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Gender Dynamics in Qur'anic Translation: Analyzing Male and Female Perspectives on Surat Al-Fatiha

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Keywords

Gender Perspectives; Qur'anic Translation; Surat Al-Fatiha; Comparative Analysis; Translation Studies; Cultural Contexts

Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of gender perspectives on the translation of Surat Al-Fatiha, a pivotal chapter in the Qur'an, through a comparative analysis of translations produced by both male and female scholars. By closely examining the works of Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Laleh Bakhtiar, and Amina Wadud, this study explores the ways in which gendered approaches shape the interpretation, rendering, and presentation of sacred Islamic texts. The selection of these translators provides a balanced representation of traditional and contemporary viewpoints, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how gender identity and scholarly perspective inform translation choices. Yusuf Ali's and Pickthall's translations are analyzed for their traditional and formal approaches, with particular attention paid to the influence of their respective historical, cultural, and religious contexts. Ali's work is characterized by extensive commentary and an emphasis on bridging cultural divides through interpretive footnotes and annotations, while Pickthall's translation remains closely aligned with classical interpretations, highlighting his commitment to linguistic and theological fidelity rooted in early Islamic tradition. In contrast, Bakhtiar's feminist approach offers a critical engagement with gender biases embedded in traditional exegesis, seeking to reinterpret specific terms and concepts in ways that challenge patriarchal readings. Wadud's academic perspective brings an intellectually rigorous yet spiritually engaged approach that integrates contemporary scholarship with a critical engagement of traditional Islamic interpretations. Her work reflects a synthesis of modern hermeneutical tools and classical exegetical insights, aiming to uncover the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an while remaining rooted in its historical context. The analysis reveals how gender perspectives affect the translation of key phrases and concepts, influencing the text's reception among diverse audiences. These findings underscore the important role that gendered translation practices play in either reinforcing or challenging established interpretations of sacred scripture. This research advances the theoretical understanding of gender in translation by demonstrating the practical effects of gendered perspectives on sacred texts. It demonstrates the tangible effects of gendered perspectives on sacred texts and offers thoughtful recommendations for future translators, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and interpretive sensitivity to foster meaningful cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue.

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الكلمات المفتاحية

منظورات جندرية، ترجمة القرآن الكريم، سورة الفاتحة، تحليل مقارن، دراسات الترجمة، السياقات الثقافية

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير المنظورات الجندرية على ترجمة سورة الفاتحة، وهي سورة محورية وأساسية في القرآن الكريم، وذلك من خلال تحليل مقارن لترجمات أنجزها باحثون وباحثات من الجنسين. من خلال دراسة متأنية لأعمال يوسف علي، ومحمد مرمدوك بيكثال، و لاله بختيار، وأمينة إنلوس، تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيف تسهم المنظورات الجندرية في تشكيل تفسير النصوص الدينية وتقديمها. ويوفّر اختيار هؤلاء المترجمين تمثيلاً متوازناً للاتجاهات التقليدية والمعاصرة، مما يتيح فهماً دقيقاً لكيفية تأثير الهوية الجندرية والخلفية الأكاديمية على الخيارات الترجميّة.تُحلَّل ترجمات يوسف علي وبيكثال من حيث مناهجهما التقليدية والرسمية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على تأثير السياقات التاريخية والثقافية والدينية التي انطلقا منها. تمتاز ترجمة علي بتعليقاته الواسعة وسعيه إلى بناء جسور ثقافية من خلال الحواشي التفسيرية، في حين تتسم ترجمة بيكثال بالتزامها الصارم بالتفسيرات الكلاسيكية وحرصه على الأمانة اللغوية والعقائدية المستمدة من التراث الإسلامي المبكر.وعلى النقيض من ذلك، تقدم لاله بختيار رؤية نسوية نقدية تتناول التحيزات الجندرية الكامنة في التفسير التقليدي، وتسعى إلى إعادة صياغة مفاهيم معينة بما يتحدى القراءات الذكورية. أما أمينة ودود، فتتبنى مقاربة أكاديمية نقدية تنطلق من خلفية معرفية رصينة، تجمع بين أدوات البحث المعاصر والتحليل الجندري، مع تفاعل جاد مع التفسيرات الإسلامية التقليدية. ويعكس منهجها تكاملاً بين مناهج التأويل الحديثة والبصيرة التفسيرية المستمدة من التراث، في سعيها لإبراز البعد المقاصدي والمساواتي في النص القرآني.ويُظهر التحليل أن المنظورات الجندرية تؤثر بشكل ملموس في ترجمة العبارات والمفاهيم الرئيسة، مما ينعكس على تلقي النص وفهمه من قِبل جماهير متنوعة. وتؤكد النتائج الدور الحاسم الذي تلعبه الممارسات الترجميّة الجندرية في تعزيز أو نقد القراءات السائدة للنصوص المقدسة.وتسهم هذه الدراسة في تطوير الفهمين النظري والتطبيقي لدور الجندر في دراسات الترجمة، حيث تُبرز الآثار العملية للمنظور الجندري على النصوص الدينية، وتقترح توصيات للمترجمين في المستقبل، تشدّد فيها على أهمية الشمولية والحساسية التفسيرية من أجل تعزيز الحوار بين الثقافات والأديان.

