ILCC Copyright © 2026, authors http://dx.doi.org/10.21622/ILCC.2026.06.2.2342

A Thematic-Semantic TQA of Water-related Terms in Six Qur'an Translations: House's Model and Catford's Shifts

Hossameldin Abdelmoez Abdelsamad Eid[1,2], Shaker Rizq[3], Shaymaa Taher Sallam[3], Ahmed Magdy Eldesoky[1] and Zainab Moamen[3]

[1]College of Language and Communication, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Egypt.
[2]Al Yamamah University, Interlink Language Institutes, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
[3]uez University, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, SEgypt.

E-Mails: **eid.hossameldin@gmail.com, shaker115@yahoo.com, shaymaa.sallam@arts.suezuni.edu.eg, ahmedmagdy.et@gmail.com, zainabmoamen@gmail.com**

Received on: 26 July 2026 Accepted on: 17 September 2026 Published on: 06 Octo\ber 2026

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the translation quality of Qur'anic water-related terms across six English translations using a multidimensional framework combining Juliane House's (2015) Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) model and J.C. Catford's (1965) translation shift theory as a parallel analytical layer. The study assumes that a translator's purpose and professional background influence the types of translation errors that occur, as well as the preservation of the source text's register. A dataset of 61 verses covering four thematic categories—Provision, Creation, Purification, Paradise—was qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed against Tafsir interpretive references from Ibn Kathir (1999), Al-Qurtubi (2006), and Al-Tabari (2001) that were selectively employed to resolve interpretive ambiguity. Each verse was assessed for Field, Tenor, Mode, overt and covert errors, and lexical/structural shifts. Based on a composite scoring rubric integrating House's TQA parameters and Catford's translation shifts, the results showed that Al-Hilali & Khan (80.8%) and Ghali (76.4%) achieved the highest functional equivalence, while Arberry (48.5%) and Pickthall (52.3%) scored the lowest due to archaic diction and semantic distortion. Three dominant error patterns emerged: contextually inappropriate hyponym selection of ماء /māʾ/ to "rain", theological reduction of طهور /ṭahūr/ to "pure", and loss of imagery (specifically, spatial "تجري من تحتها" and Paradise springs images "عين ، عينان، عيون"). The study proposed a Thematic-Semantic TQA model as an operationalized framework for sacred text analysis. The findings highlighted the need for Qur'an translator training to emphasize thematic consistency, Tafsir literacy, and sensitivity to juristic and theological meanings. Training should also address strategies for minimizing semantic loss. The Thematic-Semantic TQA model can support discourse-level translation assessment.

Keywords: *water-related terminology; House's TQA; Qur'an translation; Qur'anic discourse; thematic-semantic; translation shifts*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background*

Qur'anic discourse is characterized by semantic density, where lexical items operate simultaneously at literal, rhetorical, theological, and legal levels. Unlike ordinary Arabic texts, Qur'anic vocabulary forms interconnected semantic fields in which a single term acquires distinct meanings depending on its thematic and contextual network. Drawing on the semantic field approach, which views lexical meaning through relations among items within a shared conceptual domain (Lyons 1977), water-related terminology constitutes a recurrent and functionally complex semantic field in the Qur'an. Lexical items such as ماء /māʾ/ "water", أنهار /anhār/ "rivers", طهور /ṭahūr/ "purifying", and عين /ʿayn/ «spring» transcend literal denotation. They function as interrelated lexical nodes linked to core Qur›anic themes, including divine creation, ecological provision,

ritual purification, eschatological reward, and divine punishment.

Previous scholarship on Qur'an translation has examined metaphor and other rhetorical devices (Awan and Nawaz 2023; Naseef 2018). However, most studies focus on isolated verses, single Surahs, or specific rhetorical features. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, limited attention has been given to systematically classifying the Qur'anic water lexicon thematically and evaluating it through a multidimensional quality assessment framework across multiple English translations. This gap limits our understanding of how functional equivalence is achieved or lost when translating terms that carry layered theological and rhetorical loads. The present study addresses this gap by analyzing water-related terms across four major thematic domains that represent approximately 70% of the identified water-related occurrences in the study dataset, based on the dataset classification described in the methodology.

1.2 *Statement of the Problem*

Translating Qur'anic Arabic terminology presents a persistent challenge for English translators. A lexically defensible choice, such as rendering ماء /māʾ/ as "rain" in certain contexts or طهور /ṭahūr/ as "pure," may, depending on the context and supported exegetical interpretation, either represent a legitimate interpretive choice or satisfy surface-level denotation while weakening the term's discourse function. According to Juliane House's (2015) Translation Quality Assessment model, such cases may represent a failure to maintain functional-pragmatic equivalence at the level of register and discourse. Similarly, structural and lexical shifts identified by Catford (1965) provide a linguistic account of how meaning shifts occur during transfer. Yet, few studies apply these two frameworks (House's TQA model and Catford's shift theory) systematically to sacred texts.

The central problem, therefore, is twofold. First, existing translations vary significantly in how they handle aqua terms across different thematic contexts. Second, there is no widely adopted, sufficiently operationalized model for measuring whether such variations preserve or reduce the Qur'an's semantic and rhetorical effect. Without measurable criteria, judgments about "accuracy" remain subjective and impressionistic. This study addresses the problem by asking: to what extent do six major English translations of the Qur'an preserve the semantic, rhetorical, and theological dimensions of water-related terms across distinct thematic contexts?

1.3 *Research Questions*

To address the problem and gap outlined above, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How can the translation quality of Qur'anic water-related terms be systematically evaluated through a multidimensional framework integrating register analysis and translation shifts?

2. What variations exist among six English translations in rendering aqua terms across provision, creation, purification, and paradise themes?

3. What types of overt and covert errors most frequently occur when translating aqua terminology, and what patterns do they follow?

4. Which dimensions of House's model—Field, Tenor, Mode—are most critical for evaluating the functional equivalence of aqua terms?

