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Negotiating Polysemy: A Critical Analysis of ḍaraba in Four English Translations of the Qur'an

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigates the polysemous Qur'anic verb daraba, a lexeme whose diverse semantic range—from physical striking and traveling to parable-setting and legal-metaphorical usage—poses significant challenges for translators. Focusing on four influential English versions of the Qur'an (Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International), the research applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how translators' lexical and discursive choices both reflect and reproduce ideological orientations. The analysis categorizes 53 occurrences of daraba into five semantic domains: physical action, parable-setting, traveling, punishment/discipline, and legal/metaphorical usage. The findings reveal that the translators converge on neutral renderings in less contested categories (e.g., traveling), but diverge sharply in sensitive contexts such as Q 4:34, where translation choices range from "scourge" and "strike" to "beat" and "go away." CDA emphasises that these differences are discursive interventions influenced by gendered, cultural, and theological commitments rather than semantically neutral ones. Asad rationalises meaning through philosophical contextualisation, Bakhtiar reformulates ethically to challenge patriarchal readings, Sahih International simplifies for accessibility in accordance with conservative orthodoxy, and Pickthall maintains a biblical-archaic solemnity. This study shows that Qur'anic translation is a site of ideological negotiation where polysemy becomes a resource for framing authority, ethics, and reform by fusing semantic typology with discourse analysis. The results support translation studies, Qur'anic studies, and discussions about the relationship between language, ideology, and sacred texts.

| KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); ḍaraba; ideology in translation; polysemy; Qur'an translation

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1. Introduction

The study of how words relate in meaning, especially when it comes to polysemy, has been a cornerstone within translation studies for many years. Polysemy—where a word carries more than one related sense—often complicates a translator's task, a challenge intensified in sacred texts that require a careful balance of accuracy, doctrine, and cultural awareness (Cruse, 2011; Ravin & Leacock, 2000). The Qur'an serves as a prime example, filled with lexemes whose nuances demand more than basic linguistic skills; translators need to be sensitive to context, history, and layers of interpretation.

A case in point is the verb *daraba* (ضرب), which can signify actions as divergent as striking, journeying, or illustrating parables. Its precise importance hinges on grammatical and situational cues (Ahmad, 2023). Notably, Surah 4:34 has drawn widespread scholarly debate because of the varied readings of *daraba*, especially concerning issues of gender and authority in Islamic tradition (Kellison & Dunn, 2010; Larsson, 2014). One might even say that translation here is as much an act of negotiation as of language transfer.

In these instances, theological, linguistic, and social factors intersect. Older interpretations often favour legalistic or patriarchal frameworks, while modern versions range from a strict literalism to softer, more contextual renderings (Sideeg, 2015). Examining

translations into English thus uncovers not only technical solutions, but also the ethical stances and ideological choices that inevitably shape the translator's position.

1.1 Significance of the study

This study is significant because it examines the polysemous Qur'anic verb *daraba* whose multiple meanings—ranging from physical action to metaphor and legal instruction—carry profound theological and ideological implications. By comparing how various translators render this verb, the research highlights how translation is not neutral, but shaped by cultural, doctrinal, and interpretive choices. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study uncovers how language and ideology intersect in the translation of sacred texts, offering valuable insights for scholars of Qur'anic studies, translation, and discourse.

1.2 Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that the Qur'anic verb *ḍaraba*, due to its polysemous nature, is translated differently across English versions, and that these variations reflect not only semantic interpretation but also the translators' ideological orientations.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the lexical and semantic variations in the translation of *daraba* across four major English Qur'an translations (Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, Sahih International), focusing on its main semantic categories (physical, parabolic, travel, punishment, and legal/metaphorical).
2. To critically evaluate the extent to which translation choices of *daraba* reflect underlying ideological, doctrinal, or gender-based perspectives, particularly in sensitive verses like Q 4:34.
3. To apply Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how lexical choices and discursive strategies (e.g., register, mitigation, intensification) shape the framing of *daraba* in target translations.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How is the polysemous verb *daraba* translated across the selected English versions in its different semantic categories?
2. What ideological, cultural, or theological orientations can be identified in the translators' renderings, especially in socially and theologically sensitive verses such as Q 4:34?
3. How do lexical shifts and discursive strategies influence the framing of *daraba* in English translations of the Qur'an?

1.5 Limitations and delimitations

This study is delimited to the analysis of the polysemous verb *daraba* in selected Qur'anic verses, focusing on its translation across a representative sample of four English versions: Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, Laleh Bakhtiar, and Saheeh International. The researcher does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the entire Qur'anic lexicon or all existing translations, but rather concentrates on specific semantic categories (e.g., physical, parabolic, travelling, disciplinary, and legal or metaphorical) where *daraba* occurs with significant interpretive variance. These delimitations ensure depth and analytical manageability. Nevertheless, the study remains subject to certain limitations, such as the interpretive nature of Critical Discourse Analysis, the inaccessibility of translator intentions, and the potential influence of cultural or theological bias within both source and target texts. These limitations, while acknowledged, do not compromise the study's aim of uncovering how ideology and interpretation intersect in the translation of Qur'anic discourse.

