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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between Equivalence and Formal Correspondence: A Catfordian Analysis of Translation Shifts in the English–Arabic Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigates translation shifts between the English and Arabic versions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) through Catford's (1965) linguistic theory of translation, focusing on how textual equivalence is maintained when linguistic differences necessitate departures from formal correspondence. Adopting a qualitative comparative approach, corresponding segments from the Preamble and thirty Articles were analyzed across Catford's five shift types: level, structure, class, unit (rank), and intra-system shifts. The findings identify recurrent patterns across all five shift types. Level shifts primarily involve the lexical reconstruction of grammatical modality, particularly obligation, prohibition, and possibility. Structure shifts reflect the reconfiguration of clause organization and constituent relations to accommodate Arabic syntactic patterns. Class shifts predominantly involve verbal–nominal recategorization, notably through Arabic verbal nouns (maṣdars), whereas unit shifts generally entail upward rank movement, with compact English units realized through larger Arabic constructions. Intra-system shifts are concentrated in number selection, particularly singular–plural and plural–dual correspondences that preserve equivalent reference. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that formal non-correspondence does not necessarily compromise semantic or normative stability. Rather, translation shifts function as systematic linguistic resources for reconstructing the meanings, rights, and obligations of the UDHR within Arabic, reaffirming the analytical value of Catford's framework for English–Arabic institutional translation.

| KEYWORDS

translation shifts; Catford; formal correspondence; textual equivalence; English–Arabic translation; Universal Declaration of Human Rights

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Translation entails negotiating meaning across languages whose lexical, grammatical, and structural resources do not necessarily correspond directly. Differences between linguistic systems may therefore require formal reorganization even when source and target texts convey comparable meanings (Baker & Jones, 2025; Hatim & Munday, 2019). Rather than simple lexical substitution, translation may involve restructuring across linguistic levels, whereby meanings encoded through particular grammatical categories, syntactic configurations, lexical classes, or units are realized differently in the target language. This is particularly salient in English–Arabic translation, given differences in word order, definiteness, number and agreement, modification, clause structure, and grammatical or lexical realization (Al-Kufaishi, 2011; Al-Rubai'i, 2004). Accordingly, grammatical elements may be lexicalized, non-finite structures rendered as finite constructions, or source-language categories reformulated through different Arabic grammatical resources (Al-Kufaishi, 2011). Examining these transformations thus reveals how cross-linguistic equivalence is negotiated through systematic restructuring within the resources of the target language.

Within linguistic approaches to translation, cross-linguistic restructuring is conceptualized through translation shifts. Catford (1965) defines these as "departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL" (p. 73), explaining how equivalence may be maintained despite formal differences between languages (Hatim & Munday, 2019; Munday

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et al., 2026). Catford distinguishes two principal types: level and category shifts. Level shifts occur when an item realized at one linguistic level is translated at another, particularly between grammar and lexis. Category shifts involve departures within grammatical organization and comprise structure, class, unit (rank), and intra-system shifts (Catford, 1965). Structure shifts concern grammatical configuration; class shifts involve changes in grammatical class; unit shifts occur between different linguistic ranks; and intra-system shifts involve different selections within approximately corresponding systems. This taxonomy provides a systematic framework for classifying formal transformations through which source-text meanings are reconstructed in the target language.

Against this theoretical background, Catford's model is particularly relevant to English–Arabic translation, where structural differences frequently necessitate departures from formal correspondence. English and Arabic differ in nominal structure, definiteness, number and agreement, adjectival modification, tense and aspect, and syntactic configuration (Al-Kufaishi, 2011; Al-Najjar, 2014; Alshammari, 2023). These systemic differences generate recurrent grammatical restructuring, making this language pair productive for examining translation shifts (Hijjo & Kadhim, 2017). However, shifts should not be treated as isolated grammatical alterations. Systematic analysis is needed to identify their dimensions, linguistic realizations, and recurrent patterns within authoritative bilingual texts. This is particularly important in institutional and legal discourse, where structural accommodation must coexist with semantic and normative precision.

Within this institutional context, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides a suitable corpus for investigation. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, the UDHR is a foundational human-rights instrument and one of the world's most widely translated documents (United Nations, 1948). Its articulation of rights, freedoms, prohibitions, and entitlements requires semantic and normative stability across linguistic versions. However, legal and institutional translation operates across languages whose grammatical and conceptual resources do not fully correspond, making equivalence a central concern (Cao, 2007; Šarčević, 1997). The English and Arabic versions therefore provide a valuable context for examining semantic equivalence and formal variation. Catford's (1965) framework offers a systematic approach to classifying such variation, shedding light on the linguistic shifts through which meaning is reconstructed across the two languages.

The present study systematically examines translation shifts in the English and Arabic versions of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Drawing on Catford's (1965) linguistic model, it investigates departures from formal correspondence and their role in reconstructing meaning in Arabic. Adopting a qualitative comparative approach, the study conducts a contrastive analysis of corresponding English and Arabic segments within Catford's two principal categories of translation shifts: level shifts and category shifts, the latter encompassing structure, class, unit, and intra-system shifts. The analysis identifies the linguistic manifestations of these shifts and examines their role in preserving meaning across two structurally distinct languages. In doing so, the study moves beyond the identification of isolated formal differences to offer a systematic account of Catfordian translation shifts in English–Arabic human rights discourse.

This analysis moves beyond the identification of formal differences between the two texts by mapping individual transformations onto Catford's theoretically defined categories. In doing so, the study seeks to establish how systemic differences between English and Arabic are manifested in the translation of institutional human-rights discourse. The analysis is guided by the following research questions, each addressing a distinct dimension of Catford's shift taxonomy:

RQ1. Level shifts: How are level shifts realized between the English and Arabic versions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly through changes between grammatical and lexical encoding?

RQ2. Structure shifts: What structural shifts occur in the Arabic translation of the Declaration, and how do they reconfigure the grammatical organization of corresponding English structures?

RQ3. Class shifts: To what extent do English source-text elements undergo changes in grammatical class in their Arabic translation equivalents, and what forms do these changes take?