5. How can the resulting evaluation criteria be operationalized into a potentially replicable assessment tool for sacred text translation?

1.4 *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant on theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical levels. Theoretically, it extends Juliane House's TQA model by integrating it with Catford's shift theory and applying it to Qur'anic discourse, a genre with unique register constraints. Methodologically, it proposes a Thematic-Semantic TQA Model that provides translation scholars and students with potentially replicable criteria for assessing functional equivalence beyond lexical accuracy. Pedagogically, the findings offer concrete data for training Qur'an translators by identifying recurring error patterns and linking them to translator orientation and background. The study also contributes to broader discussions on how sacred texts can be assessed without reducing quality to literal correspondence alone.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Qur'an Translation Studies and Semantic Complexity*

Qur'an translation is widely recognized as one of the most complex forms of interlingual transfer due to the Qur'an's layered discourse structure. Abdul-Raof (2001) argues that the Qur'an's rhetorical construction, cohesion, and stylistic features make complete equivalence nearly impossible. Baker (2018) further emphasizes that equivalence problems occur not only at the lexical level but also at pragmatic, textual, and discourse levels. Therefore, evaluating Qur'an translation requires frameworks that account for more than denotative meaning.

Beyond Qur'an-specific TQA research, the present study relates to broader traditions in translation studies. Nida

and Taber's (1969) functional-equivalence approach emphasizes the preservation of communicative function rather than formal correspondence alone, providing an important conceptual basis for evaluating meaning beyond lexical matching. Corpus-based translation studies similarly demonstrate the value of systematic comparison across recurring linguistic patterns rather than isolated examples (Baker 1993, 1995). In religious translation, Long (2005) highlights the distinctive interpretive, cultural, and communicative constraints involved in translating sacred texts. However, these perspectives have rarely been integrated with register analysis, translation-shift identification, and thematic classification in the systematic evaluation of Qur'anic water-related terminology. The present study draws these concerns together by examining recurring lexical-semantic patterns across a defined Qur'anic dataset while evaluating their functional and discourse-level consequences.

Empirical studies on Qur'an translation quality have grown in the last decade. Nazir et al. (2022) applied Juliane House's TQA model to Urdu translations of Sūrat Al-Duha and demonstrated its usefulness in identifying semantic diversity and covert errors. Alhamshary (2025) compared four English translations of Sūrat Yusuf and highlighted semantic challenges in rendering polysemous Qur'anic terms. However, these studies are limited in scope, particularly in their focus on individual Surahs or restricted sets of verses rather than thematic classification across a broader dataset. They focus on a single Surah or a limited set of verses and do not employ thematic classification. Moreover, they rarely combine House's (2015) register analysis with Catford's (1965) shift theory, nor do they use Tafsir as a systematic interpretive reference.

Recent studies further illustrate these scopes and methodological limitations. Abdelkarim et al. (2025) examined semantic loss in selected verses of Sūrat Yā-Sīn, namely verses 4, 6, 8, 25, and 37, using only three English translations. Khoshafah (2024), meanwhile, applied House's (2015) TQA model to Qur'anic translation of Sūrat Yunus, considering Field, Tenor, and Mode, but within a single-Surah scope. Thus, while these studies provide valuable insights, their restricted textual scope, methodological focus, or number of translations leaves room for a broader multidimensional analysis.

Notably, the present study addresses multiple gaps simultaneously by examining a substantial proportion of the Qur'anic water-related lexicon as a unified lexical-semantic field across four major thematic categories and six English translations. It builds on this body of research by expanding the dataset to 61 verses and integrating three analytical layers: thematic classification, register analysis, and shift identification. This multidimensional approach addresses the limitations of previous studies and provides a broader picture of how water-related terminology functions across the Qur'anic text.

2.2 Research Gap and Originality

The originality of this study lies in its integrated methodological design. Previous studies have investigated and analyzed Qur'anic translations in various but limited domains. For instance, Awan and Nawaz (2023) analyzed selected explicit metaphors in Sūrat al-Baqarah by applying Newmark's seven metaphor-translation strategies. Similarly, imagery of light and darkness in Sūrat al-Nūr has been investigated by Horri (2023), House's model was applied by Khoshafah (2024), and Qur'anic expressions were studied by Shamsan (2025).

While previous studies have applied House's TQA model to a single Surah or analyzed Qur'anic metaphors in isolation, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has systematically classified the entire water-related semantic Field thematically and evaluated it through an integrated framework combining House (2015), Catford (1965), and Tafsir as an interpretive reference for resolving semantic ambiguity across six English translations, leaving patterns of covert error and functional equivalence in sacred discourse under-theorized. This combination produces three contributions. First, it provides a thematic-semantic mapping of the water-related Field in the Qur'an. Second, it operationalizes House's and Catford's theories into measurable criteria for evaluating sacred texts. Third, it generates comparative data on six translations spanning 90 years, from 1930 to 2008, representing different ideological and linguistic orientations. In this sense, the study does not merely describe translation differences; it explains them through an operationalized multidimensional framework.

2.3 Translator Background and Translation Style

To demonstrate, the six translations selected for analysis represent distinct historical periods and translation purposes. Marmaduke Pickthall's (1930) translation, titled *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an,* reflects an early 20th-century Orientalist approach aimed at conveying the "meaning" rather than the literal text. A. J. Arberry's (1955) *The Koran Interpreted* prioritizes literary rhythm and poetic effect, consistent with his background in Arabic literature.

Sahih International, produced by a team of translators in 1997, was designed for Da'wa purposes and favors clarity and accessibility for non-Arabic readers. Muhammad Mahdi Ghali's (2008) *Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Qur'an* reflects 20

years of scholarly work and emphasizes fidelity to classical exegesis. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan's (1996) translation is tafsir-based and frequently uses parenthetical additions to clarify meaning. Finally, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's (2004) *The Qur'an: A New Translation* seeks a balance between accuracy and modern, idiomatic English.

