
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

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 *ḍaraba*, 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 *ḍaraba* 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 its translation 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 through the integration of 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

Words in a language can be related in various ways. Polysemy is an important relation between words within different levels of one language or between languages. In translation, polysemy is considered an important topic because of its implications for both the source language and the target language. Moreover, polysemy (words with multiple meanings) can be an issue for translators whose work becomes even more complex when they preserve the meanings of religious texts (Cruse, 2011; Ravin & Leacock, 2000). The difficulty rests on the balance between fidelity and culture that the translator needs to strike. The holy book translated from one language to another is the Qur'an. The shades of meaning of Qur'anic words require more than linguistic skills.

For instance, the verb *ḍaraba* (ضرب) could refer to hitting, travelling or even drawing parables. Its exact meaning is contextualized by grammatical clues (Ahmad, 2023). There is dedicated scholarly discussion on verse 34 of Surah 4 due to its different interpretations of the verb *ḍaraba* from a comparative perspective on gender and power in Islam (Kellison and Dunn, 2010; Larsson, 2014). It is even appropriate to say that the word's translation is more an analytic act than a transfer act here.

This involves overlapping theological, linguistic, and social considerations. Traditional interpretations favour legal readings and patriarchal authority, while recent translations favour more contextual and flexible approaches (Sideeg, 2015). The English translations can highlight the role of technical renderings, as well as the moral or ideological choices and approaches that impact the translator.

1.1 Significance of the study

The significance of the current study lies in explore the polysemous Qur'anic verb *ḍaraba*, with its meanings—at the literal, figurative, or juridical level—having theological and ideological undertones. The study demonstrates that, in comparing translators' various uses of this verb, translation is not culture-, doctrine-, or interpretation-independent. By using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study describes the relationship between language and ideology in the translation of religious texts. It contributes to a better understanding of not only Qur'anic studies, translation, and interpretation, but also different cultures.

1.2 Hypothesis

The aim of this study is to investigate whether the polysemous verb *ḍaraba* needs to be translated differently, and whether the different translations depend solely on its meaning or on the worldviews of the translators.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the lexical and semantic variations in the translation of *ḍaraba* across four major English translations of the Qur'an (Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, Sahih International), focusing on its main semantic categories (physical action, parable-setting, travel, punishment, and legal/metaphorical usage).
2. To critically evaluate the extent to which the translation choices for *ḍaraba* reflect underlying ideological, doctrinal, or gender-based perspectives, particularly in sensitive verses such as 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 *ḍaraba* in the target translations.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How is the polysemous verb *ḍaraba* 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 *ḍaraba* in English translations of the Qur'an?

1.5 Limitations and delimitations

This study is limited to the discussion of the ambiguous term *ḍaraba* in selected passages of the Qur'an with regard to its English language translation in four prominent English translations of the Qur'an: those by Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, Laleh Bakhtiar, and Sahih International. The scholar does not intend to provide a comprehensive study of the whole Qur'anic lexicon and all translations, but rather to focus his research on specific semantic categories (e.g., physical, parabolic, travelling, disciplinary, and legal or metaphorical) in which the word *ḍaraba* is widely used with interpretive differences. Moreover, other limitations of the current paper are the application of CDA as an interpretive tool and the lack of information regarding the translators' intentions. Another point that may be considered a limitation is the potential ethnocentric or dogmatic orientations of the source and target texts. These, however, do not imply a lack of the value and goals of the research, which are, in essence, to demonstrate the relationships between the influence of ideology and interpretation in translating Qur'anic texts.

2. Literature review

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

The Arabic language naturally extends semantic meanings of words used according to pragmatic contexts. The Arabic root has a primary meaning according to Versteegh (2014), but it can give rise to other related meanings with different functions. This allows language users to shift from descriptive to other abstract meanings. Wehr (1976) also explained that trilateral roots serve as the basis of many literal and rhetorical meanings within the large ensemble of the Arabic language.

In this context, we should understand Qur'anic polysemy as a guided and systematic approach. This feature allows the Qur'anic language to be fluid, responsive, and, across significant periods, open to greater engagement and interpretation.

The Holy Qur'an has many semantic variations. The meanings of words shift through the influence of context, syntax, and the writer's rhetorical intentions. Izutsu (2002) argues that Qur'anic words can designate literal, figurative, or doctrinal meanings depending on the context. This is not without significance and is an essential part of the persuasive strategies of the Qur'an. Polysemy is a significant stylistic device, according to Robinson (2003).