RQ4. Unit shifts: In what ways are unit or rank shifts manifested in the translation when corresponding elements are realized at different linguistic ranks across the two texts?

RQ5. Intra-system shifts: Which intra-system shifts occur where English and Arabic possess approximately corresponding grammatical systems but differ in the selections made within those systems?

Together, these questions provide an integrated investigation of Catfordian translation shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR. The study examines how departures from formal correspondence operate in human-rights discourse, contributing to English–Arabic translation research by demonstrating how systematic linguistic restructuring enables meaning to be negotiated and preserved across structurally distinct languages.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Catford's (1965) linguistic theory of translation, particularly the distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence. A formal correspondent occupies approximately the same position in the target-language system as its source-language counterpart, whereas a textual equivalent may convey corresponding meaning without formal correspondence. Translation shifts arise at this intersection and are defined as "departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL" (Catford, 1965, p. 73).

Catford distinguishes level shifts from category shifts. Level shifts occur when meaning encoded at one linguistic level is realized at another, principally between grammar and lexis. Category shifts comprise four types. Structure shifts involve changes in constituent configuration, while class shifts occur when corresponding items belong to different grammatical classes. Unit (rank) shifts arise when equivalents occupy different grammatical ranks, such as word, group, or clause. Intra-system shifts occur when approximately corresponding grammatical systems make different selections, as in singular–plural variation.

These categories constitute the analytical framework of the study. Classification is determined by the linguistic locus of departure: level of realization, constituent structure, grammatical class, rank, or selection within corresponding systems, rather than by surface difference alone. Figure 1 schematically presents Catford's (1965) classification and its constituent dimensions.

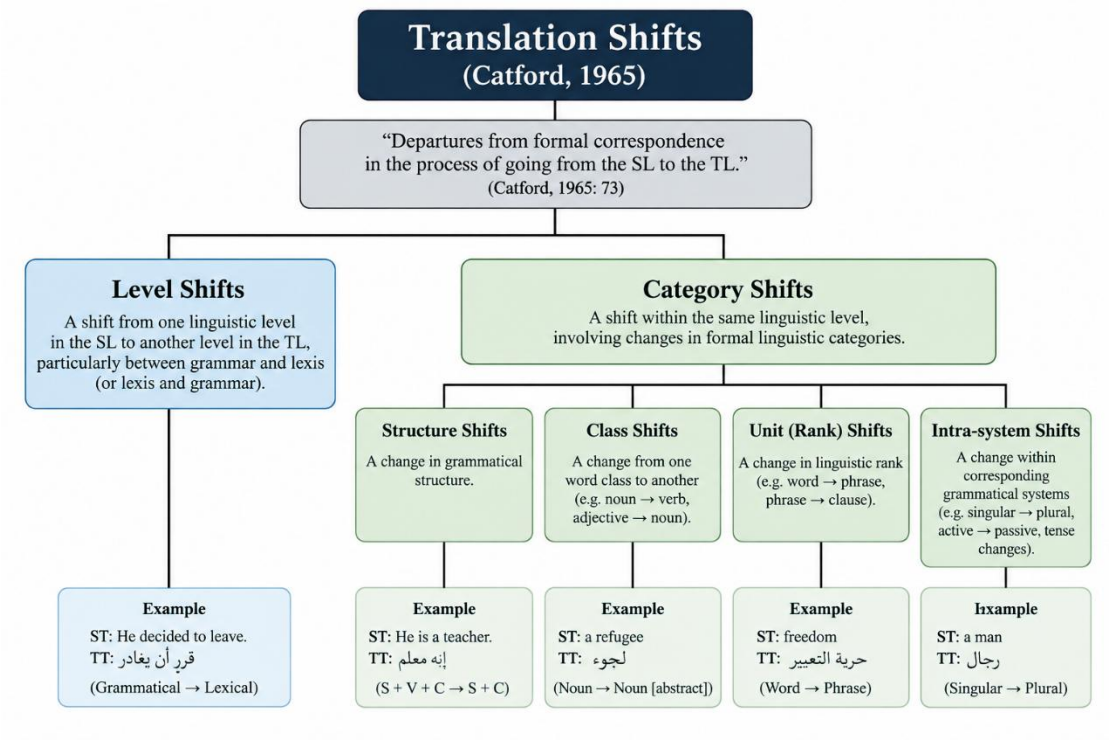


Figure 1. Catford's (1965) Framework of Translation Shifts

This taxonomy provides the conceptual and classificatory basis for the analysis of English–Arabic textual correspondences undertaken in the study.

3. Literature Review

Research on translation shifts recognizes that translation equivalence does not necessarily entail formal correspondence between source- and target-language forms (Catford, 1965; Chesterman, 2017; Hatim & Munday, 2019). Catford's (1965) account offered an early systematic linguistic taxonomy for describing transformations arising when source-language structures are reconstructed through target-language resources. Although subsequent scholarship has extended equivalence beyond structural correspondence to textual, pragmatic, and functional relations (Baker & Jones, 2025; Hatim & Munday, 2019; Munday et al., 2026), shift analysis retains descriptive value by locating observable source–target differences linguistically. This is particularly relevant to structurally divergent language pairs, where equivalence may require changes in grammatical configuration, class, rank, or systemic selection. However, studies often identify and enumerate individual shift categories rather than examine their collective operation within particular discourses. Accordingly, Catford's framework gains analytical value when taxonomic classification is extended to explain how formally distinct realizations reconstruct meaning across linguistic systems and discourse contexts.

Within English–Arabic translation research, Catford's taxonomy has proved productive because structural differences between the languages frequently necessitate departures from formal correspondence. Al-Kufaishi (2011) shows that obligatory shifts may involve grammatical–lexical, lexical–grammatical, and structural transformations arising from systemic differences. Similarly, Hijjo and Kadhim (2017) document recurrent grammatical shifts in English–Arabic news translation. Examining a BBC news text and its Arabic translation, Almutairi et al. (2020) identified all four category-shift types, with structure shifts predominating through word-order changes and active–passive or nominal–verbal restructuring. Literary applications further demonstrate the continuing relevance of Catford's model for describing English–Arabic structural transformations (Alshahrani et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies establish the applicability of shift analysis across genres while indicating its discourse

sensitivity: findings from literary or journalistic translation cannot automatically account for institutional texts governed by different communicative and semantic constraints.