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1. Introduction

Translation theory frequently addresses the impact of the translator's background on translation outcomes, yet gender perspectives have not been thoroughly examined within this framework. Foundational theories such as Venuti's (1995) "translator's invisibility" and Nida's (1964) principles of dynamic and formal equivalence underscore how translators' personal and cultural contexts influence their work. Gender, as a critical facet of translator identity, significantly affects translation choices and interpretations (Baker, 2006; Federici & Santaemilia, 2021).

A central debate in translation studies is whether translation choices are inherently influenced by the translator's gender or if such influence is subtler and context-dependent (Venuti, 1995; Federici & Santaemilia, 2021; Zhu et al., 2023). As highlighted by Pym (2015, p. 45), the translator's influence becomes particularly evident in such cases, especially when the translator's own gender identity and personal beliefs shape the translation. In the case of sacred texts like the Quran, where precision and respect for the original text are paramount, the translator's gender can significantly impact how gendered concepts and roles are portrayed, either reinforcing or challenging the biases present in the source text and its cultural context. Translators, knowingly or unknowingly, may inject their personal viewpoints into the text, potentially altering its perceived meaning in the target culture. This version highlights the specific challenges and considerations involved when a translator's gender might influence the translation of a holy text like the Quran.

This study seeks to address this debate by analyzing the translation of Surat Al-Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, through both gender-sensitive and traditional approaches. Surat Al-Fatiha is fundamental to Islamic practice and theology, and its translation provides a unique opportunity to explore how gendered and historical contexts shape the interpretation of sacred texts. To facilitate a comprehensive examination, this study compares the translation of Surat Al-Fatiha by Laleh Bakhtiar—known for her feminist and gender-sensitive approach in The Sublime Quran (2007)—with the translation and interpretive work of Amina Wadud, a prominent scholar in feminist Qur'anic hermeneutics. Wadud's Qur'an: A New Translation (2006) offers a groundbreaking feminist re-translation of the entire Qur'an, emphasizing gender equity and contextual understanding. Bakhtiar's translation challenges traditional patriarchal readings through linguistically sensitive choices that foreground feminist concerns. In contrast, Wadud combines rigorous academic scholarship with a gender-aware approach that balances respect for classical interpretations and contemporary insights.

Together, their works provide a rich and nuanced perspective on how gender influences the translation and interpretation of sacred texts, especially foundational chapters such as Surat Al-Fatiha.Together, their approaches provide a valuable lens through which to explore how gender influences the understanding and representation of sacred texts. For contrasting viewpoints, the study also examines Yusuf Ali's "The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an" (1938) and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's "The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an" (1930), which represent traditional male perspectives.

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Ali's detailed commentary and Pickthall's literal approach provide historical and traditional contexts that contrast with contemporary feminist and academic translations.

By comparing these diverse perspectives, this paper aims to shed light on how gender, historical, and ideological contexts influence translation practices and interpretations of Surat Al-Fatiha.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The translation of Surat Al-Fatiha, a central chapter in the Qur'an, exhibits considerable variation influenced by the translator's interpretive framework. Although substantial research has been conducted on translation theory and the impact of cultural and historical contexts on translation practices, there remains a notable gap in understanding how gender perspectives specifically shape the translation of sacred texts. Existing translations by male scholars such as Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, alongside those by female translators like Laleh Bakhtiar and Amina Wadud, offer a diverse range of interpretative approaches. However, there is a paucity of systematic comparative analyses that explore how gender influences translation choices and interpretations within this context. This research gap restricts our comprehension of the role gender plays in shaping translation processes and its implications for the interpretation of religious texts. Addressing this gap is crucial for advancing our understanding of gendered dimensions in translation practices and their impact on the translation of sacred scriptures.

1.2 Research Questions

- In what ways do gender perspectives shape the translation of Surat Al-Fatiha by male and female translators?
- What are the primary differences and similarities in translation choices between male and female translators of Surat Al-Fatiha?
- How do gender-specific translation choices impact the interpretation and reception of Surat Al-Fatiha among different audiences?
- What can be inferred from these gendered translation choices about the broader implications of gender on the translation of sacred texts?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons:

- Advancing Translation Theory**:** By examining how gender perspectives influence the translation of Surat Al-Fatiha, this study will contribute to the broader field of translation theory. It will offer new insights into how gendered approaches affect translation practices, enriching existing theoretical frameworks.
- Enhancing Understanding of Sacred Texts: The study will deepen our understanding of how sacred texts are translated differently based on the translator's gender. This is particularly relevant for Qur'anic studies, where the

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interpretation of sacred texts has profound implications for theological and cultural discourse.

- Informing Translational Practices: Findings from this research will provide practical insights for translators, highlighting the importance of considering gender perspectives in translation. This can lead to more inclusive and nuanced interpretations of religious texts.
- Broadening Theoretical Discussions: By adding empirical evidence to the discussion of gender in translation studies, this research will broaden theoretical debates and contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions about the role of gender in translation practices.
- Enriching Qur'anic Studies: The study will offer valuable contributions to the field of Qur'anic studies, providing a comparative analysis that can inform future research and interpretation of the Qur'an.
- Guiding Future Research: The research will lay the groundwork for further studies on the intersection of gender and translation, offering a basis for future inquiries into how different perspectives influence the translation of sacred and other texts.

