies and adopted various strategies to render. However, their discussion can only demonstrate the points highlighted above. Overall, the correlations indicated in this section constitute what Weber, Benjamin and Löwy call 'elective affinity', seen in this study as textual interpretation guided not only by linguistic necessity but also by ideological resonance.

Discussion

It has been demonstrated in the analysis that translation choices in Surat Al-Baqara are made not only on basis of linguistic concerns; indeed, the translators' ideological, cultural and epistemic orientations play major direct or indirect roles in moulding the resulting texts. These renderings epitomise what Weber (1905/2001) calls elective affinity, which is seen here as the patterned resonance between ideas/content and the value domain of an interpreter. Similarly, Benjamin (1923/1996) maintains that translation is guided by an inner tendency of the text and the translator's interpretive horizon, forging a link between what is *in* the text and the dominant factors surrounding the text and the translator during TT production. It is, according to Steiner (1975/1998, p. 362), a determining condition that simultaneously relates the translator to what is 'near'. In the translation of Quran, these affinities explain why Sale juxtaposes Islamic concepts with Protestant morality, Pickthall leans towards archaic rendering, Yusuf Ali domestically universalises meaning within Victorian ethos, and Abdel Haleem prioritises clarity and contextual neutrality in line with modern academic discourse. Indeed, these tendencies should not be construed as deliberate biases but rather as internalised predispositions that draw the contours of what the translator perceives as accurate or elegant. In this sense, the concept of elective affinity offers an analytic paradigm that goes beyond personal prejudices, biases and right-vs-wrong judgments to offer a wider and more nuanced framework for investigation.

Obviously, elective affinities materialise more through domestication strategies, particularly those tied to historical contexts. With his 18th-century translation of the Quran, Sale exemplifies what Asad (2009) describes as 'translation under Judeo-Christian [theological and cultural] sovereignty'; that is, Quranic terms like *taqwā*, *kufr* and *jihād* are remoulded through Protestant moral categories, which correspond to an Orientalist mode of domestication in which Islamic concepts are, as it appears, subordinated to Christian epistemic authority. Contrastively, Pickthall aims for semantically faithful translation; however, his translation is stylistically domesticated through the register of King James Bible. In fact, Venuti (1995) argues that style itself can be a mode of domestication, which is clearly evident here. In Pickthall's translation, the content is foreignized but at the same time domesticated through Christian scriptural aesthetics.

Yusuf Ali's translation displays features of the early 20th century Indian Muslim modernist project. With his extensive commentaries, he seeks to universalise Islamic concepts basically by appealing to rational ethics and morality, something similar to what Venuti (1995/2008, p. 270) describes as "erasing the distinction between Western and Eastern cultures". It is in this mode that Ali's translation reflects affinity with interfaith discourse, Victorian moral refinement and comparative theology. On the other side, the translation by Abdel Haleem epitomises contemporary academic norms which emphasise clarity and contextual explanation. He avoids polemical interpretations, perhaps to respond to post-9/11 expectations for Muslim scholars to counter misrepresentations of Islamic law and ethics (Abdel Haleem, 2004). Therefore, his domestication strategy is for pedagogical and explanatory purposes, rather than ideologically driven.

Based on these differences, four distinct translation profiles are generated. Sale's translation stands for a Protestant Orientalist domestication in which Islamic concepts are moulded through Christian moral matrices; Pickthall's style reflects efforts to preserve ST content (foreignization), albeit using scriptural style (domestication); Ali's profile represents moral universalist domestication through theological common grounds, allegorical readings, and extensive commentary; and Abdel Haleem's method stands for modern explanatory domestication that targets readability and doctrinal neutrality. As such, these profiles mirror the 'value-spheres' (Weber, 1905/2001) of the translators and the notion of the symbolic resonance between cultural systems (Löwy, 1998).

The findings of this study prove not only that elective affinity can account for translational divergences across domains (theological, legal, rhetorical, metaphorical), but also show that domestication is historically contingent. The intellectual and political atmosphere in which the translator lives shapes the absorption and delivery of meaning.

Finally, it should be indicted that elective affinity has the potential to expose unseen interpretive biases which the translator may have, even subconsciously, which lead to the production of translation patterns which may appear neutral to the translator but are in fact traces of culturally conditioned understandings. The resulting domestication can lead to doctrinal consequences and epistemic distortions of the original message. Therefore, elective affinity serves as a sophisticated theoretical lens to help understand translation decisions and their underpinnings.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that elective affinity offers a robust explanatory matrix that can help understand how translators' interaction with their environments (theological, cultural, ideological) can impact on the resulting texts. To substantiate the argument, the study has investigated the translation of Surat Al-Baqara by four translators, namely Sale, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Abdel Haleem, and how they choose between foreignizing and domesticating strategies to render the Quranic text into English.

The analysis shows that Sale embodies Enlightenment Christian Orientalist domestication, Pickthall reflects Islamic fidelity rendered in Biblical English aesthetics, Yusuf Ali tends towards universalist domestication informed by Victorian moralism, and Abdel Haleem represents modern academic domestication aiming at clarity and simplicity. These patterns are by no means accidental, but rather stem from deep cultural, ideological and theological affinities which Weber and Benjamin call 'elective affinities': that is, subtle resonance between translator's worldview and the semantic, rhetorical and ethical fields enshrined in the sacred text.

To conclude, elective affinity can help in illuminating why the translations of the Quran diverge and how domestication operates over time and across various contexts. It can shed light on the broader cultural forces that shape the English versions of the Quran and, by default, other translated texts in other languages, hence its contribution to Translation Studies. It is hoped that this will open new avenues for future research on how meanings (be that of the Quran or other texts) migrate across various languages and civilisations.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of elective affinity and domestication in four major translations of Surat Al-Baqara, this study acknowledges the existence of several limitations. First of all, the corpus is limited to Surat Al-Baqara, which, despite its thematic richness and volume, does not encompass the full spectrum of the Quranic rhetorical or legal or eschatological contents and styles. Future research can find a fallow soil in exploring these areas in other surahs. Besides, several other translations of the Quran have not been included (i.e. Arberry (1955), Irving (1985), Asad (1980), Khattab (2015), etc.). The selection of the four translations under investigation was only meant to prove the hypothesised views through different historical and ideological contexts. Future research on other translations can no doubt yield useful insights. Moreover, the research methodology has relied on close reading and thematic coding that fed into hermeneutic interpretation. While this is useful as it is, quantitative corpus linguistics could help refine and complement the finding, but this is way beyond the scope of this paper. Finally, the study has ideally aimed at pure objectivity and avoidance of prejudices and indoctrination; however, in humanities there should always be some space for subjective judgements, even though this subjectivity may be unintentional.

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