This genre distinction is especially significant in legal and institutional translation, which negotiates linguistic differences alongside meanings embedded in normative and institutionally constrained discourse (Cao, 2007; Šarčević, 1997). Formal restructuring is therefore consequential where grammatical differences must be accommodated without compromising rights, obligations, prohibitions, or legal relations. Catfordian studies provide empirical evidence of this interaction. Altwaijri (2019), examining the English–Arabic translation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, identified shifts throughout the legal text and assessed their frequency and necessity. Similarly, Nuirat and Zayed (2023), analyzing UN Resolution 181, identified level and category shifts involving word order, structure, and grammar–lexis relations, attributing many to systemic English–Arabic differences. While extending Catfordian analysis beyond literary and media discourse, these studies focus on particular UN instruments, leaving scope to determine whether comparable shift patterns characterize other forms of international rights discourse.

The UDHR has attracted translation scholarship because its international normative function foregrounds equivalence across linguistic versions. Bencherif (2012), examining the Arabic UDHR, situated legal equivalence within debates over formal, textual, dynamic, and functional equivalence. More recently, Bencherif and Boudjerida (2026) investigated theoretical and practical dimensions of equivalence in the Arabic UDHR, confirming the Declaration's continuing relevance to cross-linguistic correspondence. Broader legal-translation scholarship similarly emphasizes difficulties in maintaining legal meaning across divergent languages and legal cultures (Cao, 2007; Šarčević, 1997). This literature establishes the UDHR as a productive site for examining tensions between linguistic difference and semantic or normative continuity. However, its emphasis on equivalence leaves the grammatical mechanisms underlying formally different English and Arabic expressions insufficiently specified. Shift analysis can complement equivalence-oriented approaches by identifying where formal correspondence is disrupted and systematically classifying the linguistic forms through which such disruption occurs across the two language systems.

Taken together, previous research establishes three tendencies. First, Catford's taxonomy remains applicable to English–Arabic translation, revealing recurrent formal restructuring across grammatically divergent texts (Al-Kufaishi, 2011; Almutairi et al., 2020). Second, its applicability extends to legal and institutional discourse, including UN instruments (Altwaijri, 2019; Nuirat & Zayed, 2023). Third, research on the Arabic UDHR foregrounds equivalence in negotiating legal meaning across languages (Bencherif, 2012; Bencherif & Boudjerida, 2026). However, these strands have not been integrated into a systematic account of how equivalence is formally realized across the English and Arabic UDHR through Catfordian shifts. Specifically, UDHR research lacks an integrated analysis encompassing level shifts and the four category shifts: structure, class, unit, and intra-system. The present study addresses this gap by identifying and classifying these mechanisms across corresponding English–Arabic segments, thereby specifying how linguistic differences are negotiated within an authoritative international human-rights text.

4. Methodology

The dataset comprises the English and Arabic versions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), retrieved from the official website of the United Nations (UN). The English version, available at https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights, was designated as the source text (ST), while the corresponding Arabic version, available at https://www.un.org/ar/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights, was treated as the target text (TT). The use of UN-hosted versions ensures institutional provenance and textual authenticity and, importantly, confines the analysis to officially disseminated versions rather than unofficial translations or secondary reproductions.

The UDHR was selected on linguistic and methodological grounds. As a multilingual international instrument, it provides closely corresponding texts requiring semantic and normative consistency. Its English and Arabic versions therefore enable examination of how equivalence is maintained through formally non-corresponding structures. Their typological and grammatical differences further provide a productive basis for operationalizing Catford's (1965) taxonomy of translation shifts.

The dataset comprises the complete UDHR. Corresponding English and Arabic segments were aligned and contrastively analyzed, with the English ST serving as the basis for identifying departures from formal correspondence in the Arabic TT. Each instance was coded according to Catford's (1965) framework as a level or category shift, with category shifts further classified as structure, class, unit (rank), or intra-system shifts.

5. Analysis

5.1. Level Shifts

Level shifts were examined in response to RQ1, which asks how meanings encoded at the grammatical level in the English source text (ST) are realized lexically in the Arabic target text (TT), or vice versa. In Catford's (1965) framework, level shift is restricted to movement between grammar and lexis. Accordingly, differences that merely involve alternative grammatical structures were not classified as level shifts. The clearest instances in the UDHR concern English modal auxiliaries, particularly *shall*, *may*, and *can*, whose modal meanings are in several contexts realized through independent lexical predicates in Arabic. The recurrent direction in the identified cases is therefore grammar-to-lexis rather than lexis-to-grammar.

Table 1. Selected Level Shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR

Location	English ST	Arabic TT	Realization of level shift
Article 2	"no distinction shall be made"	"لا يجوز التمييز"	grammatical "shall" → lexical predicate "يجوز"
Article 14(2)	"This right may not be invoked"	"لا يمكن التذرع بهذا الحق"	grammatical "may" → lexical predicate "يمكن"
Article 20(2)	"No one may be compelled to belong to an association"	"لا يجوز إرغام أحدٍ على الانتماء إلى جمعية ما"	grammatical "may" → lexical predicate "يجوز"
Article 26(1)	"Education shall be free"	"يجب أن يُوفَّر التعليمُ مجَّانًا"	grammatical "shall" → lexical predicate "يجب"
Article 28	"the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized"	"يمكن أن تتحقق فيه الحقوق والحريات المنصوص عليها في هذا الإعلان بالكامل"	grammatical "can" → lexical predicate "يمكن"
Article 30	"Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted"	"ليس في هذا الإعلان أيٌّ نصّ يجوز تأويله"	grammatical "may" → lexical predicate "يجوز"

A prominent pattern concerns the lexical realization of deontic modality. In Article 2, the English provision "no distinction shall be made" employs the modal auxiliary "shall" as part of the grammatical system of modality. The Arabic version, "لا يجوز التمييز," realizes the prohibition through the lexical verb "يجوز," negated by "لا." A comparable shift occurs in Article 20(2), where "No one may be compelled to belong to an association" is rendered as "لا يجوز إرغام أحدٍ على الانتماء إلى جمعية ما." Here, the English modal "may," within a negative modal construction, corresponds to the lexical predicate "يجوز" in Arabic. Article 30 exhibits the same correspondence: "Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted" is rendered through " ليس في هذا الإعلان أيٌّ نصّ يجوز تأويله." Across these instances, modal meaning that is carried by the English auxiliary system is lexicalized through the Arabic verb "يجوز," while negation supplies the prohibitive value of the construction.