By highlighting how gender perspectives shape translation choices, this research aims to inform and inspire future scholars and practitioners in the field of translation studies, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of gender's role in translation practices and interpretations.

2. Literature Review

One of the primary motivations for conducting this research stems from the significant gap in the existing literature concerning gender in translation studies, particularly within the context of the translation of holy texts. This lack of focus on gender dynamics in translation studies becomes especially relevant when considering the translation of sacred texts like the Quran, where a nuanced understanding of gender roles and language is crucial.

2.1 The Relevance of Surat Al-Fatiha for Gender-Focused Translation Research

Surat Al-Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, holds a pivotal role in Islamic worship and theological discourse (Ibn Kathir, 2003). Comprising seven verses, it is recited in every unit of the Muslim prayer (Salah), emphasizing themes of divine mercy, guidance, and human dependence on God (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Saeed, 2013). As a summary of the Qur'an's core messages, Surat Al-Fatiha is crucial not only for spiritual engagement but also for religious education. Accurate translations of this chapter are essential for non-Arabic speaking Muslims, enhancing their understanding and practice (Yusuf, 1934; Nasr et al., 2015). For non-Muslim audiences, translations facilitate intercultural dialogue by bridging religious and cultural gaps (Saeed, 2013). Furthermore, for scholars in Islamic studies, translations offer valuable insights into the Qur'anic text's

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role in global religious and cultural contexts (Nasr et al., 2015; Saeed, 2013; Wadud, 2006).

2.2 Gender and Translation Theory

Spivak's concept of "translator's invisibility" (1988) provides a critical lens for understanding gender influences in translation. Spivak argues that the translator's role is often overlooked, yet their decisions subtly shape the text, potentially marginalizing gendered perspectives and reflecting the translator's biases (Spivak, 1988). This concept is particularly relevant for feminist and gender-sensitive translations, where traditional gender norms embedded in the source text may be either reinforced or inadequately challenged.

Venuti's (1995) framework of "domestication" and "foreignization" further elucidates how translation strategies affect gender representation. Domestication aims to make the text more accessible to the target audience, often resulting in a loss of gendered nuances. In contrast, foreignization strives to maintain the original text's distinctiveness, potentially preserving gendered aspects but making the text less accessible (Venuti, 1995). These strategies demonstrate how gendered dimensions can be manipulated based on the translator's approach, influencing how gender roles and identities are presented.

2.3 Impact of Gender on Translation Choices

Gender perspectives significantly affect translation choices and interpretative approaches. Feminist translation theories advocate for recognizing and addressing gender biases, both in the source and target texts (Baker, 2006). Feminist translators, such as Laleh Bakhtiar, challenge traditional interpretations to present a more equitable view of gender roles within sacred texts. Bakhtiar's The Sublime Quran (2007) is a notable example, incorporating feminist perspectives to address and reinterpret gendered content (Bakhtiar, 2007).

Cultural and linguistic differences also play a critical role. Federici & Santaemilia (2021) highlight that gendered language differences between languages require specific translation strategies. For example, gender-neutral pronouns in some languages may necessitate distinct approaches to preserve gender distinctions from the source text. Translators' gender perspectives influence their strategies, impacting how gender roles and identities are rendered in translations (Federici & Santaemilia, 2021).

Historical and cultural contexts further shape gender perspectives in translation. As Baker (2006) discusses, translators' social and cultural backgrounds affect their handling of gender issues. Traditional translations, such as those by Yusuf Ali (1938) and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), often reflect historical gender norms. In contrast, modern translations by feminist scholars challenge and reinterpret these norms, offering new insights into gender representation in sacred texts.

This revised literature review aims to clearly articulate the relevance of the research, integrate theoretical frameworks effectively, and highlight the significance of

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gender in translation practices. It maintains a structured approach, providing a comprehensive overview that aligns with the standards of academic publication.

2.4 Analysis of Male Translators' Approaches

- *Yusuf Ali's Approach*

Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an, first published in 1938, is notable for its extensive commentary and footnotes, which aim to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between the Qur'anic text and a Western audience (Ali, 1938). Ali's approach integrates translation with detailed explanations, providing historical, theological, and contextual insights to clarify complex Qur'anic concepts. His legal background and scholarly experience influenced his translation methodology, reflecting a commitment to making the text accessible while addressing potential misconceptions about Islam. For example, Ali's translation often includes extensive footnotes to explain concepts such as divine justice and mercy, which he sought to present in a manner that would resonate with Western readers (Ali, 1938). However, this adaptation sometimes leads to modifications that alter the original text's nuances to fit Western sensibilities. An instance of this is seen in Ali's translation of Surat Al-Fatiha, where his interpretive choices reflect an effort to make Islamic teachings comprehensible and palatable to a Western audience, which may affect the traditional understanding of gender roles and other contextual elements.