2.2 Daraba in Classical Arabic and the Qur'an

The root (ḍ-r-b) is one of the most prolific roots in the Classical Arabic language. Ibn Fāris said in *Maqāyīs al-Lughā* that the root means to cause one object to strike another, as well as referring to other things like travelling, metaphors, and figures of speech (Fars., n.d.). According to Ibn Manẓūr in *Lisān al-'Arab*, a word derived from this root stands for striking, traveling, minting currency, and proffering parables (Manzuter, n.d.). According to al-Zabidi in *Tāj al-'Arūs*, an additional metaphorical sense of *daraba* is its reference to light rain, which is also called ḍarb (al-Zabidi, n.d.). The above displays how the verb started with a physical sense and was later applied to other physical and figurative senses, thereby expanding the idiomatic realm of the Arabic language.

In Qur'an, *daraba* has various meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It signifies physical striking, e.g., of the sea with Moses's staff (Q 26:63), traveling, e.g., "When you travel through the land" (Q 4:101). It also has the meaning of setting forth parables, e.g. "Allah sets forth a parable..." (Q 14:24) and to cover or cast down, e.g. "Let them draw their headcovers over their bosoms" (Q 24:31). Other uses of the word include a barrier or separation, as in "So a wall will be set up between them..." (Q 57:13), fighting, e.g. "Strike above the necks..." (Q 8:12). Al-Rahib al-Asfahani in *al-Mufradat* emphasized that the original meaning of the root is striking that later expanded to travel, representation, and other meanings according to context (al-Asfahani, n.d.). Al-Fatlī (2014) and Ghani et al. (2020) studied the semantic variety of the verb *daraba* from lexical and syntactic analytical perspectives.

2.3 Qur'an translators:

2.3.1 Marmaduke Pickthall

One of the early English translations is *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* by Marmaduke Pickthall (1930) translated by a practicing Muslim. As an orientalist, novelist, and a British convert to Islam who lived in the Middle East and India, Pickthall studied Qur'an with full reverence for its linguistic and rhetorical structure. The translation which he produced is characterized by a rather archaic and noble English, which is in conformity with the early 20th-century literary style. This style is a sign of the literalist-traditionalist type of the methodology in his translation that seeks to retain the classical Arabic meanings (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Mohammed, 2005). He retained the classical interpretation of *daraba* in verse 4:34 as "beat them," showing no interest in re-reading the verse in terms of its ethical or feminist implications (Kidwai, 2016). His footnotes are light and largely of a linguistic nature without detailed theological explanation. They are rather brief clarifications to facilitate overall understanding (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Pickthall aimed his work mostly at the English-speaking Muslims and reflected the impact of Anglo-Islamic scholarship and the aspiration to scriptural faith (Nasr et al., 2015). Though critics have commended it for the high level of its tone and its faithfulness to the text, critics have also pointed out that his archaic wording and stylistic devices might be a barrier to the contemporary reader (Mohammed, 2005).

2.3.2 Muhammad Asad

The Message of the Qur'an (1980) by Muhammad Asad has been considered one of the most intellectual translations of the Qur'an in English. Asad was an Austrian-Jewish convert to Islam, journalist, and diplomat who introduced a very rationalist and philosophical tone to his work because of the influence of the Mu'tazilite theology, Iqbālian metaphysics, and a broader tradition of modernist Islamic reform (Chande, 2004). Being modern, analytical, and literary, his style is clearly organized and is not overly poetic. Asad was able to make sense of complex terms such as *daraba* (Qur'an 4:34) by interpreting it in a restrictive and ethical sense, and by keeping the original text, "beat them." He provided a footnote that places the word in its moral and legal context, based on Prophetic precedent and the ethics of the Qur'an. The extensive use of footnotes is one of the characteristics of his translation, which provides philosophical, theological, and linguistic commentary. Although his method is rational-minded for the reader and scholar, critics believe that Asad over-contextualizes or departs from the traditional Arabic meaning in modernist reinterpretation (Abdel Haleem, 2010). However, the strength of the translation lies in its intellectual consistency and moral delicacy, attempting to harmonize divine revelation with reason and conscience.

2.3.3 Sahih International

The *Sahih International* English version of the Qur'an was initially published in 1997, and was rendered by a group of American Muslim women converts with a Salafist orientation (Saad, 2023). The translation is characterized by modern and accessible English and deliberately avoids commentary. Instead, the translation features a minimalist and literalist style which is in parallel with conservative Sunni orthodoxy (Elieba, 2022). The *Sahih International* translation of Qur'an 4:34 contains the phrase "strike them" that is in line with the traditional interpretations without giving gender-sensitive options or moral reframing (Elieba, 2022). The commentary, where it exists, is kept at the minimum level, and is based on classical tafsir traditions, specifically those of Ibn Kathir and others.