An especially clear instance of grammar-to-lexis shift occurs in Article 26(1). The English statement "Education shall be free" encodes normative force through the grammatical modal "shall," whereas the Arabic "يجب أن يُوفَّر التعليمُ مجَّانًا" expresses that force explicitly through the lexical verb "يجب." The English grammatical category of modality is thus not reproduced by an Arabic modal auxiliary; instead, obligation is lexicalized through a verb whose lexical meaning itself conveys necessity or obligation. Although the grammatical configuration of the clause also changes, the relevant level shift specifically concerns the transfer of modal meaning from English grammar to Arabic lexis. This distinction is important because the accompanying structural reorganization should not itself be taken as evidence of a level shift.

A related pattern occurs with possibility. Article 14(2) renders "This right may not be invoked" as " لا يمكن التذرع بهذا الحق," while Article 28 translates "the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized" as " يمكن أن تتحقق فيه الحقوق والحريات المنصوص عليها في هذا الإعلان بالكامل." In both cases, the modal auxiliaries "may" and "can" belong to the English grammatical system of modality, whereas the corresponding possibility is expressed through the Arabic lexical verb "يمكن." The shift therefore lies specifically in the linguistic level at which possibility is encoded: grammatical in the English ST and lexical in the Arabic TT.

Taken together, the secure instances indicate a recurrent grammar-to-lexis pattern in the realization of modality. English frequently encodes obligation, prohibition, permission, and possibility through the grammatical modal system, whereas the Arabic UDHR in the examples identified above employs lexical predicates such as "يجوز," "يجب," and "يمكن." The semantic values at issue are consequently retained while the linguistic level through which they are encoded changes. This pattern is particularly significant in the UDHR because modality contributes directly to the articulation of permissions, prohibitions, possibilities, and normative requirements. The findings therefore illustrate Catford's (1965) central conception of level shift: textual equivalence may be achieved even where a meaning realized grammatically in the source language is reconstructed lexically in the target language.

5.2 Category Shift

Category shifts constitute the second major type of translation shift in Catford's (1965) framework and comprise structure, class, unit, and intra-system shifts. Unlike level shifts, which involve movement between grammar and lexis, category shifts occur between corresponding grammatical categories in the source and target languages. The English and Arabic versions of the UDHR were therefore examined for departures involving constituent structure, grammatical class, unit or rank, and selections within approximately corresponding linguistic systems. The first of these categories, structure shift, is examined below.

5.2.1. Structure Shifts

In response to RQ2, structure shifts were identified where the Arabic translation reconfigures the grammatical organization of corresponding English structures. Such shifts are particularly evident where English constructions based on a particular constituent sequence or clause pattern are reconstructed according to Arabic syntactic organization. The analysis revealed several recurrent configurations, including changes between nominal and verbal clause organization, restructuring of passive constructions, and reorganization of constituent relations within clauses and phrases.

Table 2. Selected Structure Shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR

Location	English ST	Arabic TT	Structural reconfiguration
Article 1	"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"	"يولد جميع الناس أحراراً ومتساوين في الكرامة والحقوق"	Subject-initial English clause → verb-initial Arabic clause
Article 3	"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person"	"لكلّ فرد الحقُّ في الحياة والحرّية وفي الأمان على شخصه"	Subject + verb + object structure → prepositional predicate + nominal constituent
Article 6	"Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law"	"لكلّ إنسان، في كلّ مكان، الحقُّ بأن يُعترَف له بالشخصية القانونية"	Possessive verbal construction → prepositional/nominal construction
Article 7	"All are equal before the law"	"الناسُ جميعًا سواءٌ أمام القانون"	Copular adjectival structure → verbless nominal structure
Article 10	"everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal"	"لكلّ إنسان، على قدم المساواة التامة مع الآخرين، الحقُّ في أن تَنظر قضيتَه محكمةٌ مستقلّةٌ ومحايدةٌ، نظرًا مُنصفًا وعلنيًّا"	English entitlement predication → Arabic possessive-right construction with an embedded verbal clause
Article 17(1)	"Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others"	"لكلّ فرد حقٌّ في التملُّك، بمفرده أو بالاشتراك مع غيره"	Subject + 'has' + object structure → prepositional predicate + nominal subject structure
Article 22	"Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security"	"لكلّ شخص، بوصفه عضوًا في المجتمع، حقٌّ في الضمان الاجتماعي"	English possessive verbal structure → Arabic prepositional/nominal structure
Article 24	"Everyone has the right to rest and leisure"	"لكلّ شخص حقٌّ في الراحة وأوقات الفراغ"	English subject + 'has' + object → Arabic prepositional predicate + nominal subject

A recurrent structure shift is found in the translation of the English "Everyone has the right to …" construction. English repeatedly organizes the proposition according to the pattern Subject + Verb + Object, as in "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" in Article 3. The Arabic version, "لكلّ فرد الحقُّ في الحياة والحرّية وفي الأمان على شخصه," restructures this relation through an initial prepositional phrase, "لكلّ فرد," followed by the nominal constituent "الحقُّ." The same structural pattern recurs in Article 17(1), where "Everyone has the right to own property" corresponds to "لكلّ فرد حقٌّ في التملُّك," in Article 22, where "Everyone … has the right to social security" corresponds to "لكلّ شخص … حقٌّ في الضمان الاجتماعي," and in Article 24, where "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure" is rendered as "لكلّ شخص حقٌّ في الراحة وأوقات الفراغ." The recurrent correspondence therefore represents a systematic reconfiguration of constituent relations rather than an isolated difference in word order: the English verbal possessive pattern built around "has" is reconstructed as an Arabic prepositional–nominal configuration.

