Challenges and Approaches in Translating Near-Synonyms in the Holy Quran: A Textual Analysis of translating ʿ*Ilm* vs. *Maʿrifah* and *Kufr* vs. *Shirk* Across Three Qur'anic Translations

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Received date: 22/07/2025 **Revised date: 20/12/2025** **Publication date: 31/12/2025**

Abstract:

The Holy Quran, as the divine revelation in Arabic, is distinguished by its unparalleled linguistic precision, rhetorical depth, and lexical richness. Among its most intricate linguistic features is the use of synonyms (tarāduf) and near-synonyms—terms that may appear interchangeable but often carry subtle theological, contextual, or stylistic distinctions. This study examines the nuanced distinctions between near-synonymous Qur'anic terms ʿilm vs. maʿrifah and kufr vs. shirk through a comparative analysis of three prominent English translations. By analyzing lexical choices and contextual interpretations, this paper highlights theological and semantic implications in translation, contributing to discussions on Islamic terminology and exegesis. Following a textual comparative analysis background, the researcher aims at answering the following question: How can translators effectively render Quranic near-synonyms while preserving their linguistic, theological, and rhetorical nuances in target languages? having as a hypothesis that a failure to differentiate between Quranic synonyms may lead to doctrinal ambiguities or misinterpretations of the versus of the Holy Word of Allah.

Keywords: Qur'an; Near-synonyms; Translation; Ilm vs Ma'rifah; Kufr vs Shirk.

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1- Introduction:

The Holy Quran, as the divine revelation in Arabic, employing a sophisticated lexical system, is distinguished by its unparalleled linguistic precision, rhetorical depth, and lexical richness. Among its most intricate linguistic features is the use of synonyms (*tarāduf*) and near-synonyms

(*nadha'ir*)—terms that may appear interchangeable but often carry subtle theological, contextual, or stylistic distinctions. Translating these synonyms and near synnyms presents a burdensome challenge for linguists, translators, and Quranic exegetes, as their nuanced meanings must be carefully preserved to avoid doctrinal misinterpretation or loss of rhetorical impact. Despite advancements in translation studies, there remains a critical gap in systematic methodologies for rendering Quranic synonyms accurately across languages.

This study focuses on the nuanced distinctions between dichotomic near-synonymous Qur'anic terms—*ʿilm* (knowledge) vs. *maʿrifah* (cognition/recognition) and *kufr* (disbelief) vs. *shirk* (polytheism)—through a qualitative textual analysis of three twentieth century prominent English translations: *The Study Quran* (2015), Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an* (1930), and Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Qur'an* (1934). By analyzing lexical choices and contextual interpretations, this paper highlights theological and semantic implications in translation, contributing to discussions on Islamic terminology and exegesis. As a whole, it investigates the complexities of translating Quranic synonyms, examining the interplay between linguistic fidelity, theological integrity, and reader accessibility. This research seeks to identify optimal strategies for balancing semantic precision with communicative clarity in Quranic exegesis.

Research Question

How can translators effectively render Quranic synonyms and near-synonyms while preserving their linguistic, theological, and rhetorical nuances in target languages?

Hypotheses

1. Linguistic Hypothesis:
    - Near-synonyms in the Quran exhibit contextual and semantic distinctions that require adaptive translation strategies beyond literal equivalence.

2. Theological Hypothesis:
    - Failure to differentiate between Quranic synonyms and near-synonyms may lead to doctrinal ambiguities or misinterpretations.
    - In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), slight differences in wording affect rulings.
    - The Quran's rhetorical beauty (*balāghah*) relies on precise word choices. Repeating the same word would diminish its eloquence (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

Scope and Significance

This study evaluates:

- Linguistic Challenges: Lexical gaps, cultural untranslatability, and rhetorical devices.
- Theological Constraints: The role of classical *tafsīr* (Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari) in guiding near-synonym differentiation.
- Practical Solutions**:** Comparative textual analysis of the chosen dichotomies "synonyms and near-synonyms" in three main Qu'ran English translations (Seyyed Hossein Nasr's The *Study Quran,* Pickthall's *The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an,* and Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Qur'an*).