These differing purposes—literary, Da'wa, tafsir-based, and academic—directly influence how translators handle lexically dense terms such as water-related vocabulary. The analysis in this study treats translator background as a contextual variable that serves to explain patterns of error, shift, and register choice.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research Design*

This study adopts a mixed-methods comparative research design. The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative analysis of error frequencies and weighted quality scores with qualitative discourse analysis of semantic, rhetorical, and theological shifts. The design is comparative because it evaluates six English translations of the Qur'an against a single source text. It is dataset-based because the analysis relies on a defined, replicable dataset of 61 verses representing 366 translation instances. This design allows the study to identify both general patterns across the aqua semantic field and specific instances where functional equivalence is weakened. The proposed multidimensional framework ensures that quality assessment is not limited to lexical accuracy but extends to discourse function, register consistency, and theological implication.

3.2 *Dataset and Translation Selection Criteria*

The dataset consists of six English translations of the Qur'an selected to represent different historical periods, ideological orientations, and translation purposes. Each target translation is referred to as TT1-TT6:

1. **TT1:** (Sahih International 1997) – Da'wa-oriented, team translation
2. **TT2:** (Marmaduke Pickthall 1930) – Early 20th century, meaning-based
3. **TT3:** (Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan 1996) – Tafsir-based
4. **TT4:** (Arthur J. Arberry 1955) – Literary and stylistic orientation
5. **TT5:** (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem 2004) – Modern idiomatic English
6. **TT6:** (Muhammad Mahdi Ghali 2008) – Scholarly, exegesis-informed

Water-related terms and verses were initially identified through a combination of electronic lexical searches, manual examination of the Qur'anic text, and consultation of Qur'anic concordance and exegetical resources. The identified verses were then examined contextually, and the 13 semantic themes were developed inductively by the researchers according to the thematic functions of water-related terminology. From the 13 identified semantic themes of aqua terminology in the Qur'an, this study analyzes 61 verses distributed across four major themes: Provision and Life-Giving Water, Origin of Creation and Biological Life, Purification and Cleansing, and Paradise Blessing. These four themes were selected because they were the four most frequently represented themes in the identified dataset. Each verse was selected based on two criteria: 1) it contains at least one water-related lexical item, and 2) the term functions with a clear thematic purpose within the verse. This selection produced 366 data points for analysis: 61 verses × 6 translations. For ease of reference, each analyzed verse is referred to in the present study in terms of its Surah number in the Mushaf and its number in the Surah. For example, the verse 2:22 refers to Surah number 2 in the Mushaf, verse number 22. The Uthmani Mushaf, King Fahd Complex, 1426H, serves as the source text reference.

Table 1: The thirteen themes of water-related items in the Quran + their Arabic equivalents

	English theme	Precise Arabic translation
1	Provision and Life-Giving Water	الماء بوصفه رزقًا ومصدرًا للحياة
2	Origin of Creation and Biological Life	الماء وأصل الخلق والحياة البيولوجية
3	Purification and Cleansing	الماء والطهارة والتطهير
4	Paradise Blessing	نعيم الجنة: الأنهار والعيون والشراب الطهور
5	Metaphor and Simile	الماء في الاستعارة والتشبيه
6	Hell Punishment and Corrupted Liquids	سوائل العذاب في النار والسوائل الفاسدة
7	Flood, Destruction, and Divine Judgment	الطوفان والهلاك والحكم الإلهي
8	Sea, Navigation, and Divine Power	البحر والملاحة والقدرة الإلهية
9	Barrier Between Waters and Divine Order	الحاجز بين المياه والنظام الإلهي
10	Trial, Dependence, and Divine Control	الماء بوصفه ابتلاءً ودليلًا على افتقار الإنسان إلى الله
11	Earthly Rivers, Springs, and Flowing Sources	الأنهار والعيون والينابيع في الحياة الدنيا
12	Rain as Punishment	المطر بوصفه عذابًا
13	Resurrection and Revival After Death	إحياء الأرض بعد موتها ودلالة البعث

3.3 *Theoretical Framework*

3.3.1 Thematic-Semantic TQA Model: A Proposed Framework for Sacred Text

This study proposes a Thematic-Semantic Translation Quality Assessment Model specifically developed with a focus on sacred discourse (water-related Qur'anic verses in this paper). The model integrates three analytical layers to provide both breadth and precision.

Layer 1: Thematic Classification

The Qur'anic dataset is first organized within a broader classification of 13 semantic themes based on the function of water-related terminology, of which four are analyzed in this study: Provision and Life-Giving Water, Origin of Creation and Biological Life, Purification and Cleansing, and Paradise Blessing. This layer ensures that evaluation occurs within coherent discourse contexts rather than through isolated lexical comparison.

Layer 2: Juliane House's (2015) TQA Model

At the discourse level, each translation is analyzed through House's categories of Field, Tenor, and Mode. These categories are explained in Chapter 6, "Revised House Model of Translation Quality Assessment (1997)," as part of House's revised model of TQA (House 2015, 63–65). The Field examines whether the subject matter and social action of the source text are preserved. The Tenor assesses the communicative stance and relationship between the text and the reader. Mode evaluates the rhetorical organization and textual channel. Crucially, House's distinction between overt errors, which are clearly visible linguistic deviations, and covert errors, which are functional mismatches, enables the detection of functional weakening even when literal meaning is preserved.

Layer 3: Catford's (1965) Translation Shift Theory

At the linguistic level, Catford's categories of lexical, structural, unit, and intra-system shifts explain how and why meaning changes occur. For example, a lexical shift from ماء to "rain" may constitute semantic narrowing; however, where "rain" is supported by the immediate context and recognized exegetical interpretations, it is treated as an interpretive preference rather than a translation error, while a unit shift from a single Arabic term to an English phrase reveals explicitation strategies.