- *Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's Approach*

Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's translation, first published in 1930 as The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an, is renowned for its literal approach. As a British convert to Islam, Pickthall's translation reflects his commitment to preserving the Qur'an's original text and structure as closely as possible (Pickthall, 1930). His method emphasizes fidelity to the formal and linguistic qualities of the Qur'anic text, which he believed were essential for conveying its spiritual and textual integrity (Memon, 1988). Pickthall's literal approach maintains the original Arabic syntax and phrasing, aiming to preserve the Qur'an's divine and linguistic characteristics. For example, his translation of Surat Al-Fatiha adheres closely to the Arabic text's formal qualities, which helps to retain its original sense but can also pose challenges for readers unfamiliar with Qur'anic style (Pickthall, 1930). This strategy reflects Pickthall's intention to offer an authentic representation of the Qur'an, though it may result in a translation that is less accessible to those not well-versed in Islamic or Arabic studies (Memon, 1988).

- *Comparative Analysis*

Comparing the approaches of Ali and Pickthall reveals significant differences in how gender perspectives and translation strategies shape the understanding of Surat Al-Fatiha. Ali's adaptation for Western readers involves modifying the text to align with Western cultural norms, potentially altering traditional gender representations and other

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interpretative nuances. In contrast, Pickthall's literal approach strives to preserve the original text's formal qualities, maintaining the Qur'an's integrity but sometimes at the expense of accessibility. For instance, in translating gendered language in Surat Al-Fatiha, Ali might choose explanations that align with Western notions of gender equality, while Pickthall's translation remains closer to the Arabic original, reflecting traditional gender roles more faithfully. This comparative analysis underscores how different translation strategies influence the representation and reception of gender and other thematic elements in sacred texts.

- *Theoretical Framework*

Ali's approach aligns with Venuti's concept of "domestication," which adapts the text to make it more accessible to the target audience, potentially at the expense of preserving the original's gendered and cultural nuances (Venuti, 1995). In contrast, Pickthall's literal strategy reflects "foreignization," which aims to retain the text's original form and meaning, preserving gendered aspects but potentially making the text less accessible to readers unfamiliar with its context (Venuti, 1995).

2.5 Analysis of Female Translators' Approaches

- *Laleh Bakhtiar's Feminist Approach*

Laleh Bakhtiar's translation, The Sublime Quran (2007), stands out for its feminist perspective, aimed at addressing and correcting gender biases in traditional Qur'anic translations. Bakhtiar applies a feminist lens to reinterpret verses that have historically marginalized women, offering alternative readings that challenge patriarchal interpretations and highlight gender equality. For instance, her translation of Surat Al-Fatiha reflects her commitment to presenting the text in a manner that aligns with contemporary gender understandings, while remaining faithful to its core messages (Bakhtiar, 2007).

Bakhtiar's approach is grounded in feminist translation theory, which emphasizes the need to recognize and address gender biases in both source and target texts (Baker, 2006). Her translation choices, particularly in Surat Al-Fatiha, illustrate how she addresses historical misinterpretations of gendered language. For example, Bakhtiar's rendering of key terms and concepts aims to correct patriarchal biases and offer a more inclusive perspective, reflecting her dedication to gender equity and justice. This feminist approach is evident in her careful revision of traditional interpretations to ensure that gendered implications are handled with sensitivity and fairness.

Laleh Bakhtiar's translation of the Qur'an reflects a conscious effort to challenge patriarchal interpretations and offer a more gender-inclusive understanding of the sacred text. While direct academic analyses of her translation are limited, her approach aligns closely with the feminist hermeneutic frameworks developed by scholars such as Amina

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Wadud (1999), Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), and Mervat Hatem (1996). These scholars emphasize the importance of re-examining Qur'anic verses through the lens of gender equity and justice, highlighting the ways traditional interpretations have often marginalized women's voices. Bakhtiar's translation can thus be situated within this broader movement of feminist Islamic scholarship, which seeks to reconcile faith with contemporary concerns about gender justice. By adopting gender-sensitive language and reinterpreting key terms, Bakhtiar contributes to the ongoing dialogue about inclusivity in Islamic texts, reflecting the theoretical and ethical concerns outlined in the works of Wadud, Mir-Hosseini, and Hatem.

- *Amina* Wadud's *Academic Approach*

Amina Wadud's interpretation of Islamic texts reflects her academic expertise and her pioneering role in developing gender-conscious readings of the Qur'an. Wadud applies a rigorous analytical framework that incorporates historical, linguistic, and theological contexts to provide a nuanced and balanced approach to understanding the sacred text. Her work is grounded in deep scholarly research and aims to bridge the gap between traditional Islamic exegesis and contemporary feminist thought.

Wadud's perspective is marked by a strong commitment to addressing gender bias in historical interpretations while remaining respectful of classical scholarship. In her influential work Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective (Wadud, 1999), Wadud reexamines foundational Qur'anic passages through a lens that challenges patriarchal readings and foregrounds gender equity. While she does not provide a full translation of Surat Al-Fatiha, her interpretive methodology often engages with such central texts, highlighting how gendered assumptions have influenced their reception and explanation throughout Islamic history (Mir-Hosseini, 2013). Through her scholarship, Wadud offers interpretive readings that integrate both traditional Islamic values and contemporary concerns for justice and equality. Her work exemplifies a balanced approach that is both academically rigorous and sensitive to gender dynamics (Resky & Hasibuan, 2024). It serves as a model for inclusive, informed, and contextually grounded engagement with the Qur'an, especially in areas where translation and interpretation intersect with issues of gender (Ariesita & Adhitya, 2023).