2. Literature review

2.1 Meaning, context, and polysemy in the Qur'an

Arabic exhibits inherent flexibility in meaning, with words often extending semantically depending on context and pragmatic use. As detailed by Versteegh (2014), an Arabic root is usually associated with a principal idea but can produce a network of related meanings, adapting to a host of communicative functions. This flexibility enables the language to alternate between descriptive and abstract domains effectively. Supporting this, Wehr (1976) discussed how triliteral roots provide a foundation for a wide array of physical, metaphorical, and rhetorical meanings in his comprehensive lexicon.

The Qur'an extensively employs such semantic flexibility. The meanings of words within the text are modulated by contextual cues, syntactic structures, and discursive intentions. According to Izutsu (2002), Qur'anic terms are capable of signifying a concrete phenomenon in one situation, a metaphorical insight in another, or a doctrinal implication elsewhere. This characteristic is not incidental; rather, it is a deliberate element of the Qur'an's persuasive strategies. Robinson (2003) identified the importance of intertextual and thematic factors in this process, highlighting polysemy as an essential stylistic device.

Accordingly, Qur'anic polysemy should be interpreted as a context-guided and systematic phenomenon. This dynamic aspect allows the language of the Qur'an to remain responsive, resonant, and relevant across eras, facilitating ongoing engagement and interpretation.

2.2 Daraba in Classical Arabic and the Qur'an

The root (ḍ-r-b) is among the most semantically diverse roots in Classical Arabic. Ibn Fāris in Maqāyīs al-Lugha explains that its core meaning is "to cause one thing to strike against another," from which other senses such as travel and figurative representation are derived (Fāris., n.d). In Lisān al-ʿArab, Ibn Manẓūr said that the root ḍaraba can denote physical action (striking), traveling, coining currency, and telling parables (Manẓūr., n.d). Al-Zabīdī in *Tāj al-ʿArūs* explained further figurative senses in which daaba is used to describe the light rain as ḍarb (al-Zabīdī, n.d). This semantic range shows how the verb extended its original physical sense to include additional concrete and metaphorical meanings that enriched the expressive power of Arabic.

The verb ḍaraba appears in the Qur'an with a variety of meanings determined by context. It denotes physical striking, such as striking the sea with Moses's staff (Q 26:63), and traveling, as in "When you travel through the land…" (Q 4:101). It also means to set forth parables, e.g., "Allah sets forth a parable…" (Q 14:24), and covering or casting down, as in "Let them draw their headcovers over their bosoms" (Q 24:31). Other uses include barrier or separation, as in "So a wall will be set up between them…" (Q 57:13), and fighting, as in "Strike above the necks…" (Q 8:12). Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī in *al-Mufradāt* stressed that the primary meaning of the root is striking which later extended to include meanings such as travel, representation, and other meanings depending on context (al-Aṣfahānī, n.d). More recently, al-Fatlī (2014) and Ghani et al. (2020) examined the semantic diversity of the verb daraba from lexical and syntactic perspectives.

2.3 Qur'an translators:

2.3.1 Marmaduke Pickthall

Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (1930) remains a landmark English translation and one of the earliest by a practicing Muslim. A British convert to Islam, novelist, and Orientalist who lived in the Middle East and India, Pickthall approached the Qur'an with deep reverence for its linguistic and rhetorical structure. His translation is noted for its archaic yet dignified English, consistent with early 20th-century literary style, and reflects a literalist-traditionalist methodology aimed at preserving the classical Arabic meanings (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Mohammed, 2005). In the controversial verse 4:34, he retained the classical rendering of ḍaraba as "beat them," demonstrating no engagement with later ethical or feminist reinterpretations (Kidwai, 2016). His footnotes are sparse and mostly linguistic, avoiding extended theological exposition and instead offering brief clarifications to aid understanding (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Intended primarily for English-speaking Muslims, Pickthall's work embodies the influence of Anglo-Islamic scholarship and a desire for scriptural fidelity (Nasr et al., 2015). While often praised for its solemn tone and textual loyalty, critics have noted that his use of archaic phrasing may hinder accessibility for modern readers (Mohammed, 2005).

2.3.2 Muhammad Asad

Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* (1980) is widely regarded as one of the most intellectually rigorous English translations of the Qur'an. An Austrian-Jewish convert to Islam, journalist, and diplomat, Asad brought a distinctly rationalist and philosophical tone to his work, shaped by Muʿtazilite theology, Iqbālian metaphysics, and a broader framework of modernist Islamic reform (Chande, 2004). His style is modern, analytical, and literary, marked by clear structure and a deliberate avoidance of overly poetic English. Asad interprets complex terms like ḍaraba (Qur'an 4:34) in a restrictive, ethical light, retaining the literal phrase "beat them" in translation, but providing a footnote that reframes it within moral and legal limitations, grounded in Prophetic precedent and Qur'anic ethics. His extensive footnotes are a hallmark of the work, offering philosophical, theological, and linguistic commentary. While his approach appeals to rational-minded readers and scholars, critics argue that Asad at times over-contextualizes or departs from traditional Arabic meanings in favour of modernist reinterpretation (Abdel Haleem, 2010). Nonetheless, the translation's strength lies in its intellectual coherence and ethical sensitivity, aiming to reconcile divine revelation with reason and conscience.