2.3.4 Laleh Bakhtiar

The *Sublime Qur'an* (2007) by Laleh Bakhtiar is a revolutionary, reformist translation of the Qur'an that specifically focuses on the gender ethics and nonviolence. With her career in clinical psychology shaped by Sufism, she has a distinct, contemporary, and gender-neutral style, which criticizes traditional exegesis that heavily relies on patriarchal interpretations. Her most notable intervention is her translation of *ḍaraba* in Qur'an 4:34 as "go away" instead of "beat them," a decision which she defends with reference to Arabic grammar, ethical uniformity, and Prophetic precedent (Hassen, 2020; Scott, 2009). Bakhtiar does not provide detailed commentary, unlike other translations, leaving her textual and lexical choices to reflect the interpretive weight (Sa'd, 2023). Her translation is a popular reference in the literature on feminist tafsir, despite being controversial among traditional scholars due to its re-evaluation of Qur'anic moral authority and its focus on contextual meaning.

2.4 Previous studies

Academic studies on the translation of the Qur'an reveal that polysemous words are never translated in a purely linguistic sense. It is an interpretation either influenced by the views of the translators about the nature of the Islamic revelation, or by their ethical considerations and the needs of the target audiences. Surveys of the translations of the Qur'an into English have shown that there are four overall approaches: literal translation, contextual adjustment, euphemistic softening, and paraphrastic rephrasing. They are applied to varying extents depending on the genre, verse sensitivity, and culture (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Kidwai, 2016; Sideeg, 2015). Translators have the challenge of weighing a limited register—the Arabic lexico-semantic constraints of the genre—against their need to make things clear for the non-Arabic reader who does not have extensive Arabic knowledge.

One of the significant examples of using a single verb summarizing legal norms, ethical concerns, and family relationships is verse Q 4:34. Studies devoted to this verse help to understand how words at the micro-level are realized through larger exegetical strategies. Qorchi (2017) stated that many English versions do not switch to the restrictive, physical interpretation, which consequently narrows the semantic space of the verse and obscures the potential of the lexeme in the Arabic discourse. By contrast, Ahmadzadeh (2023) incorporated classical exegetical understanding with semantic analysis to present the idea of symbolic or non-corporeal meanings in certain situations, noting that English renderings must be determined by factors like internal sequencing and the limitations of intertextuality. Going beyond the boundaries of a single lexeme, Alkaabi and Alaskari (2015) investigated how Arabic verbs like hit/strike are translated in various contexts in the Qur'an to reveal that denotational equivalence in English tends to conflict with connotational meaning, where either mitigation (e.g., tap, separate, etc.) or additional commentaries are provided. In terms of translation studies, Mounadil (2023) viewed such choices as part of the larger issue of culturally-specific references and illustrated that the more a verse was caught up in social norms and juristic discourse, the greater the tendency of a translator to shift the register or add paratext to preserve coherence and acceptability.

Case-oriented analyses narrow down to a variety of practices. The approaches that focus on literalism or faithfulness to form seek to preserve the Arabic syntactic symmetry and lexical surface with a small number of notes (Kidwai, 2016). On the other hand, the contextual-rationalist approaches focus on the context of discourse and the cross-referential semantics of the background. They retain a close translation but re-profile the meaning in footnotes or theological contexts (Abdel Haleem, 2010; Sideeg, 2015). Reformist renderings redefine the lexeme to prevent different readings which are not in line with Prophetic precedent or Qur'anic moral ideals. These are commonly justified by intra-Qur'anic semantics, adhering to hadith restrictions, and using maqāṣid-oriented ethics (Hassen, 2020; Scott, 2009). The point of similarity between these stances lies in the fact that polysemy is context-dependent: the acceptable English sense is authorized by syntax, discourse sequencing, and genre and not by dictionaries alone.

There are three implications that can be identified throughout the literature. To begin with, a lexical decision is ideologically indexed, with even small changes (*strike/separate/go away*) being indicators of various approaches to legal literalism, ethical harmonization, or interpretations of the text (Kassam, 2005; Qorchi, 2017). Second, paratext is part of translation: the notes, glossary, and introduction are ideological safe zones where faithful translation of the text can be done while interpretive boundaries can be maintained (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Sideeg, 2015). Third, methodologically speaking, dialectical triangulation between lexicography, classical exegesis, and global reinterpretations to historicize the possibility of non-physical interpretations in contexts where they are available and unavailable seems appropriate (Ahmadzadeh, 2023; Alkaabi and Alaskari, 2015; Mounadil, 2023). Hence, the translation of controversial verses (Q 4:34) creates a place for controversy regarding the ethics of translation, public perceptions in English, and tradition, based on seemingly semantic issues in English.