2.6 Comparative Analysis

Comparing Bakhtiar's feminist approach with Wadud's academic perspective reveals distinct methodologies in addressing gender issues in translation. Bakhtiar's feminist lens results in reinterpretations that challenge traditional gender norms, offering readings that emphasize gender equality and inclusivity. Her translation of gendered language often reflects a progressive stance on gender roles, aiming to correct historical biases and provide a more equitable representation of gender (Bakhtiar, 2007). In contrast, Wadud's academic approach maintains a balance between respecting classical scholarship and addressing modern gender insights. Her translation of Surat Al-Fatiha integrates

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traditional interpretations with contemporary understandings, providing a nuanced view that acknowledges both historical contexts and current gender dynamics. This balanced approach highlights how Wadud navigates between preserving the integrity of classical interpretations and incorporating gender-conscious perspectives. For example, Bakhtiar's translation might emphasize egalitarian readings in specific verses, while Wadud's approach could offer a comprehensive analysis that respects historical interpretations while incorporating modern gender insights. This comparative analysis illustrates how different perspectives on gender impact the translation of sacred texts, providing valuable insights into the broader implications for translation practices.

- *Theoretical Framework*

Bakhtiar's feminist approach aligns with feminist translation theory, which advocates for the recognition and correction of gender biases in translation (Baker, 2006). Her method challenges traditional gender norms and aims to present a more inclusive view of the Qur'an. Wadud's academic approach reflects scholarly practices that integrate historical and contemporary perspectives, offering a balanced translation that respects classical interpretations while addressing gender concerns. This comparative analysis of Bakhtiar's and Wadud's translations not only highlights their distinct approaches but also contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender influences the translation of sacred texts. By examining these methodologies, we gain insights into the broader implications of gender perspectives on translation practices and interpretations.

3. Methodology

This study aimed to explore the impact of gender on translation choices in the interpretation of Surat Al-Fatiha, with a specific focus on how gender-sensitive language influences the perception of divine attributes and roles. The methodology involved a comparative analysis of the translations of four scholars: Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Laleh Bakhtiar, and Amina Wadud. The following sections outline the research design, data collection, and analysis procedures.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative comparative design, examining how gender perspectives manifest in different translations of the same text. The research specifically analyzed the English translations of Surat Al-Fatiha from four translators, two male (Yusuf Ali and Pickthall) and two female (Bakhtiar and Wadud). The primary data for this research consisted of their translations of the verses in Surat Al-Fatiha. The focus was on identifying gendered language choices, such as pronouns, adjectives, and terminology, and interpreting how these choices reflected each translator's cultural, religious, and gendered perspectives. The sample was purposefully selected to include both well-known traditional and feminist interpretations, allowing for a robust comparison between male and female approaches to translation.

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The translators' works were selected based on their influence and availability in English-language scholarship on the Qur'an, making them representative of both historical and contemporary approaches to Qur'anic translation.

3.2 Research Instrument(s)

The primary research instrument was a thematic content analysis framework. This qualitative tool allowed the researcher to systematically identify and analyze gendered language choices in the translations of Surat Al-Fatiha. No new instruments were developed for this study, as existing methods of textual analysis in translation studies were employed, particularly focusing on identifying linguistic choices and their potential gendered implications. The analysis was based on established theoretical frameworks in translation studies, particularly those related to feminist translation theory and cultural/contextual translation, which helped in interpreting the subtle gendered nuances in the selected translations. Reliability and validity of the analysis were ensured by adhering to established practices in qualitative research, including consistent coding and categorization of gendered terms and phrases.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected by systematically gathering the English translations of Surat Al-Fatiha from the four selected translators. Each translation was examined line by line to identify language that either directly or indirectly reflected gendered perspectives. The collection process was completed by sourcing the translations from available published works and reputable academic databases. For the analysis, the study utilized a comparative method to evaluate how each translator's choices in language impacted the perception of gender roles and divine attributes. Each verse was analyzed for specific words or phrases that might reflect a gendered viewpoint, such as the use of terms like "Master," "Compassionate," or "You" versus "Thee," which could be indicative of gender sensitivity or a lack thereof. The study focused not only on the words themselves but also on the broader implications of those choices, assessing how they aligned with feminist or traditional interpretations of religious texts.

The data was then synthesized and compared across the four translations. The analysis was qualitative, aimed at drawing thematic conclusions about how gendered translation choices influence the broader understanding of the text, especially in the context of Islamic theology and gender equality. Additionally, the researcher examined the cultural and historical contexts surrounding each translator's approach to better understand the motivations behind their language choices. Finally, the findings were discussed in relation to the broader literature on translation studies and feminist theory, providing insights into how gender influences the interpretation and dissemination of sacred texts.