2.3.3 Sahih International

The *Sahih International* translation of the Qur'an, first published in 1997, is the product of a team of American Muslim women converts with a Salafi-influenced orientation (Sa'd, 2023). Known for its contemporary and accessible English, the translation intentionally avoids elaborate commentary, offering a minimalist, literalist approach aligned with conservative Sunni orthodoxy (Elieba, 2022). Its rendering of Qur'an 4:34 includes the phrase "strike them," adhering to traditional interpretations without providing gender-sensitive alternatives or ethical reframing (Elieba, 2022). The commentary, where present, is sparse and rooted in classical tafsīr traditions, particularly those aligned with Ibn Kathīr and similar sources.

2.3.4 Laleh Bakhtiar

Laleh Bakhtiar's *The Sublime Quran* (2007) offers a groundbreaking, reformist translation of the Qur'an with a strong emphasis on gender ethics and nonviolence. Drawing from her background as a Sufi-influenced clinical psychologist, she adopts a clear, modern, and gender-inclusive style, challenging patriarchal readings prevalent in traditional exegesis. Her most significant intervention is her translation of *ḍaraba* in Qur'an 4:34 as *"go away"* rather than *"beat them"*, a choice she justifies through Arabic grammar, ethical consistency, and Prophetic precedent (Hassen, 2020; Scott, 2009)**.** Unlike other translations, Bakhtiar provides minimal commentary, allowing her textual and lexical decisions to carry the interpretive weight (Sa'd, 2023)**.** Though controversial among traditional scholars, her work is widely cited in feminist tafsir literature for its moral re-evaluation of Qur'anic authority and emphasis on contextual meaning**.**

2.4 Previous studies

The literature on Qur'anic translation consistently shows that rendering polysemous items is never a purely linguistic exercise; it is an interpretive intervention shaped by translators' theological stances, ethical commitments, and target-audience expectations. Comparative surveys of English Qur'an versions identify recurrent strategies—literal retention, contextual modulation, euphemistic mitigation, and paraphrastic re-framing—that are selectively deployed according to genre, verse sensitivity, and reception norms (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Kidwai, 2016; Sideeg, 2015). In practice, translators walk a tightrope between preserving Arabic lexico-semantic breadth and supplying clarity for readers unfamiliar with Classical Arabic's dense semantic networks.

Verse Q 4:34 serves as a critical example where a single verb encapsulates legal norms, ethical considerations, and familial relations. Research focusing on this verse illustrates how lexical choices at the micro-level correspond to broader exegetical approaches. Qorchi (2017) argued that numerous English translations default to a restrictive, physical interpretation, thus limiting the verse's semantic expanse and obscuring the lexeme's fuller potential within Arabic discourse. In contrast, Ahmadzadeh (2023) integrated classical exegetical insights with semantic analysis to advocate for symbolic or non-corporeal interpretations in select contexts, emphasizing that factors such as internal sequencing and intertextual constraints should shape English renderings. Extending the lens beyond a single lexeme, Alkaabi and Alaskari (2015) examined how translators handle Arabic "hit/strike" verbs across Qur'anic contexts, showing that denotational equivalence in English often clashes with connotational fit, prompting either mitigation (e.g., "tap," "separate") or explanatory notes. From a translation-studies perspective, Mounadil (2023) considered such decisions within the broader problem of culturally specific references, demonstrating that the more a verse is entangled with social norms and juristic discourse, the more likely translators are to shift register or supplement with paratext to protect coherence and acceptability.

Case-oriented analyses converge on a spectrum of practice. At one pole, literalist or form-faithful strategies aim to conserve Arabic syntactic symmetry and lexical surface, often accompanied by minimal notes (Kidwai, 2016). In the middle, contextual-rationalist approaches foreground discourse environment and cross-referential semantics, retaining a close translation while re-profiling the meaning through footnotes or theological framing (Abdel Haleem, 2010; Sideeg, 2015). At the other pole, reformist/ethically revisionist renderings recast the lexeme to avoid readings deemed incongruent with Prophetic precedent or Qur'anic moral ideals; such choices are typically justified via intra-Qur'anic semantics, hadith constraints, and maqāṣid-oriented ethics and then defended in paratext (Hassen, 2020; Scott, 2009). What unites these positions is an acknowledgment—implicit or explicit—that polysemy is context-activated: the viable English sense is licensed by syntax, discourse sequencing, and genre, not by dictionaries alone.

Across the literature, three implications stand out. First, a lexical choice indexes ideology: even small shifts ("strike" → "separate"/"go away") signal different commitments to legal literalism, ethical harmonization, or reader reception (Kassam, 2005; Qorchi, 2017). Second, paratext is part of translation: notes, glossary entries, and introductions function as ideological safety principles that allow a close rendering to coexist with interpretive guardrails (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Sideeg, 2015). Third, method matters: studies that triangulate classical lexicography/exegesis, intra-Qur'anic cohesion, and modern semantics better account for why some contexts license non-physical senses while others do not (Ahmadzadeh, 2023; Alkaabi & Alaskari, 2015; Mounadil, 2023). Consequently, translation of contentious verses like Q 4:34 becomes a discursive site where the ethics of interpretation, community reception, and the authority of tradition are negotiated through apparently technical choices in English.

2.5 Theoretical framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study adopts CDA to examine how ideological, theological, and gendered meanings are constructed in English translations of the Qur'anic verb *ḍaraba*. CDA is well-suited for this analysis as it views language not as a neutral code, but as a site where power, ideology, and social values are produced and contested (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Qur'anic translation, especially of polysemous and ethically sensitive terms like *ḍaraba*, involves interpretive decisions shaped by the translator's worldview, audience, and discursive tradition (Sideeg, 2015).