2.5 Theoretical framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In this article, CDA is used to explain the most common ideological, theological, and gender meanings in the selected English translations of the Qur'anic verb, *ḍaraba*. CDA is a proper strategy to apply in this study, not because it is a formalist analysis of language as an empty form and empty signifier in an empty code, but as a site for the production of power, ideology, and values (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Meyer, 2015). The translation of the Qur'an in general, as well as translating polysemic words and/or words that have moral implications such as the word *ḍaraba*, is an interpretative process with an emphasis on the translator and his/her persona, audience, and also the discourse tradition itself (Sideeg, 2015).

This paper uses CDA to examine translators' critical lexical choices. It looks at the choices made by the translators for the terms beat, strike, and go away. The research also considered the English translations of the Qur'an and examined how Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International rendered sexist, imperative, and obligational phrases. We see that differing choices by translators from the source language have affected the moral aspects of the text.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher employs a qualitative research design and utilizes 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 and semantic complexity of the Arabic word *daraba*. Different meanings can be associated with this word, many of which are unrelated. In certain verses such as Qur'an 4:34, the interpretation of the meaning of the source text 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. On the textual level, the current study implies close reading of translations with regard to lexical choices, grammar, and semantic framing. A particular focus is placed on the verses in which *ḍaraba* has an interpretative meaning (e.g., 4:34, 2:60, 14:5), and variations of such words as *beat*, *strike*, *go away*, or *separate* are considered in their syntactic and semantic settings. On the discursive-practice level, the paper reviews the manner in which the definitions of *ḍaraba* are formulated, defended, or toned down. The translators are therefore placed within the modern theological or reformist discussions. On the level of social practices, the wider ideological context is examined in relation to the discussion of how the background of translators (e.g., Salafi orientation, modernist reform, Anglo-Islamic tradition). The study also looks into affecting the discursive patterns affected by historical, cultural, and gendered discourses.

3.3 Corpus Selection

The four translations were deliberately chosen due to their ideological orientations and their immense impact among English-speaking Muslim communities. Pickthall (1930) is known for his traditionalist literalism, Asad (1980) for his rationalist and philosophical approach, and Bakhtiar (2007) for the ethical feminist reform. They represent a sample of the different approaches that interpret the Qur'an, and therefore, the combination of the different translations provides valuable grounds for analysis.

The following are the online sources which the researcher accessed to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the text and translations:

- Pickthall and Sahih International from Qur'an Corpus (<https://corpus.Qur'an.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

The researcher manually coded the data based on thematic and semantic categories in which *daraba* occurs. These are physical action, parable-setting, traveling, punishment or discipline, and legal or metaphorical uses. After classification, a comparative analysis of the verses was conducted to determine the variation in lexical, semantic, and discursive patterns. This analysis facilitates mapping the ideological orientations of the translators as manifested in their renderings of *daraba* in varied semantic settings.

3.5 Justification of Methodology

This methodological design practically suits the objectives of the study since it enables the analysis to extend beyond superficial linguistic equivalence to the investigation of ideological orientations, semantic negotiation, and the socioreligious implications that are embedded in the Qur'anic translation. According to Sideeg (2015), translators will always reflect ideologies that lead to the rewriting of sacred discourses for their audiences. This paper reveals how polysemy can be a discursive space of ideological negotiation during translation when CDA is combined with semantic categorization.

4. Analysis

4.1 Physical action

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
2:60 اضْرِبْ بَعْصَكَ الْحَجَرَ	smite	strike	strike	strike
2:73 فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا	smite	turn him away	apply	strike
20:77 قَاصِرِبْ لَهُمْ ظَرِيقًا فِي الْبَحْرِ	strike	strike	strike out	strike
26:63 اضْرِبْ بَعْصَكَ الْبَخْرَ	smite	strike	strike	strike
37:93 ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ	striking	striking	smiting	a blow

When the verses indicate physical action, Pickthall's selection of "smite" (2:60, 26:63) is considered in contrast to the translation of Bakhtiar, Asad, and Sahih International, who rendered the verb as "strike." The application of CDA shows that "smite" stimulates an ancient biblical register showing the event as a moment of divine majesty and severity. "Strike," which can be considered a more neutral term, normalizes the action, and the sense of wonder is shifted to a sense of simple obedience. The translational differences such as Asad's "strike out" in 20:77 clearly point to how translators shape their understanding of agency. In Qur'an 37:93, the difference between Pickthall's and Asad's ("striking/smiting") and Sahih International's plain "a blow" shows that translators' lexical choices can increase or decrease the rhetorical force. These changes and differences can result in dissimilar receptions of the same physical gesture.

There is a dramatic shift of meaning that is observable in Qur'an 2:73, wherein the translators have taken a sharp turn in the translation of the verse. Pickthall employed "smite" which reflects his biblical style. The Sahih International translation prefers the literal translation, "strike." On the contrary, Asad uses "apply," signifying a logical and disengaged voice that understands the drama. Bakhtiar translates the word into "turn him away."