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4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Translation Differences and Gender Impact

In this section, the approach selected by the selected translators (Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, Bakhtiar, and Wadud) to approach the translation of Surat Al-Fatiha will be analysed, specifically focusing on gendered choices and how those choices impact the presentation of divine attributes. The analysis of the first seven verses reveals significant differences in the use of gender-sensitive language, reflecting the translators' cultural and personal backgrounds.

Table 1.

Comparison of Gendered Translation Choices in Surat Al-Fatiha

Verse	Translator	Translation	Key Terms	Gender Sensitivity
1	Yusuf Ali	In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful	Most Gracious, Most Merciful	Non-gendered, accessible to Western audience
1	Pickthall	In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful	Beneficent, Merciful	Traditional, gender-neutral
1	Bakhtiar	In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful	Compassionate, Merciful	Feminist, gender-inclusive
1	Wadud	In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful	Most Compassionate, Most Merciful	Feminist, gender-conscious, interpretive

Verse 1 Translation Analysis

- **Yusuf Ali:** His translation uses “Most Gracious” and “Most Merciful,” aiming to make God’s attributes relatable to a Western audience. While these choices enhance accessibility, they do not explicitly address gender issues.
- **Pickthall:** Sticks to traditional terms like “Beneficent” and “Merciful,” retaining the formal and classical tone, focusing on divine qualities but without integrating gender-specific perspectives.
- **Bakhtiar:** Her use of “Compassionate” instead of “Beneficent” reflects a feminist view, aiming for an empathetic, inclusive translation that challenges historical gender biases.

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- **Wadud:** Employs terms like "Most Compassionate" and "Most Merciful," bringing a feminist, interpretive lens to the text. Her approach is grounded in gender-conscious scholarship that critically engages with patriarchal interpretations while remaining faithful to Islamic tradition.

4.2 Gendered Language and Inclusivity in Translation

The impact of gendered language choices is evident throughout the translations, especially in the divine attributes described in the first three verses.

Table 2.

Gendered Language Use in Translation

Verse	Translator	Gendered Language Choice	Analysis of Gender Impact
2	Yusuf Ali	Cherisher and Sustainer	Gender-neutral, but implies nurturing qualities
2	Pickthall	Lord of the Worlds	Traditional, masculine-oriented
2	Bakhtiar	Sustainer of the worlds	Gender-neutral, emphasizing care
2	Wadud	Lord of the Worlds	Traditional but balanced with modern insights

Verse 2 Translation Analysis:

- **Yusuf Ali:** "Cherisher and Sustainer" places emphasis on the nurturing and sustaining roles of God, indirectly incorporating a more caring, gender-neutral tone. However, there is no direct gender-related focus.
- **Pickthall:** "Lord of the Worlds" adheres to traditional terminology, focusing on God's sovereignty and authority. This choice aligns with classical interpretations, reflecting a masculine-oriented view of divine rule.
- **Bakhtiar**: Choosing "Sustainer" highlights the nurturing aspect of God's role, aligning with her feminist approach that prioritizes care and inclusivity.
- **Wadud:** Although she uses traditional terms like "Lord of the Worlds," Wadud critically engages with the gendered implications of such language in her scholarship, balancing respect for classical texts with modern gender sensitivity and interpretive awareness.

4.3 Implications of Gender in Theological Interpretation

The different translation choices also shape how readers interpret divine roles and attributes, especially regarding gender perceptions within Islamic theological discourse.

- **Yusuf Ali:** His translation is aimed at a Western audience, prioritizing accessibility and understanding of divine qualities without engaging deeply with gender perspectives. His language choices reflect a desire to bridge cultural gaps (Ali, 1938).

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- **Pickthall:** Emphasizes maintaining classical integrity, with terms like "Lord" that resonate with traditional interpretations but remain neutral concerning gender (Pickthall, 1930).
- **Bakhtiar:** Her translations challenge traditional gender roles by offering a more inclusive perspective, reflecting modern values of gender equality and empathy (Bakhtiar, 2007).
- **Wadud:** Wadud's approach critically engages with classical texts through a gender-conscious lens, combining respect for tradition with feminist interpretive insights that highlight issues of gender equity and inclusivity (Wadud, 1999).

4.4 Gendered Translation in Reception and Cultural Contexts

Translation choices also influence how these texts are received by different audiences, including Muslim and non-Muslim readers, and in both academic and religious settings.

Table 3.

Reception of Gendered Translations Across Audiences

Translator	Audience Type	Reception Impact
Yusuf Ali	Traditional Muslim, Academic	Well-received for scholarly depth but less inclusive for gender-sensitive readers
Pickthall	Traditional Muslim	Preferred for its classical style and adherence to Islamic scholarship
Bakhtiar	Progressive Muslim, Feminist Readers	Appeals to readers seeking gender-sensitive interpretations
Wadud	Progressive Muslim, Academic	Resonates with contemporary scholars and readers interested in gender-conscious and feminist interpretations

- *Reception Insights*
- **Yusuf Ali and Pickthall:** Their translations are often favored by traditional audiences who appreciate their adherence to classical interpretations. However, these choices may not appeal to readers sensitive to gender inclusivity.
- **Bakhtiar and Wadud:** These translators' work is well-received by progressive Muslim audiences and scholars who prioritize gender equality and inclusivity in religious texts.