Interpretive Reference Component (Tafsir Integration): To reduce subjectivity, classical exegesis from Ibn Kathir (1999), Al-Qurtubi (2006), and Al-Tabari (2001) was used as an interpretive reference to resolve semantic ambiguity and discrepancies. The specified editions of these Tafsir works were consulted as needed according to the lexical or contextual issue under examination. This ensures that judgments about "accuracy" are grounded in established Qur'anic interpretation rather than the researcher's intuition.

Tafsir was not treated as the sole or prescriptive criterion for determining translation quality. Rather, it served as an interpretive reference for identifying contextually plausible meanings and resolving semantic ambiguity. A translation that diverged from a particular exegetical interpretation was therefore not automatically classified as erroneous; its acceptability was evaluated in relation to the range of interpretations supported by the consulted Tafsir sources, the immediate Qur'anic context, and its functional effect in the target text.

Accordingly, the analysis distinguished among (1) translation error, where a rendering produces an unsupported or functionally significant distortion of the source meaning; (2) interpretive preference, where a translator selects one contextually and exegetically plausible meaning among available alternatives; and (3) exegetical difference, where more than one interpretation is supported by the consulted Tafsir sources. Only the first category was treated as an error for evaluative purposes.

Overall, the Thematic-Semantic TQA Model provides measurable criteria for functional equivalence in sacred text. It moves beyond formal correspondence to assess whether a translation preserves discourse function, register, and theological implication. This model is potentially replicable and can be applied to other semantic fields in the Qur'an or to other sacred texts.

3.3.2 Analytical Role of the Three Components

House's (2015) TQA model constituted the primary evaluative framework of the study. Field, Tenor, and Mode were used to determine whether the target text maintained the relevant semantic, interpersonal, and textual functions of the source text, while overt and covert errors were identified according to their effects on functional equivalence. Catford's (1965) shift theory served a complementary descriptive role: after a difference between the source and target texts was identified, the relevant shift category was used to describe the linguistic mechanism through which that difference occurred. A translation shift was not treated as an error merely because formal correspondence had changed; it affected the quality assessment only when the shift produced a relevant semantic or functional loss. Tafsir constituted neither a third quality-assessment model nor an independent scoring criterion. It was consulted selectively when the meaning or contextual function of a Qur'anic expression required interpretive clarification. The final quality judgment was therefore based primarily on source–target comparison through House's functional categories, with Catford explaining the linguistic form of the change and Tafsir supporting the interpretation of contextually ambiguous cases.

3.3.3 Definition of Key Terms

For clarity, the following terms are operationalized in this study:

Water-related terminology: Arabic lexical items in the Qur'an that denote water or water-related concepts, including ماء, نهر, عين, مطر, غيث, طهور, and بحر when used in literal or figurative contexts.

Overt error: A clear deviation from the source text at the linguistic level, such as omission, Addition, or distortion of meaning.

Covert error: A translation that is linguistically acceptable but fails to reproduce the situational or rhetorical function of the source text.

Translation shift: A departure from formal correspondence between source and target text, categorized by Catford (1965).

3.4 *Analytical Procedures: Eight-Step Protocol*

Each verse was analyzed using the following potentially replicable protocol:

1. ***Term Identification:*** Locate and tag all water-related lexical items within the verse. Arabic forms were recorded with transliteration following the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration system.
2. ***Thematic Classification***: Assign the verse to one of the four analyzed themes based on contextual and Tafsir evidence.
3. ***Comparative Reading***: Align the source verse with all six translations to observe lexical and structural variation.
4. ***House Register Analysis:*** Evaluate each translation for Field, Tenor, and Mode according to Juliane House's (2015) model. Field examines subject matter and social action. Tenor assesses stance and reader relationship. Mode evaluates rhetorical organization.
5. ***Overt Error Coding:*** Identify clear linguistic deviations, including omission, Addition, and distortion of denotative meaning.
6. ***Covert Error Coding***: Identify functional mismatches where the translation is linguistically acceptable but fails to maintain functional equivalence at the level of Field, Tenor, or Mode.
7. ***Catford Shift Identification:*** Classify translation shifts as lexical, structural, unit, or intra-system according to Catford (1965) to explain the mechanism of change.
8. ***Quality Rating:*** Assign each translation a score from 5 = Strongest to 1 = Weakest based on the degree of functional equivalence preserved.

Inter-rater Reliability: To assess the consistency of the thematic classification, 20% of the dataset was independently classified by a second rater with expertise in Qur'anic studies and translation, who assigned the selected verses to the thematic categories using the same classification criteria. Inter-rater agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, $\kappa = 0.86$, indicating strong agreement beyond chance.

3.5 *Scoring and Quantification*

Quantitative analysis followed a weighted scoring system developed in this study to operationalize the qualitative dimensions of House's (2015) TQA model for quantitative comparison. The numerical scale is not part of House's original model; rather, it translates the degree of functional equivalence identified through register analysis and error coding into comparable scores. Each translation per verse received a score from 5 to 1 based on the degree of functional equivalence preserved across Field, Tenor, and Mode and the functional consequences of the identified translation shifts, as operationalized in the following table.

Table 2: Scoring and Quantification

Score	Rating	Operational criterion
5	Strongest	Functional equivalence is fully maintained; no significant Field, Tenor, or Mode mismatch. Any translation shift preserves the relevant semantic and discourse function.
4	Strong	Functional equivalence is largely maintained, with only a minor register mismatch or semantic loss that does not substantially affect the source-text function.
3	Medium	Functional equivalence is partially maintained; a noticeable Field, Tenor, or Mode mismatch or semantic shift affects part of the source-text meaning or function.
2	Weak	Functional equivalence is substantially reduced by significant register mismatch, semantic distortion, omission, or loss of relevant discourse function.
1	Weakest	Functional equivalence is seriously compromised through major or multiple mismatches, substantial semantic distortion, or loss of essential source-text function.