CDA is employed in this study to examine how translators make essential lexical selections. The analysis focuses on translators' choices regarding key terms such as "beat," "strike," and "go away." Examining their English translations of the Qur'an, the current study also looks at how Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International addressed sensitive issues related to gender, authority, and moral obligation. Notably, the differences reflected in their word choices clearly reflect the extent to which translators' backgrounds and perspectives can shape the ethical dimensions of a religious text.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher employs a qualitative research design and utilises CDA as a theoretical framework. The analysis here focuses on the different translations of the polysemous Arabic verb *ḍaraba* in four prominent English translations of the Qur'an by Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, Laleh Bakhtiar, and Sahih International. Furthermore, the study shows how the four translators addressed the lexical semantic complexity of the Arabic word *daraba*. Different meanings can be associated with this word, many of them are unrelated. In certain verses such as Qur'an 4:34, the interpretation of the meaning of the source and the resulting translations can spark an endless debate. In addition to the lexical examination of the translations of *daraba*, the researcher examines how the translators' discursive choices reflect deeper ideological, theological, and sociolinguistic commitments that clearly influence their interpretive position.

3.2 Analytical framework

The methodology is guided by Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA, which conceptualizes discourse as a textual, discursive, and social practice. At the textual level, the study involves close reading of translations with attention to lexical choice, grammatical structure, and semantic framing. Special emphasis is placed on verses where *ḍaraba* carries interpretive weight (e.g., 4:34, 2:60, 14:5), and variations such as *"beat," "strike," "go away,"* or *"separate"* are evaluated within their syntactic and semantic context. At the discursive-practice level, the study examines how the meanings of *ḍaraba* are framed, justified, or softened, thereby positioning translators within contemporary theological or reformist debates. At the social-practice level, the broader ideological context is considered, exploring how translators' backgrounds (e.g., Salafi orientation, modernist reform, Anglo-Islamic tradition) shape discursive patterns in line with historical, cultural, and gendered discourses.

3.3 Corpus Selection

The four translations were purposively selected because of their ideological diversity and their significant influence among English-speaking Muslim communities. Pickthall's (1930) work is noted for its traditionalist literalism, Asad's (1980), Sahih International's (1997) for its conservative minimalism for its rationalist and philosophical orientation, and Bakhtiar's (2007) for its feminist ethical reform. Together, they represent a broad spectrum of interpretive approaches, making them a suitable sample for comparative analysis.

The following online repositories were accessed to ensure accuracy and consistency of the text and translations:

- Pickthall and Sahih International from Qur'an Corpus (https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp)
- Laleh Bakhtiar from Altafsir (https://www.altafsir.com)
- Muhammad Asad from the official Muhammad Asad website (https://muhammadasad.com)

3.4 Procedures of Analysis

Data were manually coded according to thematic and semantic categories where *ḍaraba* appears. These include physical action, parable-setting, traveling, punishment or discipline, and legal or metaphorical applications. Once categorized, the verses were comparatively analysed to identify lexical and semantic variation, and to reveal underlying discursive patterns. This step enabled the mapping of translators' ideological orientations, as reflected in their treatment of *ḍaraba* across different semantic environments.

3.5 Justification of Methodology

This methodological design is well-suited to the study's aims, as it allows the analysis to move beyond surface-level linguistic equivalence toward uncovering the ideological orientations, semantic negotiations, and socioreligious implications embedded in Qur'anic translation. As Sideeg (2015) emphasizes, translators inevitably carry traces of ideologies that subtly but powerfully reshape sacred discourse for their audiences. This study shows how polysemy becomes a discursive site of ideological negotiation in translation by combining CDA with semantic categorisation.

4. Analysis

4.1 Physical action

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
اضْرِب بِّعَصَاكَ الْحَجَر 2:60	smite	strike	strike	strike
فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا 2:73	smite	turn him away	apply	strike
فَاضْرِبْ لَهُمْ طَرِيقًا فِي الْبَحْر 20:77	strike	strike	strike out	strike
اضْرِب بِّعَصَاكَ الْبَحْرَ26:63	smite	strike	strike	strike
ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِين 37:93	striking	striking	smiting	a blow

In the physical action verses, Pickthall's choice of *"smite"* (2:60, 26:63) stands in contrast to Bakhtiar, Asad, and Sahih International, who all render the verb as *"strike."* From a CDA perspective, *"smite"* activates an archaic biblical register that frames the event as a moment of divine majesty and severity, reinforcing a discourse of God's overwhelming power enacted through Moses. The more neutral term "*strike*" normalizes the action and shifts it from a sense of wonder to one of simple obedience. Even small differences, like Asad's "*strike out*" in 20:77, show how translators shape understanding of agency. In this case, it highlights human initiative within divine command. Likewise, in Q 37:93, the variation between elevated renderings (*"striking/smiting"*) and Sahih International's plain *"a blow"* shows how lexical choice either amplifies or minimizes the rhetorical force of the act, producing different receptions of the same physical gesture.