The translators' approaches to gender-sensitive language are also apparent in verses 4 through 7. These verses involve references to God's authority, human dependence on divine aid, guidance, and the paths of righteousness. Each translator's choices reflect varying degrees of traditionalism, inclusivity, and gendered perspectives.

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Table 4.

Comparison of Gendered Translation Choices for Verses 4-7 in Surat Al-Fatiha

Verse	Translator	Translation	Key Terms	Gender Sensitivity
4	Yusuf Ali	Master of the Day of Judgment	Master	Traditional, non-gendered
4	Pickthall	Master of the Day of Judgment	Master	Traditional, non-gendered
4	Bakhtiar	Master of the Day of Judgment	Master	Traditional, no gendered alteration
4	Wadud	Sovereign of the Day of Judgment	Sovereign	Feminist, challenges patriarchal assumptions
5	Yusuf Ali	Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek	Thee, Thine	Formal, non-gendered
5	Pickthall	Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help	Thee	Traditional, non-gendered
5	Bakhtiar	You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help	You	Modern, inclusive
5	Wadud	You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help	You	Gender-inclusive, reinterprets divine pronouns
6	Yusuf Ali	Show us the straight way	Straight way	Non-gendered, accessible
6	Pickthall	Guide us on the Straight Path	Straight Path	Non-gendered, traditional
6	Bakhtiar	Guide us on the straight path	Straight path	Inclusive, but traditional phrasing
6	Wadud	Guide us on the equitable Path	Equitable Path	Feminist, emphasizes justice and inclusivity
7	Yusuf Ali	The way of those who receive Thy grace; not the way of those who have brought down wrath upon themselves, nor of those who have gone astray	Grace	Non-gendered, traditional
7	Pickthall	The path of those who have received Thy grace; not the	Grace	Traditional, non-gendered

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		path of those who have brought down wrath upon themselves, nor of those who have gone astray		
7	Bakhtiar	The path of those who have received Your grace; not the path of those who have brought down wrath upon themselves, nor of those who have gone astray	Grace	Modern, inclusive
7	Wadud	The path of those granted Your mercy; not the path of those who earned wrath or went astray	Mercy	Inclusive, reinterprets divine mercy emphasizing justice

Verse 4 Translation Analysis

- **Yusuf Ali:** The term “Master” emphasizes divine authority over the Day of Judgment. This maintains a traditional tone without addressing gender issues. The use of "Master" is formal and non-gendered, a consistent choice reflecting a classical understanding of divine sovereignty (Ali, 1938).
- **Pickthall:** Similarly, Pickthall uses “Master,” maintaining the same traditional and formal tone. There is no explicit gender sensitivity, as the term "Master" has historically been used in Islamic texts without gender connotations (Pickthall, 1930).
- **Bakhtiar:** Bakhtiar uses the term “Master” as well, despite her feminist perspective. She does not alter this term, as it fits the traditional language of the Qur’an, focusing more on inclusivity in other parts of her translation (Bakhtiar, 2007).
- **Wadud:** Her translation and interpretive methodology critically engage with gendered language in the Qur’an. Rather than literal word-for-word rendering, Wadud offers a hermeneutic re-reading aimed at dismantling patriarchal assumptions embedded in traditional interpretations (Wadud, 1999). For example, she prefers terms like “Sovereign” instead of “Master” to emphasize divine authority without patriarchal connotations. Her use of “You” makes the relationship between the divine and human more immediate and egalitarian.

Verse 5 Translation Analysis

- **Yusuf Ali:** His use of “Thee” and “Thine” reflects formal, traditional language. The phrase emphasizes servitude and dependence on God, but does not directly address gender considerations (Ali, 1938).

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- **Pickthall:** Similar to Yusuf Ali, Pickthall uses “Thee” and “Thee do we beseech for help,” which maintains a formal tone while emphasizing servitude. There is no gender-specific impact in this rendering (Pickthall, 1930).
- **Bakhtiar:** She modernizes the language by using “You” instead of “Thee.” This change makes the translation more inclusive and accessible, aligning with contemporary values of equality (Bakhtiar, 2007). Her choice ensures that the language reflects a more neutral and inclusive approach.
- **Wadud:** Wadud also uses “You,” similar to Bakhtiar, reflecting a modern, inclusive approach. Her translation remains faithful to the original message while embracing contemporary sensibilities regarding gender neutrality (Wadud, 1999).

Verse 6 Translation Analysis:

- **Yusuf Ali:** “Show us the straight way” is a direct and straightforward request for guidance. This phrasing is non-gendered and accessible to all audiences, emphasizing the universal need for divine direction (Ali, 1938).
- **Pickthall:** Using “Guide us on the Straight Path,” Pickthall maintains traditional phrasing. His translation preserves classical language while avoiding gender-specific implications (Pickthall, 1930).
- **Bakhtiar:** Her choice of “Guide us on the straight path” is largely traditional but reflects her feminist sensitivity by using modern language that feels more inclusive. She does not alter the essence of the request but ensures that the tone resonates with contemporary readers (Bakhtiar, 2007).
- **Wadud:** Wadud also replaces “Straight Path” with “equitable path,” highlighting her commitment to justice and fairness as core Quranic values, integrating gender equity into theological concepts (Wadud, 1999).