The Weighted TQA Score for each translator was calculated as:

Weighted Score = (5 × Sg) + (4 × S) + (3 × M) + (2 × W) + (1 × Ws), where Sg = frequency of Strongest, S = Strong, M = Medium, W = Weak, Ws = Weakest.

The Mean Percentage was calculated as:

Mean % = (Weighted Score ÷ Maximum Possible Score) × 100

Quality levels were defined as: Strong = 75–100%, Medium-Strong = 65–74%, Medium = 55–64%, Medium-Weak = 45–54%, Weak < 45%.

House's and Catford's frameworks were not assigned equal numerical weights. House's register dimensions and error categories provided the primary basis for assessing functional equivalence, while Catford's shift categories served as a complementary analytical layer for identifying the linguistic mechanisms associated with translation changes. Moreover, where multiple renderings were supported by the Qur'anic context or consulted Tafsir sources, variation among translations was treated as interpretive variation rather than semantic error and was not penalized solely for differing from a preferred exegetical rendering.

The quantitative component is descriptive and is intended to summarize and compare patterns within the selected dataset rather than establish population-level statistical superiority among translators. Frequencies, percentages, and weighted scores are therefore interpreted as dataset-specific descriptive indicators.

4. RESULTS

4.1 *Quantitative Results*

Quantitative analysis of the 366 data points reveals significant variation in translation quality across the six translators and four themes. Table 2 presents the frequency of overt errors, covert errors, and Catford shifts across each theme. Table 3 presents the weighted scores and overall translators' ranking.

Table 3: Shift Distribution Across 366 Instances

Shift Type	Pickthall (TT2)	Arberry (TT4)	Sahih International (TT1)	Abdel Haleem (TT5)	Al-Hilali & Khan (TT3)	Ghali (TT6)	Total
Level Shift	18	16	8	10	3	4	59
	29.5%	26.2%	13.1%	16.4%	4.9%	6.6%	16.1%
Structure Shift	22	19	9	11	2	3	66
	36.1%	31.1%	14.8%	18.0%	3.3%	4.9%	18.0%
Class Shift	12	14	15	13	5	6	65
	19.7%	23.0%	24.6%	21.3%	8.2%	9.8%	17.8%
Unit Shift	5	6	18	16	4	5	54
	8.2%	9.8%	29.5%	26.2%	6.6%	8.2%	14.8%

Intra-system Shift	3	4	10	9	8	7	41
	4.9%	6.6%	16.4%	14.8%	13.1%	11.5%	11.2%
Addition/ Explicitation	1	2	1	2	39	36	81
	1.6%	3.3%	1.6%	3.3%	63.9%	59.0%	22.1%
Total Shifts	61	61	61	61	61	61	61
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

As indicated in Table 2, level and structure shifts account for 65.6% and 57.3% of all shift instances in TT2 and TT4, respectively, representing the lowest TQA scores. Meanwhile, Addition constitutes 63.9% and 59.0% of all overt errors in TT3 and TT6, respectively, correlating with strong scores. Structure and level shifts result in mode and tenor errors, while Addition without distortion causes no covert error.

Table 4: Overall TQA Scores Across All 61 Verses

Translator	Sg	S	M	W	Ws	n	Weighted Score	Max	Mean %	Quality Level
Al-Hilali and Khan (TT3)	28	19	10	3	1	61	247	305	80.8	**Strong**
Ghali (TT6)	22	20	12	5	2	61	233	305	76.4	**Strong**
Sahih International (TT1)	8	21	20	9	3	61	207	305	67.8	**Medium-Strong**
Abdel Haleem (TT5)	5	18	23	12	3	61	195	305	63.8	**Medium-**
Pickthall (TT2)	3	12	22	18	6	61	160	305	52.3	**Medium-Weak**
Arberry (TT4)	1	9	21	20	10	61	148	305	48.5	**Weak**

As shown in Table 3, Al-Hilali and Khan achieved the highest overall functional equivalence with a mean score of 80.8%, classified as Strong. Ghali ranked second at 76.4%, also Strong. Sahih International scored 67.8%, classified as Medium-Strong. Abdel Haleem scored 63.8%, Medium. Pickthall scored 52.3%, Medium-Weak. Arberry scored 48.5%, Weak. The data indicate that tafsir-based translations, as presented by Al-Hilali and Khan, outperformed literary translation by Arberry and Da'wa-oriented translation by Sahih International in preserving discourse function and register consistency.

4.2 *Qualitative Patterns*

Beyond numerical scores, qualitative analysis identifies three systematic "covert" or "overt" patterns that recur across multiple verses and translations.

Pattern 1: Semantic Narrowing of ماء /māʾ/

The general term ماء /māʾ/ "water" was narrowed to "rain" in 26 instances, primarily in Sahih International and Abdel Haleem. For example, in the Quranic verse 2:22, ماء is rendered as "rain" despite the verse referring to water sent down to produce sustenance broadly. This constitutes a covert error according to House (2015) because the Field is reduced from general ecological provision to specific meteorology. The narrowing weakens the Qur'an's connection between water as a universal sign of divine mercy and its specific meteorological manifestation.

Pattern 2: Theological Reduction of طهور /ṭahūr/

The active participle طهور /ṭahūr/ "that which purifies" was reduced to the adjective "pure" or "clean" in four of six translations. In the Quranic verse 25:48, the juristic function of water as an agent of ritual purification is lost when translated as "pure water." Only Pickthall and Arberry preserved the active sense. This theological reduction affects Tenor by weakening the legal and ritual implications central to Islamic practice.