The greatest shift in meaning occurs in Q 2:73, where translators take very different approaches. Pickthall again deploys *"smite,"* consistent with his biblical tone, while Sahih International adheres to the literal *"strike."* Asad shifts the discourse with *"apply,"* introducing a rationalist and clinical register that de-dramatizes the act, and Bakhtiar radically reframes it as *"turn him away,"* replacing physical violence with symbolic separation. CDA shows that these choices are not neutral; they reflect deeper beliefs. Pickthall maintains a traditional seriousness, Sahih upholds a strict literalism, Asad provides a rational viewpoint, and Bakhtiar reinterprets the action in a more ethical way that fits modern views. The translations of *daraba* in these examples show how the physical action can be a site where power, 'violence', and obedience are either strengthened, weakened, or redefined.

4.2 Setting parables

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً 2:26	coin	propound	propound	present
ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً 14:24	coineth	propounded	sets forth	presents
وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاس 14:25	coineth	propounds	propounds	presents
وَضَرَبْنَا لَكُمُ الْأَمْثَالَ 14:45	made	propounded	set forth	presented
فَلَا تَضْرِبُوا لِلَّهِ الْأَمْثَالَ 16:74	coin	propound	coin	assert
ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا عَبْدًا مَّمْلُوكًا 16:75	coineth	propounded	propounds	presents

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَّجُلَيْنِ 16:76	coineth	propounded	propounds	presents
ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً 16:112	coineth	propounded	propounds	presents
ضَرَبُوا لَكَ الْأَمْثَالَ 17:48	coin	propounded	liken	strike
اضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا 18:45	coin	propound	propound	present
ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ 22:73	coined	propounded	set forth	presented
وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ 24:35	speaketh	propounds	propounds	presents
وَكُلًّا ضَرَبْنَا لَهُ الْأَمْثَالَ 25:39	warned by	propounded	proffer	presented
وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ 29:43	coin	propound	propound	present
ضَرَبَ لَكُم مَّثَلًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ 30:28	coineth	propounds	propounds	presents
ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ 30:58	coined	propounded	propounded	presented
وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ 36:13	coin	propound	set forth	present
وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا 36:78	coined	propounded	in terms of comparison	presents
ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ 39:27	coined	propounded	propounded	presented
ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَّجُلًا 39:29	coineth	propounded	sets forth	presents
ضُرِبَ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ مَثَلًا 43:17	likeneth to	cited as	attributes to	attributes to
ضُرِبَ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ مَثَلًا 43:57	quoted as	cited as	is set forth as	presented as
أَمْ هُوَ مَا ضَرَبُوهُ لَكَ 43:58	raise	cited to	put comparison	present
كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ أَمْثَالَهُمْ 47:3	coineth	propounds	set forth	present
وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ 59:21	coin	propound	propound	present
ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا 66:10	citeth	propounded	propounded	presents
وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا 66:11	citeth	propounded	propounded	presents

A dominant pattern emerges across most parable verses: Pickthall frequently renders *daraba* with *"coin/coineth,"* reflecting an archaic idiom rooted in older English translations of sacred texts. This stylistic choice is a practical example of an authoritative and formal discourse in which the Qur'anic parables are linked to a biblical register. Bakhtiar, on the other hand, often uses the word "*propound/propounded*," which has a philosophical meaning that makes parables more like propositions—things to think about instead of rules that must be followed. Asad's use of "*propound*" or "*set forth*" is very similar to this approach because it puts the document in the discursive space of rationalism and explanation. Sahih International, on the other hand, uses "*present/presents/presented*," which is a simple modern translation that suggests that parable-making is a story that is made possible. CDA shows that these competing lexical clusters give discourse different directions. Pickthall supports traditionalism and seriousness, Asad and Bakhtiar stress rationalism and exposition, and Sahih International weakens the rhetorical force by using neutral, easy-to-read language.

Within this broad pattern, certain verses such as Q 14:24, Q 14:25, Q 16:75–76, and Q 30:28–30:58 show near-identical renderings across Bakhtiar and Asad (*"propound/propounds"*), underscoring their shared intellectualist framing. The translations show that *daraba* is not considered an act of divine authority but rather a presentation of truth in a dialogue. This appeals to readers' reasoning. Using *"presents"* in Sahih International in these contexts maintains the moralizing aim but softens the elevated style in order to conform to contemporary explanatory prose. In addition to its being archaic, Pickthall's *"coineth,"* on the other hand, corresponds to the semantic field of "minting," implicitly connecting the parable to concepts of fixed worth and permanence. CDA here highlights how, despite semantic convergence, translators' lexical choices still convey contrasting ideological positions on the legitimacy and purpose of parables.

The translational difference can be clearly noticed in verses like Q 16:74 and Q 17:48. In these examples. Here, Pickthall uses *"coin"* or *"coineth,"* while Asad chooses *"liken"* or *"put comparison."* Bakhtiar, on the other hand, prefers *"propounded."* Sahih International goes further with *"assert"* or *"strike."* Such differences highlight that when a parable challenges false beliefs or controversial views, translators shift between literal rendering and interpretive adaptation. It is important here to note that Pickthall's selection of words reflects his preferred style of elevated language. Asad's language, however, points to the precision and logical comparison in his translation. Sahih International simplifies the message using everyday terms. The analysis of these two examples under CDA shows the ideological difference related to whether parables are regarded as unchangeable divine truths or as persuasive tools in theological discussions.