Verse 7 Translation Analysis:

- **Yusuf Ali:** His translation specifies "the way of those who receive Thy grace," distinguishing between those who have received divine favor and those who have gone astray. This maintains the traditional phrasing and does not engage with gendered language directly (Ali, 1938).
- **Pickthall:** "The path of those who have received Thy grace" follows a similar structure to Yusuf Ali’s translation. There is no direct focus on gender, maintaining a neutral tone and adhering to traditional Islamic scholarship (Pickthall, 1930).
- **Bakhtiar:** By using “Your grace,” Bakhtiar modernizes the language, making it more accessible and inclusive. This reflects her feminist approach, translating resonates with contemporary values of inclusivity and equality (Bakhtiar, 2007).
- **Wadud:** In her rendering of verse 7, she shifts “grace” to “mercy,” framing divine favor in terms that emphasize compassion and justice rather than hierarchical control (Wadud, 1999).

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Verses 4-7 also highlight significant translation choices that influence how gender is addressed within divine concepts. These verses particularly focus on human dependence on God, the request for guidance, and the distinction between those who follow divine guidance and those who stray. The translators' choices in these verses further illustrate the difference between traditional and contemporary interpretations of divine sovereignty, servitude, and guidance. In verses 4 through 7, the male translators (Yusuf Ali and Pickthall) continue to emphasize traditional interpretations, with an emphasis on formality and reverence, while the female translators (Bakhtiar and Wadud) shift towards inclusive language. Bakhtiar and Wadud's use of modern terms like "You" and "Your" marks a notable shift toward more inclusive, contemporary language that resonates with values of equality and accessibility, especially for modern readers. Thus, the choice of gendered language not only impacts theological interpretations but also shapes the reception of these texts across different cultural and academic contexts. These differences, particularly in how divine attributes and roles are presented, demonstrate the evolving nature of Qur'anic translation in the modern world.

4.5 Broader Theological and Cultural Implications

Gendered translation choices can reshape theological discussions and influence how religious texts are perceived across different cultural contexts. The shift toward more inclusive language, as seen in Bakhtiar and Wadud's work, may contribute to a re-evaluation of traditional theological interpretations. It offers an opportunity to engage with the Qur'an in ways that address both historical and modern understandings of gender roles.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights how gendered and cultural perspectives profoundly influence the translation choices in Surat Al-Fatiha, as demonstrated by the works of Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, Bakhtiar, and Wadud. Yusuf Ali and Pickthall's translations reflect the early 20th-century context, focusing on traditional interpretations and catering to their respective cultural backgrounds. While Yusuf Ali prioritizes accessibility for Western audiences, Pickthall stays rooted in classical scholarship. In contrast, Bakhtiar and Wadud bring contemporary feminist and scholarly perspectives to their translations, challenging historical gender biases and making the text more inclusive for modern readers.

These differing approaches emphasize the evolving nature of translation, as contemporary translators seek to balance respect for tradition with an awareness of current social and gender issues. The reception of these translations varies: traditionalists value the fidelity to classical interpretations in Yusuf Ali and Pickthall's works, while progressive readers appreciate the inclusive and gender-conscious translations offered by Bakhtiar and Wadud. These dynamics underline the ongoing dialogue within Islamic discourse and how translation practices can reflect both historical values and contemporary concerns. Ultimately, these translations enrich readers' engagement with sacred texts, offering diverse pathways to understanding Islamic teachings.

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6. Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

Building on this analysis of gendered translations of Surat Al-Fatiha, several key recommendations emerge for future translators and scholars:

- Awareness of Gender Perspectives: Translators should actively engage with and reflect on their own gender perspectives when translating, as these perspectives can significantly shape the text's interpretation. Future research should explore how gender identity and cultural backgrounds influence translation choices, ensuring more balanced and inclusive outcomes.
- Use of Inclusive Language: Future translations need to employ language that respects and represents diverse gender perspectives. Translators should carefully consider the implications of gendered terms to avoid reinforcing outdated biases. For example, Bakhtiar's use of "Compassionate" over "Beneficent" serves as a model for gender-inclusive language that aligns with contemporary values of equality.
- Engagement with Contemporary Theories: Translators are encouraged to incorporate insights from modern gender studies and feminist translation theories to address biases and integrate contemporary sensibilities. This approach would align with Federici & Santaemilia's (2021) advocacy for gender studies in translation to promote fairness and equity.
- Consideration of Diverse Audience Needs: Translators should consider the varied needs of their audience—both traditional and progressive readers, while maintaining a balance between traditional accuracy and modern inclusivity. Wadud's translation demonstrates how respecting classical interpretations while being accessible and inclusive can cater to a broad spectrum of readers.
- Feedback and Dialogue: Engaging with a diverse range of readers, scholars, and community members is crucial for identifying potential biases and improving translation practices. Seeking feedback from individuals of different gender identities can enrich the translation process and ensure that the text is reflective of diverse perspectives.

By adhering to these recommendations, translators can advance the field of translation studies, fostering more inclusive and gender-sensitive practices that contribute to a deeper, more equitable understanding of sacred texts across diverse cultural contexts.

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