A further structure shift is evident in Article 1. The English "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" begins with the grammatical subject "All human beings," followed by the verbal complex "are born." Its Arabic equivalent, "يولد جميع الناس أحراراً ومتساوين في الكرامة والحقوق," begins instead with the verb "يولد," followed by "جميع الناس." The corresponding proposition is thus reorganized from an English subject-initial configuration to an Arabic verb-initial configuration. The semantic

relation between the participants and the process remains identifiable, but the constituent arrangement through which that relation is expressed changes.

Article 7 provides another type of structural reconfiguration. The English statement "All are equal before the law" employs the copular verb "are" to connect the subject "All" with the predicative adjective "equal." The Arabic "الناسُ جميعًا سواءٌ أمام القانون" is organized as a verbless nominal clause, with "الناسُ جميعًا" followed by the predicate "سواءٌ." The shift consequently involves a change from an English copular structure to an Arabic nominal structure without an overt copular verb in the present tense. This represents a structural difference in the grammatical organization of predication rather than merely the omission of an individual lexical item.

More extensive restructuring occurs in Article 10. The English segment "everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal" organizes the right through the predication "is entitled," followed by the complement "to a fair and public hearing" and the agentive phrase "by an independent and impartial tribunal." The Arabic version, "لكلّ إنسان، على قدم المساواة التامة مع الآخرين، الحقُّ في أن تَنظر قضيتَه محكمةٌ مستقلّةٌ ومحايدةٌ، نظرًا مُنصفًا وعلنيًّا," reorganizes the proposition around the possessive-right construction "الحقُّ... لكلّ إنسان," followed by the embedded verbal clause "أن تَنظر قضيتَه محكمةٌ مستقلّةٌ ومحايدةٌ." The tribunal that occurs within the English "by"-phrase is consequently integrated into the Arabic verbal clause as the grammatical subject of "تَنظر." This constitutes a substantial restructuring of constituent relations while preserving the central proposition concerning entitlement to an independent, impartial, fair, and public hearing.

The examples demonstrate that structure shifts in the Arabic UDHR are not reducible to arbitrary changes in linear word order. Rather, they involve systematic reorganization of grammatical relations and constituent configurations, particularly where recurrent English structures do not correspond formally to preferred Arabic patterns. The repeated restructuring of "Everyone has the right to …" as "لكلّ شخص/فرد ...حقٌّ في ...," the movement from subject-initial to verb-initial organization in "All human beings are born …" / "... يولد جميع الناس," and the replacement of the English copular configuration in "All are equal before the law" by the Arabic nominal construction "الناسُ جميعًا سواءٌ أمام القانون" (See Table 2) illustrate distinct manifestations of structural non-correspondence. These findings answer RQ2 by showing that structure shifts in the Arabic UDHR reconfigure the grammatical organization of corresponding English propositions while largely retaining their propositional and normative content.

5.2.2. Class Shifts

Class shifts were examined in response to RQ3 and were identified only where an English source-text item is represented by an Arabic equivalent belonging to a different grammatical class. Unlike structure shifts, these instances concern a change in the grammatical class of the corresponding elements rather than their arrangement within the clause. Several clear noun–verb and adjective–noun correspondences were identified.

Table 3. Selected Class Shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR

Location	English ST	Arabic TT	Class shift
Article 6	"the right to recognition"	"الحقُّ بأن يُعترَف له"	noun "recognition" → verb "يُعترَف"
Article 8	"an effective remedy"	"لإنصافه الفعلي"	noun "remedy" → verbal noun "إنصاف"; adjective "effective" → adjective "الفعلي"
Article 14(1)	"to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum"	"التماس ملجأ في بلدان أخرى والتمتُّع به"	verbs "seek/enjoy" → verbal nouns "التماس/التمتُّع"
Article 17(1)	"to own property"	"في التملُّك"	verb "own" → verbal noun "التملُّك"
Article 19	"to seek, receive and impart information and ideas"	"في التماس الأنباء والأفكار وتلقّيها ونقلها"	verbs "seek/receive/impart" → verbal nouns "التماس/تلقّي/نقل"
Article 27(1)	"to participate freely"	"المشاركة الحرّة"	adverb "freely" → adjective "الحرّة"

A recurrent class shift involves English verbs being realized through Arabic verbal nouns (maṣdars). In Article 14(1), "to seek and to enjoy … asylum" corresponds to "التماس ملجأ ...والتمتُّع به," shifting the English verbs "seek" and "enjoy" to the nominal forms "التماس" and "التمتُّع." The same tendency appears in Article 17(1), where "to own property" is rendered as "في التملُّك," and in Article 19, where "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas" corresponds to "في التماس الأنباء والأفكار وتلقّيها ونقلها."

These instances constitute class shifts because the processes expressed through English verbs are reconstrued through Arabic nominal forms while retaining their basic semantic content.

The reverse direction occurs in Article 6. The English nominalization "recognition" in "the right to recognition" is realized verbally in "الحقُّ بأن يُعترَف له," producing a noun-to-verb shift. Class shifting is therefore not exclusively unidirectional. A further type occurs in Article 27(1), where the English adverb "freely" in "to participate freely" corresponds to the Arabic adjective "الحرّة" modifying "المشاركة." Here, manner expressed adverbially in English becomes an adjectival property of the nominalized activity in Arabic.

Overall, the findings answer RQ3 by showing that class shifts occur principally through redistribution between verbal and nominal expression, with an additional adverb-to-adjective pattern. The recurrent use of Arabic maṣdars is particularly salient, allowing processes expressed verbally in English to be represented nominally without substantial alteration of their propositional meaning.

5.2.3. Unit (Rank) Shifts

Unit shifts were examined in response to RQ4 and were identified where corresponding English and Arabic elements are realized at different grammatical ranks. Following Catford (1965), the classification was restricted to changes of rank, such as word-to-group or group-to-word correspondences; differences involving only grammatical class or constituent arrangement were excluded. The data reveal several defensible instances in which a compact English lexical unit is expanded into an Arabic group, or an English group is condensed into a single Arabic lexical unit.