Pattern 3: Loss of Imagery

a- Loss of Spatial Imagery in تجري من تحتها /tajrī min taḥtihā/

The phrase تجري من تحتها "rivers flowing from beneath it" describes the eschatological landscape of Paradise. However, translations such as "underneath," "at their feet," and "graced with streams" alter the spatial image. Ghali consistently preserved "from beneath," maintaining the Qur'anic image of rivers emerging from under the gardens, whereas other renderings, such as Abdel Haleem's and Arberry's, constitute unit and structural shifts that reduce the vividness of the eschatological scene, thus affecting Mode and rhetorical effect.

b- Loss of Paradise Springs Imagery in , عين, عينان عيون /ayn, aynan, uyon/

The words عين,عينان, عيون describe the springs in Paradise. Arberry's rendered texts showed a significant change in meaning: "fountain," which suggests a man-made structure, not a natural source of abundant water, whereas the other renderings, such as Pickthall's and Arberry's, constitute lexical shifts leading to semantic narrowing.

5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in relation to the five research questions. The five questions will be addressed following the same order.

5.1 *RQ1: Multidimensional Evaluation of Qur'anic Aqua Terms*

The findings addressing RQ1 indicate that translation quality can be evaluated systematically using a multidimensional method. Therefore, this study demonstrates the potential effectiveness of the proposed Thematic-Semantic TQA Model for evaluating the translation of sacred discourse. By integrating House's register analysis with Catford's shift theory and Tafsir as an interpretive reference, the model provides measurable criteria for identifying covert errors that would be invisible in literal accuracy assessments. The model demonstrates that functional equivalence in Qur'an translation requires consistency at three levels: semantic Field across themes, theological Tenor aligned with Tafsir, and rhetorical Mode that preserves imagery and cohesion. This theoretical contribution offers an extension of House's framework from general discourse to sacred text, where register constraints are more rigid and theological precision is essential. In this integrated procedure, Catford's framework identifies where linguistic change occurs, while House's model determines whether that change affects Field, Tenor, or Mode and therefore constitutes functional loss rather than a necessary translation adjustment.

5.2 *RQ2: Variation Across Translators and Themes*

Regarding RQ2, the findings reveal systematic variation among the six translations in the degree of literalness, explicitation, semantic specification, and register preservation, with these differences becoming more pronounced in thematically and theologically marked contexts. Also, the quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate that a translator's purpose and background strongly correlate with error type and register preservation. Tafsir-based translators like Al-Hilali & Khan and Ghali consistently maintain Field and Tenor fidelity because their translations are anchored in classical exegesis. Their frequent use of parenthetical explicitation preserves theological and juristic meaning without altering the main text.

In contrast, Arberry's literary orientation prioritized rhythmic and archaic diction over functional clarity. This led to high frequencies of semantic distortion and archaic vocabulary that obscure meaning for contemporary readers. Regarding Sahih International's Da'wa orientation, it favored accessibility and simplification, which explains the recurring semantic narrowing of ماء to "rain." While this choice increases readability, it reduces register consistency across the Qur'anic text. These findings support House's (2015) argument that Mode and Tenor are decisive factors in shaping translation decisions and determining functional equivalence.

5.3 *RQ3: Overt and Covert Error Patterns*

In response to RQ3, the analysis identified three recurrent, systematic "covert" or "overt" patterns that recur across multiple verses and translations. These three are Semantic narrowing of ماء /māʾ/, theological reduction of طهور /ṭahūr/, and loss of spatial imagery as in تجري من تحتها /tajrī min taḥtihā/ or loss of paradise springs imagery in عين,عينان, عيون /ayn, aynan, uyon/.

To clarify, the findings have direct implications for the training of Qur'an translators and for courses in Translation and Applied Linguistics. First, translator training programs should emphasize the thematic and register consistency of Qur'anic vocabulary. The frequent rendering of ماء /māʾ/ as "rain" illustrates the risk of semantic narrowing when translators prioritize contextual meteorology over the broader theological and ecological Field. Trainees must be taught to distinguish between context-bound rendering and register-bound consistency across the Qur'anic text. Second, the mistranslation of طهور /ṭahūr/ as "pure" instead of "purifying" shows the need for training in juristic and ritual semantics. Courses should integrate basic fiqh terminology and Tafsir literacy so translators can preserve functional and legal dimensions of the sacred text. Third, the loss of spatial imagery in تجري من تحتها /tajrī min taḥtihā/ suggests that explicitation and translator notes should be taught as legitimate strategies for maintaining image and Field when target-language equivalents cause semantic loss. Finally, the ranking of translators in this study indicates that a combination of Islamic scholarship and target-language mastery produces the most functionally equivalent translations. Therefore, Qur'an translation curricula should require collaborative supervision by experts in Arabic-Islamic studies and experts in English discourse and pragmatics. Adopting the Thematic-Semantic TQA model as an assessment tool in university courses will help students move beyond word-level equivalence toward discourse-level quality evaluation.

5.4 *RQ4: Relative Importance of Field, Tenor, and Mode*

Field, Tenor, and Mode are complementary rather than equally decisive in every instance of Qur'anic aqua-term translation. Their relative importance depends on the semantic and functional characteristics of the expression being translated. Field is particularly critical when the translation involves the lexical and contextual meaning of water-related terminology. This is evident

in the rendering of ماء /māʾ/ "water" as "rain," where semantic specification may narrow the broader meaning of the source expression and consequently affect the representation of its thematic Field. Field, therefore, provides an essential criterion for determining whether the semantic scope and thematic function of an aqua term have been adequately maintained.

Tenor becomes particularly important when a water-related expression carries theological, ritual, or juristic significance. The translation of طهور /ṭahūr/, for example, demonstrates that a rendering may convey the general concept of purity while failing to preserve the source expression's purifying function. In such cases, evaluating lexical meaning alone is insufficient because the translation must also maintain the relevant theological and communicative force of the expression. Tenor, therefore, plays a particularly significant role in contexts where doctrinal or ritual implications contribute to functional equivalence.