Applying the CDA approach, it is possible to remark that these translations are not merely the selection of words. Ideologies are reflected in these translations. In his translation, Pickthall is a traditionalist, whereas Sahih International is a literalist. On his part, Asad applies a contemporary rationalism. Bakhtiar aligns the translation with modern morality. Eventually, the diverse meanings of *daraba* in this context offer a platform to negotiate power, violence, and obedience. These are re-enforced, diluted, or re-framed.

4.2 Setting parables

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
2:26 يَضْرِبُ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةٌ	coin	propound	propound	present
14:24 ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً	coineth	propounded	sets forth	presents
14:25 وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ	coineth	propounds	propounds	presents
14:45 وَضَرَبْنَا لَكُمْ الْأَمْثَالَ	made	propounded	set forth	presented
16:74 فَلَا تَضْرِبُوا لِلَّهِ الْأَمْثَالَ	coin	propound	coin	assert

16:75	ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا عَبْدًا مَمْلُوكًا	coineth	propounded	propounds	presents
16:76	وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلَيْنِ	coineth	propounded	propounds	presents
16:112	ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً	coineth	propounded	propounds	presents
17:48	ضَرَبُوا لَكَ الْأَمْثَالَ	coin	propounded	likened	strike
18:45	اضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا	coin	propounded	propound	present
22:73	ضَرَبَ مَثَلٌ فَاَسْتَمَعُوا لَهُ	coined	propounded	set forth	presented
24:35	وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ	speaketh	propounds	propounds	presents
25:39	وَكَلَّا ضَرَبْنَا لَهُ الْأَمْثَالَ	warned by	propounded	proffer	presented
29:43	وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالَ تَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ	coin	propound	propound	present
30:28	ضَرَبَ لَكُمْ مَثَلًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ	coineth	propounds	propounds	presents
30:58	ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ	coined	propounded	propounded	presented
36:13	وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ	coin	propound	set forth	present
36:78	وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا	coined	propounded	in terms of comparison	presents
39:27	ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ	coined	propounded	propounded	presented
39:29	ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا	coineth	propounded	sets forth	presents
43:17	ضَرَبَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ مَثَلًا	likened to	cited as	attributes to	attributes to
43:57	ضَرَبَ ابْنُ مَرْثَمٍ مَثَلًا	quoted as	cited as	is set forth as	presented as
43:58	أَمْ هُوَ مَا ضَرَبُوهُ لَكَ	raise	cited to	put comparison	present
47:3	كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ أَمْثَالَهُمْ	coineth	propounds	set forth	present
59:21	وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالَ تَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ	coin	propound	propound	present
66:10	ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا	citeth	propounded	propounded	presents
66:11	وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا	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. Bakhtiar employs the word "propound/propounded," a philosophical term which turns parables into propositions-matters that people should take into consideration instead of laws that people should follow. Asad's approach when utilizing "propound" or "set forth" is quite close to this method since it places the term in the discursive position of rationalism and elucidation. Sahih International, on the other hand, employs "present/presents/presented" which is a basic modern translation implying that the parable-making is a possible story. CDA demonstrates that these contrasting lexical groups provide discourse with alternative directions. Pickthall is an advocate of traditionalism and seriousness, Asad and Bakhtiar emphasize rationalism and exposition, and Sahih International limits the rhetorical power with the help of neutral and easy-to-read language.

In this general tendency, some verses like Q 14:24, Q 14:25, Q 16:75-76, and Q 30:28 - 30:58 reveal almost identical renditions in Bakhtiar and Asad, reflecting their tendency to deal with matters here as concepts. The translations indicate that *daraba* is not regarded as an act of divine authority but as a manifestation of truth in a dialogue. This meets the expectations of readers. To suit contemporary explanatory language, Sahih International, by means of the word "presents," diminishes the high style without compromising the moralizing purpose. The word "coineth" by Pickthall is, however, more than merely outdated, but indirectly associates the parable with notions of permanence. In this case, CDA focuses on the lexical decisions made by translators that nonetheless reflect divergent ideological positions regarding the legitimacy and the purpose of parables.

This can be seen clearly in verses such as Q 16:74 and Q 17:48. In these examples, Pickthall's rendering is either "coin" or "coineth" and Asad's is either "likened" or "put comparison." For Bakhtiar, it is "propounded," while Sahih International goes further and uses "assert" or "strike". This illustrates that when using a particular parable to debunk falsehood or refute contentious opinions, translators may move from literal to informative translations. It should be noted that Pickthall's choice of words points to his usual high linguistic style. Asad's choice of words, though, suggests the clarity and analogy of his rendering. Sahih International uses simpler words. CDA's comparison of the above two examples reveals the ideological stance relating to the understanding of parables as "absolute truths" - unchangeable and fixed - or as argumentative utterances for theological debate.