Table 4. Selected Unit (Rank) Shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR

Location	English ST	Arabic TT	Unit (rank) shift
Article 2	"non-self-governing"	"غير متمتّع بالحكم الذاتي"	word → adjectival group
Article 10	"in full equality"	"على قدم المساواة التامة مع الآخرين"	prepositional group → expanded prepositional group (not counted as a rank shift)
Article 20(2)	"association"	"جمعية ما"	word → nominal group
Article 21(1)	"freely chosen representatives"	"ممثّلين يُختارون في حرّية"	nominal group → noun + relative clause
Article 23(3)	"supplemented"	"تُستكمَل ...بوسائل أخرى"	word → verbal group with complement; expansion across rank
Article 29(2)	"requirements of morality"	"مقتضيات الفضيلة"	word → nominal/genitive group

Unit shifts were identified only where the English and Arabic correspondences involve movement between different grammatical ranks. The analysis therefore distinguishes genuine rank shifts from expansions or structural modifications occurring within the same rank. The clearest tendency is toward expansion, whereby a relatively compact English unit is realized through a higher-ranking Arabic construction.

In Article 2, the single-word form "non-self-governing" is realized as the adjectival group "غير متمتّع بالحكم الذاتي," representing a word-to-group shift. A similar expansion occurs in Article 20(2), where the single noun "association" corresponds to the nominal group "جمعية ما." Article 23(3) likewise exhibits expansion in the correspondence between "supplemented" and "تُستكمَل ... بوسائل أخرى," where the meaning associated with the English word is distributed across a more elaborate Arabic verbal construction.

A particularly salient rank shift occurs in Article 21(1). The English nominal group "freely chosen representatives" corresponds to "ممثّلين يُختارون في حرّية," in which part of the modification is reconstructed through the relative clause " يُختارون في حرّية." The shift consequently involves movement from modification contained within a nominal group to modification realized clausally. This illustrates how information compressed within an English group may be redistributed across a higher grammatical rank in Arabic.

Importantly, formal expansion was not automatically treated as unit shift. In Article 10, "in full equality" and " على قدم المساواة التامة مع الآخرين" remain prepositional groups despite the greater elaboration of the Arabic expression. Overall, RQ4 is answered by showing that genuine unit shifts occur when textual equivalence entails redistribution across grammatical ranks, with the identified instances predominantly involving upward movement from compact English units to more elaborated Arabic groups or clauses.

5.2.4. Intra-system Shifts

Intra-system shifts were identified where English and Arabic possess approximately corresponding grammatical systems but select different terms within those systems. Following Catford (1965), the relevant domains potentially include number, definiteness, and tense/aspect**.** These must be distinguished from voice alternations: although English and Arabic both distinguish active and passive voice, active–passive changes affect clause configuration and are therefore treated as structure shifts**,** not intra-system shifts. In the present corpus, the securely identifiable intra-system shifts in Table 5 concern number selection. No sufficiently recurrent and unambiguous shifts in definiteness or tense/aspect were established to warrant their inclusion in the table.

Table 5. Intra-system Shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR

Location	English ST	Arabic TT	Selection
Article 4	"in all their forms"	"بجميع صورهما"	plural → dual
Article 16(1)	"Men and women of full age"	"للرجل والمرأة، متى أدركا سنَّ البلوغ"	plural → generic singular
Article 21(2)	"public service"	"الوظائف العامَّة"	singular/non-count → plural
Article 26(1)	"the elementary and fundamental stages"	"مرحلتيه الابتدائية والأساسية"	plural → dual

The clearest number shifts involve differences between singular and plural selection. Article 4 provides a plural-to-dual intra-system shift. In the English expression "in all their forms," the two antecedents are accommodated within the plural number system, since English lacks a grammatical dual category. Arabic, by contrast, selects the dedicated dual form in "بجميع صورهما," where the suffix "ـهما" explicitly refers to the two antecedents. The shift therefore reflects different selections within the number systems available to the two languages: English employs plural reference where Arabic grammaticalizes the same two-member reference through the dual. This constitutes an intra-system shift because the referential meaning remains constant while its grammatical number realization changes.

In Article 16(1), the English plural "Men and women of full age" corresponds to the generic singular " للرجل والمرأة، متى أدركا سنَّ البلوغ." English selects plural forms to express the two general classes, whereas Arabic employs singular generic nouns. The change is grammatical rather than referential: "الرجل والمرأة" retains the general reference to men and women expressed by the English plurals. Article 21(2) exhibits the opposite direction. The English non-count expression "public service" corresponds to the plural "الوظائف العامَّة." Arabic therefore selects a plural count expression where English conceptualizes public service as a singular institutional domain.

Article 26(1) illustrates a different number-system relation. English places the two coordinated items in the plural in "the elementary and fundamental stages," whereas Arabic explicitly selects the dual in "مرحلتيه الابتدائية والأساسية." Because English has no productive grammatical dual corresponding to Arabic dual morphology, the same two referents are distributed differently across the respective number systems. This case demonstrates the relevance of language-specific system organization to intra-system analysis.

Overall, the intra-system shifts demonstrate that equivalent reference is preserved despite different grammatical selections within the English and Arabic number systems.

6. Discussion

6.1. RQ1: Level Shifts and the Lexical Reconstruction of Grammatical Modality

The findings for RQ1 reveal that level shifting in the English–Arabic UDHR is principally manifested in the lexical reconstruction of meanings encoded through English grammatical modality. As demonstrated in Section 5.1, the clearest correspondences involve English modal auxiliaries such as "shall," "may," and "can" and Arabic predicates such as "يجوز" "يجب،" and "يمكن." The significance of this pattern extends beyond the formal replacement of one linguistic item by another. From a Catfordian perspective, it demonstrates that textual equivalence can be maintained despite a change in the linguistic level at which a particular meaning is realized. Thus, RQ1 can be answered by establishing that the attested level shifts operate predominantly from grammar in the English ST to lexis in the Arabic TT, particularly in the expression of obligation, prohibition, permission, and possibility.