Mode is especially critical in verses where water-related meaning is realized through rhetorical organization and imagery. The translations of Paradise expressions such as تجري من تحتها /tajrī min taḥtihā/ and references to springs illustrate how simplification or restructuring can reduce spatial imagery even when the basic referential meaning remains understandable. Mode thus enables the evaluation to account for textual and rhetorical losses that a predominantly lexical assessment might overlook.

5.5 *RQ5: Operationalizing the Thematic-Semantic TQA Model*

The findings addressing RQ5 indicate that the proposed Thematic-Semantic TQA Model can be operationalized as a staged assessment procedure. As explained in the procedures section, the process begins with the identification of the Arabic aqua expression or Aqua-related words. After that, they have to classify the words thematically. After that, the contextual meaning through linguistic evidence and relevant Tafsir should be determined and sought before examining the corresponding English rendering for translation shifts using Catford's framework and through House's Field, Tenor, and Mode dimensions. As a result, mismatches are then classified as overt or covert before recording the final assessment.

The potential replicability of the model is possible when each evaluator follows the same sequence of analysis and applies the same criteria.

Table 5: Operationalizing the Thematic-Semantic TQA Model

Identify the Arabic aqua term/expression.
Establish its contextual meaning.
Consult relevant Tafsir as an interpretive benchmark.
Assign the expression to its thematic category.
Record the six English renderings.
Identify any Catford translation shift.
Evaluate the effect on Field.
Evaluate the effect on Tenor.
Evaluate the effect on Mode.
Classify any mismatch as overt/covert or as an acceptable functional shift.
Record the final assessment according to predetermined criteria.

6. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated six English translations of Qur'anic water-related terminology using a multidimensional framework that integrates thematic classification, Juliane House's (2015) TQA model, Catford's (1965) shift theory, and classical Tafsir. The analysis of 61 verses across four thematic categories generated 366 data points and revealed significant variation in translation quality. Al-Hilali & Khan and Ghali achieved the highest functional equivalence due to their tafsir alignment and register fidelity, while Arberry scored lowest due to semantic distortion and archaic diction.

Three dominant error patterns were identified as main threats to functional equivalence: semantic narrowing of ماء /māʾ/, theological reduction of طهور /ṭahūr/, and loss of spatial imagery in تجري من تحتها. The study proposes the Thematic-Semantic TQA Model as a potentially replicable tool for assessing sacred text beyond lexical accuracy. The findings underscore that faithful Qur'an translation requires balancing faithfulness to the source text with functional fidelity to its discourse purpose. This balance can be achieved through Tafsir-informed decisions and register-aware translation strategies. Finally, the analysis provided answers for the research questions.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the scope is limited to six English translations and four of the thirteen identified semantic themes due to the constraints of an MA thesis. Expanding the dataset to all themes may reveal additional patterns. Second, thematic overlap exists in the Qur'anic text, and some verses could plausibly fit more than one category. Third, the high frequency of the Quranic verse 2:25, "جنات تجري من تحتها الأنهار," which appears 24 times in the

Qur'an, may disproportionately affect the frequency of spatial image loss. Fourth, the study focuses on English translations and does not address translations into other languages, where different semantic and rhetorical challenges may arise.

Although the proposed scoring framework operationalizes the qualitative analysis into explicit criteria and inter-rater reliability was assessed, the framework was not independently validated through expert review, pilot testing, or formal construct validity procedures. It should therefore be regarded as a preliminary operational framework whose robustness and generalizability require further empirical validation across larger datasets, additional translators, and other categories of sacred discourse.

The study relies primarily on descriptive statistics and does not employ inferential testing; consequently, differences in translators' scores should be interpreted as observed patterns within the analyzed dataset rather than statistically significant differences generalizable beyond it. Future studies may test these patterns using inferential procedures and effect-size measures across larger datasets.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on these limitations, future research should:

1. Expand the dataset to include all 13 semantic themes of aqua terminology for a complete mapping of the Field.
2. Include additional translations across different time periods and ideological orientations to trace historical shifts in translation norms.
3. Apply the Thematic-Semantic TQA Model to translations into other languages, such as French, Urdu, Turkish, and Spanish, to test its cross-linguistic validity.
4. Conduct reader-response studies to test whether the identified covert errors affect comprehension and theological understanding among non-Arabic readers.

Appendix:
Translator Profiles
(This commentary part is organized chronologically)

Pickthall's translation shows his eagerness towards preserving the Holy nature of the Quran rather than focusing on the literary and rhythmic style. The title "The Meaning of the Glorious Koran" also shows that he believed the Quran cannot be translated, but only the meaning can be transferred. Even though he clearly tried to maintain the sacred level of rendering and the classic style with semi-literary translation, some criticize this translation as old and archaic and less familiar to modern readers. That is why some water-related words might be elevated to display the majesty of the situation, whether related to Paradise or Hell Punishment. His translation is believed to be somewhat archaic in style, but mostly consistent, though.

Arberry was a non-Muslim British scholar. He was one of the major British scholars of Arabic and Persian literature. He also cared about literary style, rhythm, and structure. It is important to mention that he belonged to the British academic Orientalist tradition; however, he was more balanced and objective compared to other orientalists who were severely biased. Like Pickthall, Arberry believed that the Quran cannot be easily translated, which appears in the title of" The Koran Interpreted," which was published in 1955. To add on, Arberry admires Arabic texts with rhythm, rhetoric, and literary force. Thurs, Abdel Haleem notes that Arberry showed respect for the Qur'an's musical effects. On the other hand, his limited knowledge of Arabic and the Quran seemed to complicate English translation. One of the apparent limitations is that some semantic clarity can be intentionally sacrificed for rhythm and rhetorical effect.

Sahih International is provided by three women for the first time in the Quran translation. It aims to facilitate the Quran translation and interpretation to the audience since it was meant to be used for Da'wa, and it was not an official project in the first place. Generally, the translation cannot be described as Hilali-Khan's heavy translation, but it still follows a conservative Sunni framework. It is less literary than Arberry and more modern, and doesn't use archaic or old English like Pickthall's. That is why, in translating some specific terms, the translation tends to be more literal than literary. As believed, its strength lies in the teamwork that produced the translation that is distinctive from the other 5 translations.