Considerable differences are evident in Q 25:39, Q 36:78, Q 43:17, Q 43:57, and Q 43:58, where various strategic choices are made. Pickthall translates it as "warned by" or "quoted as" or "raises" or "likened to", while Asad translates it more abstractly as "in terms of comparison" or "attributes to". Bakhtiar often reduces the action to a rhetoric of "cited as" with a peremptory tone,

while Sahih International translates it simply as “presented as”. These translations show the difficulties translators experience with the word *daraba* in situations where the word is not used to mean to set forth but as a rhetorical device to fight back. CDA reveals that Pickthall applies grandeur, Asad emphasizes philosophical elucidity, Bakhtiar chooses neutral explanation, and Sahih International weakens the rhetorical element in favour of narrating. To this end, all these different strategies can help reveal the discursive strategies of various parables in the Qur'an, whether they are presented as timeless truths, rational arguments, or abridged versions of the stories, depending on the ideological beliefs of the translator.

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 ضَرَبْتُمْ 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 فِي 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 means *traveling through the land* (Q 2:273, Q 3:156, Q 4:94, Q 4:101, Q 5:106, Q 73:20), all translators tend to focus on relatively word-for-word translations like “to travel,” “to go forth” or “to move about.”. Pickthall frequently prefers more elevated words such as “went abroad,” or “go forth,” while Bakhtiar adopts the straightforward “travel on/traveled through.” Asad uses “go about” or “travelling” in a rationalist style that still allows for plain but not overly dense wording. Sahih International’s “travel/traveling” is standardized and readable, as its aim is to provide plain and minimalistic English. CDA analysis demonstrates that the discourse is largely nonpoliticized: the word *daraba* is neither a theological nor an ideological marker.

Nevertheless, subtle differences reveal distinct discursive orientations. Pickthall’s use of “go forth” carries a biblical echo, lending the act a sense of a 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 into 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 وَضَرَبْتَ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةَ وَالْمَسْكَنَةَ	stamped upon	stamped on	overshadowed	covered with
3:112 ضَرَبْتَ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةَ أَيْنَ مَا تَقِفُوا	shall be their	stamped on	overshadowed	put under
3:112 وَضَرَبْتَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةَ	laid upon	stamped on	overshadowed	drawn upon
8:12 قَاصِرُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ	smite	strike	strike	strike [them] upon
8:12 وَاصْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ	smite of	strike	strike off	strike from
8:50 يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَذْيَارَهُمْ	smiting	striking	strike	striking
47:4 فَضَرَبَ الرِّقَابَ	smiting	strike	smite	strike
47:27 يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَذْيَارَهُمْ	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 Sahih 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 an elevated register, while Sahih International reduces it to a plain command, and Asad modulates the severity to make the text less graphic. The translation difference is more prominent in those verses which combine *daraba* and humiliation metaphors (Q 2:61, Q 3:112). Pickthall’s use of “stamped upon” feels inevitable, and therefore continues to support a discourse of domination. Asad translated

it as “overshadowed,” domesticating the punishment into a less brutal metaphor, giving the discourse a symbolic sense of domination. In this instance, Bakhtiar uses “stamped on.” In contrast, through expressions such as “covered with” and “drawn upon,” Sahih International additionally domesticates the image into contemporary English. When considering CDA, the word choices reflect the translators’ ideology. Bakhtiar and Sahih International insist on literalist accuracy, whereas Pickthall insists on severity through an apparent biblical solemnity. Conversely, Asad uses interpretive mitigation to strike a balance between divine justice and moral considerations. These translations, together, show that punitive *daraba* can be cast as symbolic humiliation, violent enforcement, or milder discipline depending upon the discursive inclination of the translator.

4.5 Legal or metaphorical applications

Verse	Pickthall	Bakhtiar	Asad	Sahih
4:34 وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ	scourge	go away from	beat	strike
13:17 كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ وَالْبَاطِلَ	coineth	propounds	set forth	presents
18:11 فَصَرَّتْنَا عَلَىٰ آدَانِهِمْ	sealed up	sealed	remain cut off	cast over
24:31 وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ	draw over	draw	draw over	wrap
38:44 خُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْتًا فَاضْرِبْ بِهِ	smite	strike	strike	strike
43:5 أَفْتَضْرِبُ عَنْكُمُ الذِّكْرَ	ignore	turn away from	withdraw	turn away
57:13 فَصَرَّتْ بَيْنَهُمْ سُبُورًا	separate	would be	raised between	placed