Significant variations emerge in verses Q 25:39, Q 36:78, Q 43:17, Q 43:57, and Q 43:58, where translational choices differ considerably. Pickthall employs diverse renditions such as "*warned by*," "*quoted as*," "*raise*," and "*likeneth to*," whereas Asad adopts more abstract expressions like "*in terms of comparison*" or "*attributes to*." Bakhtiar frequently condenses the action to "*cited as*," conveying a purely descriptive tone, while Sahih International consistently simplifies it to "*presented as*." These translations indicate the challenges translators face with the term *ḍaraba* in contexts where it functions not merely as "*to set forth*" but also as a rhetorical instrument of confrontation. CDA reveals that Pickthall maintains a sense of grandeur, Asad prioritizes philosophical clarity, Bakhtiar opts for a neutral explanation, and Sahih diminishes the rhetorical aspect in favour of narrative delivery. Collectively, these distinct approaches illuminate how Qur'anic parables are discursively framed—either as eternal truths, logical arguments, or simplified narratives—contingent upon the translator's underlying ideological commitments.

4.3 Traveling

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
2:273 لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ضَرْبًا فِي الْأَرْضِ	travel	travel on	go about	move about
3:156 إِذَا ضَرَبُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ	went abroad	traveled through	set out	traveled
4:94 إِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ	go forth	traveled in	go forth	go forth
4:101 وَإِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْ فِى الْأَرْضِ	go forth	traveled on	go forth	travel
5:106 إِنْ أَنْتُمْ ضَرَبْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ	are campaigning	traveled through	travelling	are traveling
73:20 يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ	travel	travel	go about	traveling

In the verses where ضرب denotes *traveling through the land* (Q 2:273, Q 3:156, Q 4:94, Q 4:101, Q 5:106, Q 73:20), the translators generally converge on literal renderings such as *"travel," "go forth,"* or *"move about."* Pickthall often opts for slightly formal phrasing like *"went abroad"* or *"go forth,"* while Bakhtiar uses *"travel on/traveled through,"* maintaining a straightforward descriptive tone. Asad's *"go about"* or *"travelling"* reflects a rationalist style that keeps the wording plain but readable. Sahih International's *"travel/traveling"* is the most standardized and accessible, reflecting its goal of offering clear and minimalistic English. CDA shows that the discourse is largely depoliticized: translators treat *daraba* not as a theological or ideological marker, but as a neutral description of physical movement, with little attempt to dramatize or soften the act.

Nevertheless, subtle differences reveal distinct discursive orientations. Pickthall's use of *"go forth"* carries a biblical echo, lending the act a sense of solemn mission, especially in contexts like Q 4:94 and Q 4:101, where travel is tied to the cause of God. Asad's *"go about"* introduces a slightly less formal, almost everyday register, reframing the Qur'anic injunctions into pragmatic terms rather than elevated commands. Sahih International's uniform *"travel"* strips away any rhetorical nuance, neutralizing the discourse for accessibility, while Bakhtiar's variations (*"travel on," "traveled through"*) align with a descriptive, gender-neutral style that avoids biblical connotations. Through CDA, these lexical nuances show how translation either maintains a discourse of sacred mission (*"go forth"*), reinterprets it as rational activity (*"go about"*), or reduces it to plain narration (*"travel"*).

4.4 Punishment or discipline

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
2:61 وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ	stamped upon	stamped on	overshadowed	covered with
3:112 ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ أَيْنَ مَا ثُقِفُوا	shall be their	stamped on	overshadowed	put under
3:112 وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةُ	laid upon	stamped on	overshadowed	drawn upon
8:12 فَاضْرِبُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ	smite	strike	strike	strike [them] upon
8:12 وَاضْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ	smite of	strike	strike off	strike from
8:50 يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ	smiting	striking	strike	striking
47:4 فَضَرْبَ الرِّقَابِ	smiting	strike	smite	strike
47:27 يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ	smiting	striking	striking	striking

In the punishment verses, a clear lexical pattern emerges. Pickthall consistently prefers *"smite/smiting"* (e.g., Q 8:12, Q 47:4, Q 47:27), a choice that amplifies the severity of divine sanction and preserves an archaic biblical resonance. Bakhtiar and Sahih International usually settle on *"strike/striking,"* which is more neutral and modern, though still literal. Asad and Sahid International align with them in many places but occasionally shift the nuance, as in Q 2:61 and Q 3:112, where they rendered *daraba* as *"overshadowed"* or *"put under,"* softening the harshness of physical or punitive imagery. CDA shows that while most

translators maintain a discourse of divine authority and discipline, Pickthall's diction intensifies the violence through elevated register, while Sahih International reduces it to a plain command, and Asad modulates the severity to make the text less graphic. The divergence is most evident in verses that combine *daraba* with humiliation metaphors (Q 2:61, Q 3:112). Pickthall's *"stamped upon"* suggests permanence and inevitability, reinforcing a discourse of total subjugation. Asad used "*overshadowed*" to reframe punishment into a less violent image, moving the discourse from physical punishment to symbolic domination. Bakhtiar uses with *"stamped on"* in this context. With terms like "*covered with*" and "*drawn upon*," Sahih International further domesticates the image into understandable contemporary English. Taking CDA into consideration here, these translation decisions point to translators' ideology. While Bakhtiar and Sahih International uphold literalist accuracy, Pickthall upholds severity through a seemingly biblical solemnity. On the other hand, Asad employs interpretive mitigation to balance divine justice with moral considerations. Together, these translations demonstrate how, depending on the discursive orientation of the translator, punitive *daraba* can be framed as symbolic humiliation, violent enforcement, or softer discipline.