Ghali was a Muslim Egyptian scholar who studied at Al-Azhar University. This is different from the rest because it gives him an advantage in rendering based on both Islamic knowledge and linguistic background. So, he knows both the Islamic and language aspects

of the text. His experience in the western community in relation to his studies and his identity as an Islamic and Arabic scholar made his choices careful while referring to the Quran. It is significantly important to note that his intention was the interpretation of the meaning of the Quran instead of the Arabic words. For that, he spent nearly 20 years doing this rendering. His style is more towards maintaining and preserving the meaning over the English smoothness or style. As an example, he might sacrifice being more idiomatic for the sake of showing the distinctions between water-related words used in different themes.

Al-Hilali was a Moroccan scholar who was known for his Sunni religious interpretation, while **Muhsin Khan** had a medical education, and he was a British Indian (now Pakistani) who later became well known for his translations of Islamic texts. At times, they would add parenthetical translations, which were criticized by some; however, they followed a tafsir-heavy and hadith-based interpretation framework. Some of the translations might be evaluated as having "lexical shift" or "unnecessary addition" for adding explanatory comments to clarify the Qur'anic meaning. Thus, for this very reason, their translation received notable criticism.

Abdel Haleem is another Muslim Egyptian scholar who memorized the Quran from an early age, which makes him more privileged to have a good relationship with the text before starting the academic path. Like Ghali, he combines the knowledge of Arabic and the academic expertise of English, which connects him to both sides. Abdel Haleem admires understanding the Qur'an through its themes, structure, and linguistic features. His style and method are described as moderate as he is less literal than Pickthall and less parenthetical than Hilali-Khan. Thus, his style is fluent, smooth, natural, and interpretive without overloading the translation. It can be described as one of the best contemporary translations for its ability to render or transfer Qur'anic meanings without complications to the readers.

REFERENCES

Abdelkarim, Majda Babiker Ahmed, Ali Albashir Mohammed Alhaj, and Ahmed Hadi Hakami. 2025. "Semantic Loss in Some Selected Verses of Sūrat Yā-Sīn: A Comparative Study of Three Trustworthy English Translations." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 15 (1): 216–23. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1501.24.

Al Qurṭubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. 1967. *Al-Jāmiʻ Li-Aḥkām Al-Qurʻān*. Edited by Abd Allāh ʿ ibn and Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. Vol. 24. Dar "Ihia" al Turath al Arabi.

Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. 2001. *Jāmiʻ Al-Bayān ʻan Taʼwīl Al-Qurʼān*. Edited by Abd Allāh ibn and Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. Dār Hajr.

Alhamshary, Yousreya Ahmed. 2025. "Semantic Challenges in Translating the Qur'an: A Comparative Analysis of Four English Translations of Surat Yusuf." *Crossroads: Pharos International Journal of Languages and Translation* 2 (1). https://doi.org/10.21608/cpijlt.2025.460077.

Awan, Ali Raza, and Dr Muhammad Nawaz. 2023. "The Applicability of Metaphor Translation Strategies by Peter Newmark: Evaluating English Translations of Quranic Metaphors in Surah Al-Baqarah." *Journal of Translation & Multilingualism* 1 (01): 1–20. https://ctsmpk.org/index.php/jtm/article/view/11.

Baker, Mona. 1993. "Corpus Linguistics and Translation Studies — Implications and Applications." In *Text and Technology: In Honor of John Sinclair,* edited by Mona Baker, Gill Francis, and Elena Tognini-Bonelli. John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/z.64.15bak.

Baker, Mona. 1995. "Corpora in Translation Studies." *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies* 7 (2): 223–43. https://doi.org/10.1075/target.7.2.03bak.

Baker, Mona. 2018. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation.* . 3Rd ed. . Routledge.

Catford, J. C. 1965. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Horri, Abolfazl. 2023. "Assessing the Translation Quality of Rhetorical Images of Light and Darkness in the Quran in Light of the Julian House Model (Case Study: Verses 35-40 of Surah An-Nur)." *Quranic and Hadith Researches of Modares* 9 (18): 277–310. https://qhts.modares.ac.ir/article_21717_en.html.

House, Juliane. 2014. *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*. Routledge.

Ibn Kathīr, and Ismāʿīl ibn Umar. 1999. *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-ʿAẓīm*. 2Nd edition. Edited by Sāmī ibn Muḥammad Salāmah. Dār Ṭayyibah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ.

Khoshafah, Hakima Mansour Ahmed. 2024. "Applying House's Translation Quality Assessment Model (2015) on Quranic Narratives." *Sana'a University Journal of Human Sciences* 2 (2): 411–26. https://doi.org/10.59628/jhs.v2i2.810.

Long, Lynn, ed. 2005. *Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?* . Multilingual Matters.

Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics*. Vols. 1–2. Cambridge University Press.

Naseef, R. A. M. 2018. "Kināyah as a Figure of Speech in the Qur'an: An Analysis of Four English Translations." PhD dissertation, University of Leeds. White Rose Theses Online.

Nazir, Nargis, Shair Ali Khan, and Shabir Ahmad. 2021. "Qur'an Translation and the Semantic Diversity: Assessment of Urdu Quran Translations (Application of Julian House Model of Quality Assessment)." *Al-Idah* 40 (1): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.37556/al-idah.040.01.0770.

Newmark, P. 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall.

Nida , Eugene A., and Charles R. Taber. 1969. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. E. J. Brill.

Shamsan, Baleid Taha, Afaf Alwan, and Mohammed Hamoud Ghannam. 2025. "Sacred Text Constraints: Metaphor Translation in the Qur'an Beyond Newmark's Framework." *Journal of Social Studies* 31 (9). https://doi.org/10.20428/jss.v31i9.3296.