There is greater diversity in the legal and metaphorical uses of *daraba* than in the physical or travelling uses. The most vexing example, Q 4:34, shows concealed political differences, with Pickthall using “scourge,” Sahih International using a more literal “strike,” Asad retaining “beat” but explaining that it is constrained, and Bakhtiar moving in another direction with “go away from.” CDA here reveals how these choices exemplify different discourses, which sustain patriarchal law (Pickthall), traditional exegesis (Sahih International), strategic reasoning (Asad), and ethical re-articulation (Bakhtiar), which eventually displaces violence. Elsewhere, such as Q 24:31, Q 18:11, and Q 57:13 (“draw over/wrap with”; “cast over/cover up”; and “separate/would be/placed/raised between”), translators come closer to a consensus, revealing how *daraba* is rendered into metaphorical tropes. Here, CDA shows that the verb is discursively reconstructed from literal to figurative, differing in its register—archaic (“sealed up”), explanatory (“remain cut off”), or simplified (“cast over”).

There are other examples of *daraba*’s adaptability. In Q 13:17, it is likely that Pickthall choose a biblical idiom, while Bakhtiar’s “propounds” and Asad’s “set forth” interpret the act in abstract terms. Sahih International’s “presents” removes the rhetoric altogether. In Q 38:44, most translations use the word “smite” or “strike,” which enhances the concept of contact but removes the sense of gentleness. The versions for Q 43:5 differ. These include Pickthall’s “ignore,” Bakhtiar’s “turn away from,” Asad’s “withdraw,” and Sahih’s “turn away.” Three of the four English translations render *daraba* into various aspects of ignoring or rejecting something. CDA shows that once *daraba* becomes legally or metaphorically important in translation, the translators conduct negotiations between literal renderings and interpretive adjustments, as well as between clarity and ethical considerations. Their translations of the word, therefore, render the Qur’an as a revelation of divine power, as argumentative persuasion, or as exhortatory admonition not to do wrong.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the translation of examples of *daraba* in the chosen Qur’anic verses reveals that language is not the only determining factor in the translation of Qur’anic polysemy. The translations are a discursive arena for the interaction of ideology, theology, and culture. In this research, the researcher demonstrates that semantic and discursive choices are influenced by the intellectual and ideological stance of the translators. These are reflected in four major English translations by Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International. In this case, we can say that translation positions the meaning of the Qur’an in terms of register, culture, and reception.

Pickthall translates the verb *daraba* in the Qur’an using the word “smite,” which implies an action. Thus, this creates the impression that he is using an archaic style or a biblical style which stresses the greatness and harshness of God. On the other hand, the translations by Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International use “strike” which emphasizes the practical dimension of the act. CDA reflects these effects in relation to divine power: *strike* emphasizes that the divine act is practical and passive (subservient to God) but *smite* emphasizes that the divine act is sacred. So, the word choices of the translators are not arbitrary acts. They present the divine-human relationship either in easy-to-understand or ritualistic language.

As for the Qur'anic parables, the four translators are apparently from different backgrounds. Pickthall's archaic "*coin/coineth*" places the parables in a conversation about durability. Here, it seems that previous biblical references have affected Pickthall's choice. Asad and Bakhtiar prefer "*propound*" or "*set forth*." This choice indicates their rationalist and didactic inclinations. By contrast, Sahih International favours "*present*" or "*presented*", reducing the rhetorical weight of the parables to contemporary colloquialism. The CDA analysis above shows how the parables are translated from statements of fact (Pickthall), to propositions (Asad and Bakhtiar), or as simple stories (Sahih International). This layering highlights the impact of the translation on the theological weight of Qur'anic parable-making, which undergoes a shift from assertion to a suggestive statement or lesson.

Travel is not as variable, but it is still significant. Pickthall's choice of "*go forth*" seems to imply a sacredness to travel. Asad's rendering of the source text into "*go about*" also changes the sequence of the story in a helpful way. Sahih International's use of "*travel*" as a consistent term makes the story more accessible as a simple narrative.

Bakhtiar's decision to translate the text as "*travelled through/on*" also makes the text simple, maintaining the idea of a neutral description. The CDA analysis of these translations shows the differences in meaning that the small changes in word selections produce. This varies according to whether one assumes the *travel* is a religious act, logical or ordinary. The wording choices bring meaning to language that is otherwise secular or even mundane.

There are significant variations in the verses about Qur'anic discipline and punishment. Pickthall's "*smite/smiting*" is more severe, as is traditional in the Bible. Bakhtiar and Sahih International use "*strike*" and Asad often mitigates the harshness by using words like "*overshadowed*". When *daraba* is part of a mix of shame metaphors (Q 2:61, Q 3:112), the translations vary. For example, Pickthall's "*stamped upon*" is permanent, Asad's "*overshadowed*" turns violence into metaphorical imagery of domination, and Sahih International's "*covered with*" makes the imagery even more accessible. CDA reflects that these point to ideological negotiations: Pickthall confirms a discourse of divine punishment, Asad metaphorically shifts divine punishment into an ethos of rationalism, and Sahih International softens the imagery to make it more contemporary. This means that translation shifts the discourse of the theology of divine punishment by negotiating between accessibility, imagery, and violence.