4.5 Legal or metaphorical applications

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ 4:34	scourge	go away from	beat	strike
كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ وَالْبَاطِلَ 13:17	coineth	propounds	set forth	presents
فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَىٰ آذَانِهِمْ 18:11	sealed up	sealed	remain cut off	cast over
وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ 24:31	draw over	draw	draw over	wrap
خُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْثًا فَاضْرِب بِّهِ 38:44	smite	strike	strike	strike
أَفَنَضْرِبُ عَنكُمُ الذِّكْرَ 43:5	ignore	turn away from	withdraw	turn away
فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُم بِسُورٍ 57:13	separate	would be	raised between	placed

The translations of *daraba* show more variety in the legal and metaphorical uses than in the physical or travel uses. The most contentious instance, Q 4:34, reveals distinct ideological orientations: Pickthall uses "*scourge*," Sahih International uses the more literal "*strike*," Asad keeps "*beat*" but adds notes that limit its meaning, and Bakhtiar goes in a completely different direction with "*go away from*." CDA analysis here highlights how these choices reflect competing discourses — Pickthall's archaic severity sustains patriarchal authority, Sahih International's literalism reinforces traditional exegesis, Asad rationalizes through contextual constraints, and Bakhtiar reinterprets ethically to displace violence. In other cases, such as Q 24:31 (*"draw over/wrap"*), Q 18:11 (*"sealed up/over"*), and Q 57:13 (*"separate/would be/placed/raised between"*), translators converge more closely, showing how *daraba* is domesticated into metaphorical idioms. Here, CDA reveals that the verb is discursively recontextualized from a physical act into symbolic representation, with translators differing only in the register — archaic (*"sealed up"*), explanatory (*"remain cut off"*), or simplified (*"cast over"*).

Other examples show how flexible *daraba* is. In Q 13:17, Pickthall's "*coineth*" seems to reflect a biblical idiom, while Bakhtiar's "*propounds*" and Asad's "*set forth*" change the act into a rational explanation. Sahih International's "*presents*" takes away the rhetoric. Most translations of Q 38:44 use "*smite*" or "*strike*," which keeps the physical meaning but changes the intensity. In Q 43:5, however, the translations significantly vary. These differences can be seen in Pickthall "*ignore*," Bakhtiar's "*turn away from*," Asad's "*withdraw*," and Sahih's "*turn away*." The four English translations change *daraba* into an act of withholding or rejection depending on the situation. CDA demonstrates that when *daraba* possesses legal or metaphorical significance, translators engage in negotiations among literal retention, explanatory modulation, and ethical reinterpretation. Their lexical choices thus position the Qur'an either as a source of divine authority, as rational persuasion, or as softened ethical instruction.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the translations of *daraba* in the selected Qur'anic verses indicates that Qur'anic polysemy is more than just a linguistic phenomenon. It is rather a discursive space where ideology, theology, and cultural positioning interact in translation. The study shows how lexical and discursive decisions are inseparably linked to the intellectual and ideological commitments of the translators, reflected in four significant English translations: Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International. Here, one can assume that translation reframes the Qur'anic semantic choices within the limits of register, culture, and reception rather than merely translating meaning between languages.

Pickthall mostly uses the word "*smite*" to mean physical action, which makes his translation sound like an old-fashioned biblical style that stresses God's greatness and harshness. Conversely, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International collectively use the more neutral term "*strike*," highlighting the action as pragmatic rather than sensational. The CDA analysis shows that this difference in word choice changes how people think about divine authority: "*strike*" makes the act seem practical and subdued, while "*smite*"

makes it seem like a sacred force. Therefore, the choice of words is not a random translational practice; instead, it is a way to put divine-human interactions in either easy-to-understand or ritualistic terms.

When citing Qur'anic parables, the four translations once more are divided into ideological groups. Pickthall's old-fashioned "*coin/coineth*" puts the parables in a discourse about permanence. Here, Pickthall seems to be influenced by his previous biblical background. Asad and Bakhtiar favour "*propound*" or "*set forth*," indicative of their rationalist and explanatory perspectives, whereas Sahih International consistently uses "*present*" or "*presented*," diminishing the rhetorical impact of the parables into contemporary vernacular. The CDA analysis illustrates the transformation of parables in translation from authoritative truths (Pickthall) to dialogical propositions (Asad, Bakhtiar) or simplified narratives (Sahih). This stratification demonstrates how translation actively influences the theological impact of Qur'anic parable-making, transforming it from a solemn decree into intellectual contemplation or educational instruction.

The concept of travel demonstrates less variation, yet it retains considerable ideological importance. Pickthall's use of "*go forth*" seems to give travel a sense of sacred purpose. Asad's translation of the source into "*go about*" also changes the order of the story in a useful and logical way, while Sahih International's consistent use of "*travel*" makes it easier to read by presenting it as a simple story. Bakhtiar's choice of "*travelled through/on*" also keeps the language simple, which goes along with the idea of being neutral in description. The CDA analysis of the translations shows how these small differences in language change the meaning of the verse. These changes in meaning depend on how you view travel: as a sacred journey, a logical activity, or just a normal part of life. The choices made in translation give the text religious and cultural meaning, even when the situation seems simple.