This tendency is especially consequential in the UDHR because modality is integral to the document's normative discourse. The correspondence between "Education shall be free" (Article 26 (1)) and "يجب أن يُوفَّر التعليمُ مجَّانًا" for example, does not merely replace the English "shall" with the Arabic "يجب"; rather, it reconstructs the provision's obligatory force through a different linguistic resource. Similarly, the correspondences between "No one may be compelled" (Article 20 (2)) and " لا يجوز إرغام أحدٍ," and between "the rights and freedoms … can be fully realized" (Article 28) and "يمكن أن تتحقق فيه الحقوق والحريات … بالكامل"

show that prohibitive and possibility meanings remain recoverable despite the shift in their mode of encoding. The findings therefore suggest that formal non-correspondence at the level of realization does not necessarily entail a change in the normative value of the proposition. Instead, grammatical meanings in the ST are re-encoded through lexical resources available in the TT.

The predominance of grammar-to-lexis shifts is also explicable in relation to the contrasting linguistic resources of English and Arabic. English possesses a highly grammaticalized system of modal auxiliaries through which distinctions of obligation, permission, possibility, and related meanings can be incorporated directly into the verbal construction. The Arabic translation frequently realizes comparable meanings through independent predicates followed by verbal or clausal complements. Consequently, correspondences such as "shall"–"يجب," "may"–"يجوز," and "can"–"يمكن" should not be interpreted simply as lexical substitutions. Rather, they reflect a redistribution of semantic information across different linguistic levels. This finding supports Catford's (1965) contention that translation equivalence is not dependent upon formal correspondence and that a feature associated with grammar in one language may find its translational realization in the lexis of another.

The findings are broadly compatible with previous Catfordian research on English–Arabic translation, which has demonstrated that systemic differences between the two languages can motivate departures from formal correspondence (Al-Kufaishi, 2011; Almutairi et al., 2020). They also complement studies applying Catford's framework to institutional and United Nations discourse, where structural and systemic differences require linguistic reconfiguration in the Arabic target text (Altwaijri, 2019; Nuirat & Zayed, 2023). The present findings, however, sharpen this observation in relation to the UDHR by locating one recurrent site of such reconfiguration specifically in modal meaning. In this rights-based text, the shift between grammatical and lexical realization operates within propositions whose legal and normative force must remain sufficiently stable across languages.

Accordingly, the answer to RQ1 is not simply that level shifts occur between the English and Arabic versions of the UDHR. More specifically, the evidence examined in Section 5.1 indicates that they are realized predominantly through a grammar-to-lexis movement in modality, whereby meanings encoded by English modal auxiliaries are reconstructed through Arabic lexical predicates. This finding illustrates the distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence at the core of Catford's model: the linguistic level of realization may change while the relevant modal meaning is preserved. In the context of the UDHR, such shifts demonstrate how English–Arabic translation accommodates systemic linguistic differences while maintaining the obligations, prohibitions, permissions, and possibilities through which human rights are normatively articulated.

6.2. RQ2: From English Possessive and Copular Patterns to Arabic Rights-Conferring Structures

The findings for RQ2 show that the most salient structure shift is the recurrent replacement of the English verbal possessive pattern "Everyone has the right to …" by the Arabic prepositional–nominal pattern "لكلّ فرد/شخص … حقٌّ في …" in Articles 3, 17(1), 22, and 24. Its recurrence is analytically significant: the same structural solution is employed across provisions dealing with different rights, including life and security (Article 3), property (Article 17(1)), social security (Article 22), and rest and leisure (Article 24). The pattern can therefore be interpreted as a systematic means of construing entitlement in the Arabic TT. English presents the individual as grammatical subject and possession of the right through "has," whereas Arabic foregrounds entitlement through the initial prepositional construction "لـ" and subsequently identifies the right. The shift consequently changes the grammatical construal of entitlement without changing its fundamental participant relation: the individual remains the beneficiary or holder of the right. This recurrent correspondence provides particularly strong evidence for Catford's (1965) distinction between textual equivalence and formal correspondence, since equivalence is maintained through a consistently different grammatical configuration.

A second finding concerns the different grammatical organization of predication, represented by Articles 1 and 7. In Article 1, the movement from "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" to "يولد جميع الناس أحراراً ومتساوين في الكرامة والحقوق" reflects the availability of verb-initial organization in Arabic, whereas Article 7, "All are equal before the law" / "الناسُ جميعًا سواءٌ أمام القانون," reflects the absence of an overt present-tense copula in the corresponding Arabic nominal clause. These cases are important because they show that structure shifts do not arise from a single translational operation. Rather, they are conditioned by different points of structural non-correspondence between English and Arabic. The former concerns constituent ordering within the clause, while the latter concerns the grammatical realization of predication itself. Both nevertheless produce the same broader result: the Arabic translation preserves the propositional relation while dispensing with the formal organization through which English expresses it.

The restructuring observed in Article 10 is more extensive and therefore particularly revealing. Unlike the relatively regular transformations above, the English entitlement construction "everyone is entitled … to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal" is reconstructed through "لكلّ إنسان … الحقُّ في أن تَنظر قضيتُه محكمةٌ مستقلَّةٌ ومحايدةٌ." The significance of this shift lies in the redistribution of grammatical functions: what appears in English within the "by"-phrase is repositioned as the grammatical subject of "تَنظر" in the Arabic embedded clause. Nevertheless, the essential semantic relations remain intact: an individual possesses a right, a judicial hearing is required, and that hearing is to be conducted by an independent and impartial tribunal. Article 10 therefore demonstrates that textual equivalence can survive substantial structural reorganization, provided that the participant relations constituting the normative proposition are preserved.