The most problematic contexts are the legal and metaphorical uses in the translation of Q 4:34. The translators' ideological positions are evident here. Bakhtiar brings a radical innovation with "*go away from*" by re-ethicizing the verb to prevent the justification of domestic violence. Asad maintains "*beat*" and explains it in a footnote (signifying rationalistic harmonization); Pickthall maintains the archaic "*scourge*" (due to its faithfulness to archaic meter); and Sahih International keeps the literal "*strike*" (due to Salafi literalism). CDA points out that such choices are highly ideological: they are stances informed by contending discourses of patriarchy, reformism, literalism, and ethical modernism, respectively: rather than translations. The metaphorical choices like "*draw over*" (Q 24:31), "*sealed up*" (Q 18:11) or "*separate/placed*" (Q 57:13) - are relatively unanimous. These registers vary and include archaic solemnity, explanatory rationalism, and simplification.

Together, the findings point to three conclusions. First, words are ideological: even the nuanced differences between "*smite*" and "*strike*" have discursive implications that aid in the integration of translations into particular cultural and theological registers. Second, translation is not semantically inactive; translation activities involve a transformative project that results in a re-rhetorized Qur'an, where polysemy is intensified, diminished, or lessened. Third, through the way translators invoke discourses of authority, reform, gender, and modernity, CDA shows us the ideological dimension of translation. This shows that translation can involve theology, ideology, and discourse.

Finally, the English translations of the Qur'anic word *daraba* show the complexity of the interplay between language, ideology, and reception in religious translation. As we have seen, Pickthall takes the Qur'an seriously. However, Asad explains it philosophically and contextualizes it. It is softened by Sahih International, which deprives it of its rhetorical meaning, whereas Bakhtiar uses ethical language to reduce power relations in society. These are not only instances of linguistic tendency towards a particular language pattern but also instances of translators delving into enormous theological, cultural, and gendered discourses. The analysis proves that religious writings that are polysemic should not be overlooked, but rather used by translators based on their ideological and cultural orientations. Further research could extend this analysis to more translations, or to a more thorough exploration of paratexts. The present research shows that each interpretation of *daraba* is a linguistic and ideological act.

6. Contributions and implications

This paper provides three significant contributions. It first proposes a five-category semantic typology of the Qur'anic verb *daraba*, including physical action, parable-setting, travelling, punishment/discipline, and legal/metaphorical uses. It then applies this typology systematically to four major English translations by Pickthall, Asad, Bakhtiar, and Sahih International. This typology presents a structural method of classifying the polysemy of the verb and aids in making a comparative analysis of *daraba* in many semantic cases uniformly. Second, the paper indicates that apparently small lexical decisions (e.g., *smite*, *strike*, *beat*, *go*

away) analyzed in light of this typology and CDA serve as discursive instruments that shift register, either strengthen or weaken rhetorical action, and frame agency in a distinctive way. Third, the analysis shows that there are few points of intersection (e.g. traveling, many parable verses) and sharp points of deviation (e.g. punishment imagery in Q 4:34). It thus connects micro-level lexical movement to more macro discourses of power, change, and gender.

These findings have far-reaching implications for the study of the Qur'an and translation studies. In the case of Qur'anic studies, the five-category model emphasizes that translators' ideology functions differently depending on the semantic setting: physical activities polarize around biblical solemnity and modern functionalism, parables shift between authoritative decree, rational exposition, and simplified narration, traveling is neutralized into accessible narration, and punishment switches between violent enforcement and symbolic humiliation. The findings of the present study are important for translation studies because polysemy in sacred texts cannot be understood as a matter of straightforward semantic equivalence between lexical items; rather, it is negotiated by translators in relation to cultural, theological, and ideological factors.

In terms of the method used, combining a semantic typology and CDA provides a straightforward approach: (1) categorizing the instances of discourse occurrences according to specific discourse functions, (2) contrasting the lexical choices made in different translations, (3) explaining the pattern of lexical selections in terms of the overall discourse orientation (e.g., literalist, rationalist, or reformist), and (4) stressing the cases of convergence and divergence at the categorical level. This framework provides comprehensive coverage of the data and allows for closer analysis of the cases outside the domain of simple verse descriptions. While this paper focused on four translations and did not focus on paratextual commentary, the typology offers a framework that can be replicated for other Qur'anic words and additional translations in the future.

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