The verses about punishment and discipline show some of the biggest differences. Pickthall uses "*smite/smiting*" to make things sound worse, which fits with the traditional biblical language. Bakhtiar and Sahih International use "*strike*," and Asad often softens the severity with words like "*overshadowed*." In verses that mix *daraba* with humiliation metaphors (Q 2:61, Q 3:112), the translations are very different. For example, "*stamped upon*" (Pickthall) means something permanent, "*overshadowed*" (Asad) turns violence into symbolic domination, and "*covered with*" (Sahih International) makes the imagery more neutral and easier to understand. CDA calls these differences ideological negotiations: Pickthall strengthens a discourse of divine wrath, Asad changes punishment into metaphorical images that fit with rationalist ethics, and Sahih International makes the image more modern by making it easier to read. Thus, translation modifies the theological implications of divine punishment by mediating between accessibility, symbolism, and violence.

The most contested area is the legal and metaphorical applications in the translation of Q 4:34. The ideological orientations of the translators is clearly reflected here. Bakhtiar introduces a radical departure with "*go away from*," rephrasing the verb ethically to avoid legitimising domestic violence. Asad keeps "*beat*" but surrounds it with contextual restrictions in footnotes, representing rationalist harmonisation; Pickthall keeps "*scourge*," reflecting his commitment to fidelity in archaic style; and Sahih International maintains the literal "*strike*," in line with Salafi literalism. These decisions are revealed by CDA to be highly ideological acts: they are interventions influenced by conflicting discourses of patriarchy, reformism, literalism, and ethical modernism rather than neutral transfers of meaning. The metaphorical usages such as "*draw over*" (Q 24:31), "*sealed up*" (Q 18:11), or "*separate/placed*" (Q 57:13) show a closer agreement among translators. However, the registers are different and include archaic solemnity, explanatory rationalism, and simplified accessibility.

When combined, the results highlight three important conclusions. First, lexical choice reflects ideology: even small differences between "*smite*" and "*strike*" have discursive connotations that help translations fit into specific cultural and theological registers. Second, translation is discursively productive rather than semantically neutral; by enhancing, reducing, or simplifying the Qur'anic polysemy, translators actively reshape the text's rhetorical power. Third, by demonstrating how translators situate themselves within discourses of authority, reform, gender, and modernity, CDA proves invaluable for exposing the ideological investments of translation. This study shows that Qur'anic translation is a practice which can include theological negotiation, ideological contestation, and discursive framing.

To conclude, the translation of Qur'anic word *daraba* into English reflects how complex is the interaction between language, ideology, and reception in the rendering of religious texts. Pickthall, as the analysis shows, maintains seriousness in his translation of the Qur'an. On the other hand, Asad makes sense of it through philosophical and contextual framing. Sahih International makes it easier to understand by taking away the rhetorical power, and Bakhtiar uses ethical language to challenge patriarchal readings. These strategies exemplify not only linguistic inclinations but also the translators' entrenchment in expansive theological, cultural, and gendered discourses. The research validates that polysemy in sacred texts is not an issue to be disregarded, but rather a resource that translators navigate in accordance with their ideological and cultural perspectives. Subsequent research may broaden this analysis to encompass additional translations or investigate paratextual materials more

comprehensively; however, the current study demonstrates that each rendering of *daraba* constitutes both a linguistic act and an ideological intervention.

6. Contributions and implications

This study offers three principal contributions. First, it presents a five-category semantic typology for the Qur'anic verb *daraba*, encompassing physical action, parable-setting, travelling, punishment/discipline, and legal/metaphorical usages, and systematically applies it to four significant English translations: Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International. This typology offers a systematic framework for categorising the verb's polysemy and facilitates uniform comparative analysis across various semantic contexts. Second, the study demonstrates that seemingly minor lexical choices (e.g., *smite*, *strike*, *beat*, *go away*), when analysed through this typology and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), function as discursive strategies that alter register, enhance or diminish rhetorical force, and uniquely frame agency. Third, the analysis demonstrates that translators converge in some categories (e.g., traveling, many parable verses) but diverge sharply in others (e.g., punishment imagery and Q 4:34), thereby linking micro-level lexical shifts to broader discourses of authority, reform, and gender.

The implications of these findings are significant for both Qur'anic studies and translation scholarship. For Qur'anic studies, the five-category model highlights that translator ideology operates differently depending on the semantic environment: physical actions polarize between biblical solemnity and modern functionalism; parables shift between authoritative decree, rational exposition, and simplified narration; travel is neutralized into accessible narration; punishment alternates between violent enforcement and symbolic humiliation; and legal/metaphorical contexts foreground ethical reinterpretation, especially in gender-sensitive verses. For translation studies, the findings underscore that polysemy in sacred texts is not a problem of lexical equivalence but a resource that translators negotiate according to cultural, theological, and ideological orientations.

Methodologically, the integration of CDA with a semantic typology provides a clear and systematic approach: (1) categorize occurrences by discourse function, (2) compare lexical renderings across translations, (3) interpret patterned choices in terms of discursive orientation (e.g., literalist, rationalist, reformist), and (4) highlight convergence and divergence at the category level. This framework ensures comprehensive coverage of the data and enables nuanced interpretation beyond verse-by-verse description. While this study deliberately focused on four translations and emphasized textual renderings over paratextual commentary, the typology combined with CDA offers a replicable framework that can be extended to other Qur'anic lexemes and additional translations, providing a foundation for cumulative comparative research in the future.

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