Taken together, these three patterns refine the answer to RQ2. Structure shifts in the UDHR range from recurrent constructional substitution (Articles 3, 17(1), 22, and 24), through language-system-driven differences in clause organization

(Articles 1 and 7), to more extensive redistribution of grammatical functions (Article 10). This finding is compatible with previous English–Arabic Catfordian studies reporting structure shifts as a consequence of grammatical non-correspondence between the two languages (Al-Kufaishi, 2011; Almutairi et al., 2020), as well as their occurrence in UN and institutional translation (Altwaijri, 2019; Nuirat & Zayed, 2023). The present results, however, show specifically what this structural accommodation accomplishes in the UDHR: it allows propositions formulated through English syntactic resources to be reconstructed through Arabic grammatical patterns while retaining the relations of entitlement, equality, agency, and judicial protection on which their rights-based meaning depends.

Accordingly, RQ2 is answered not merely by establishing that English structures are reorganized in Arabic, but by showing which recurrent forms that reorganization takes and what remains stable through it. The repeated "Everyone has the right to …" → "لكلّ فرد/شخص … حقٌّ في …" correspondence is the dominant pattern identified in Section 5.2.1, while Articles 1 and 7 demonstrate system-related restructuring of predication and Article 10 demonstrates a more complex redistribution of grammatical relations. Across these configurations, formal structure changes but the central participant and propositional relations are retained. Structure shift therefore emerges in the UDHR as a principal mechanism through which textual equivalence is achieved precisely in the absence of structural formal correspondence.

6.3. RQ3: Grammatical Recategorization as a Resource for Textual Equivalence

The findings for RQ3 suggest that class shift functions less as lexical replacement than as a mechanism for adapting the conceptual content of the ST to the grammatical organization of Arabic. Most notably, the concentration of verbal–nominal recategorization in Articles 14(1), 17(1), and 19 indicates a tendency to construe actions as nominalized processes. In the context of the UDHR, this has an important textual consequence: activities such as seeking, owning, receiving, and imparting can be incorporated into Arabic formulations of rights as entities or processes to which entitlement attaches. Nominalization therefore contributes to the compact and abstract formulation characteristic of institutional rights discourse.

The reverse movement identified in Article 6 is equally informative because it demonstrates that the Arabic TT does not simply exhibit a general preference for nominalization. Instead, grammatical class appears responsive to the requirements of the particular target construction. This bidirectionality strengthens a Catfordian interpretation: class shift is motivated by the search for textual equivalence within the grammatical possibilities of the TL rather than by systematic replacement of one English class with another. Similarly, the adverb-to-adjective recategorization in Article 27(1) shows that a shift affecting the grammatical realization of an activity can trigger corresponding adjustments in the way its qualities are expressed.

These findings refine previous observations that grammatical non-correspondence is a recurrent feature of English–Arabic translation (Al-Kufaishi, 2011; Almutairi et al., 2020). In the UDHR, class shifts perform a more specific function: they allow rights and their associated actions to be integrated into grammatically coherent Arabic formulations without altering their essential normative scope. RQ3 therefore demonstrates that grammatical class is variable across the two texts, whereas the semantic relation underlying the right remains comparatively stable. This supports Catford's (1965) distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence by showing that preservation of meaning may depend precisely on grammatical recategorization rather than formal class matching.

6.4. RQ4: Rank Expansion and the Redistribution of Meaning

The findings for RQ4 demonstrate that unit shifts in the Arabic UDHR predominantly involve upward movement in grammatical rank, whereby meanings compressed within relatively compact English units are redistributed across larger Arabic grammatical constructions. This tendency suggests that rank expansion functions as a means of preserving textual equivalence when direct realization at the corresponding rank would not provide an equally natural or sufficiently explicit Arabic formulation.
The pattern identified in Articles 2, 20(2), and 23(3) shows that English lexical compression may be unpacked through Arabic groups containing additional grammatical or semantic specification. More significantly, Article 21(1) demonstrates that such redistribution may extend beyond the group to the clausal rank. The shift therefore concerns not simply greater target-text length, but a reorganization of the grammatical level at which information is encoded. In this respect, the findings support Catford's (1965) conception of unit shift as a departure from formal correspondence in rank.
Overall, RQ4 demonstrates that unit shifts function as a selective strategy of rank redistribution, enabling meanings compressed in English to be realized through higher-ranking Arabic units while preserving textual equivalence.

6.5. RQ5: Number Selection and Referential Equivalence

The findings for RQ5 indicate that intra-system shifts arise from differences in how English and Arabic grammaticalize number while maintaining equivalent reference. The concentration of shifts in the number system reflects an important systemic contrast: Arabic can exploit singular, plural, and dual distinctions more explicitly than English. Consequently, the shifts in Articles 4, 16(1), 21(2), and 26(1) represent alternative grammatical construals of essentially unchanged referents rather than changes in propositional meaning. Particularly significant is the Arabic dual, which permits more precise grammatical encoding of two-

member reference. These findings exemplify Catford's (1965) intra-system shift by demonstrating that textual equivalence can coexist with different selections within corresponding grammatical systems.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined translation shifts in the English–Arabic UDHR through Catford's (1965) distinction between level and category shifts. The findings demonstrate that equivalence between the two texts is frequently maintained through systematic linguistic restructuring rather than formal correspondence. Level shifts were principally manifested through the lexical reconstruction of English grammatical modality in Arabic, particularly in expressions of obligation, prohibition, and possibility.

Category shifts revealed several complementary patterns. Structure shifts involved the reconfiguration of constituent relations and clause organization, particularly in the reconstruction of English verbal and copular patterns through Arabic syntactic configurations. Class shifts occurred primarily through verbal–nominal recategorization, with the recurrent use of Arabic maṣdars representing a salient pattern. Unit shifts predominantly involved upward rank movement, whereby meanings compressed within English words or groups were redistributed across larger Arabic grammatical units. Intra-system shifts were concentrated in number selection, particularly singular–plural and plural–dual correspondences, while equivalent reference was maintained.

Taken together, the findings show that the English–Arabic UDHR achieves textual equivalence through multiple forms of systematic linguistic adjustment. Formal non-correspondence therefore does not necessarily compromise semantic or normative stability; rather, translation shifts enable meanings to be reconstructed through the grammatical and lexical resources of Arabic while preserving the essential rights, obligations, and propositions articulated in the English text.

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