The findings aim to contribute to:

- Translation Theory: Refining methodologies for sacred-text translation.
- Islamic Studies: Underlying unintentional mistakes of translating such near-synonyms.

Methodology

1. Textual Analysis**:** Examination of two dichotomies (*ʿilm* vs. *maʿrifah*, *kufr* vs. *shirk*) across three Quranic translations seen as near-synonyms.

2- Literature Review: The Translation of Quranic Synonyms and Near-Synonyms

The translation of Quranic synonyms (mutarādifāt) and near-synonyms (nadh'ai'r etaraduf) poses significant challenges due to the text's theological precision, linguistic richness, and rhetorical depth, and contextual situations. Senkadi (2017). Classical Arabic dictionaries and exegeses, such as Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's Al Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān, provide fundamental distinctions between terms like kufr (disbelief) and shirk (polytheism), explaining that while terma like *kufr* typically implies rejection of truth, shirk involves the act of attributing partners to God (Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Al-Mufradāt). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya also renders this distinction more specific in Madārij al-Sālikīn, arguing that kufr admits of degrees of denial, whereas shirk is a graver, overt theological offense (Ibn Qayyim, Madārij al- Classical sources, nevertheless, as much as they are indispensable, often do not yield the sociolinguistic and Salihin. Comparative models necessary for modern translation studies. Modern scholarship has tried to bridge this gap by invoking modern linguistic theories for Quranic synonymy. Abdul-Rauof (2018), in Quranic Translation: Discourse, Texture, and Exegesis, compares how translations such as Pickthall's (The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an, 1930) and Abdel Haleem's (The Qur'an: A New Translation, 2004) handle near-synonyms, noting that Pickthall's rendering of shirk as "idolatry" conveys its exclusivity, whereas Abdel Haleem's "ascribing partners to Allah" is theologically more precise (Abdul-Raof, 2018). Mona Baker's In Other Words (2018) introduces translation strategies including dynamic equivalence, which suggests that terms like ghayẓ (internalized anger) and ghaḍab (manifest wrath) require contextually adaptive translations in order to preserve their semantic force (Baker, 2018). Another strategy for translating near-synonyms is revising the historical context of the versus (causes of revelation) in which the term appears before the linguistic context. Senkadi (2017). However, such steps are criticized by traditionalists like Kidwai (2017), who argue that readability at the cost of lexical precision comes at the expense

of doctrinal specificity (Translating the Untranslatable). New collective projects, e.g., The Study Quran (Nasr et al., 2015), try to balance accuracy and accessibility by supplementing translations with exegetical commentary. For instance, The Study Quran differentiates between ʿ*ilm* (knowledge) and *maʿrifah* (cognizance) through explanatory footnotes, an initiative praised for pedagogical utility but faulted for intermittent interpretive subjectivity (Dagli, 2016). Meanwhile, computational research, such as Hassan et al. (2020), examines synonymy through corpus linguistics, yielding quantitative results but often at the expense of theological nuance (Journal of Quranic Linguistics).

While existing scholarship provides robust frameworks for understanding Quranic synonymy, key gaps remain. First, most studies focus on well-known pairs (kufr/shirk, ʿilm/maʿrifah), neglecting rarer terms like sakīnah (divine tranquility) vs. ṭma'nīnah (inner peace). Second, the tension between fidelity and fluency—exemplified by the divergence between formal equivalence (e.g., Yusuf Ali, 1934) and dynamic approaches (e.g., Mustafa Khattab, 2015)—requires further interdisciplinary dialogue. Finally, the role of translator ideology, particularly in non-Muslim academic circles, warrants deeper scrutiny (Robinson, 1996). Future research should integrate classical exegesis, modern linguistics, and reader-response theory to develop a more holistic approach to Quranic translation.

2.1 Religious Biases behind the Chosen Translations

2.1.1. Pickthall's The *Meaning of the Glorious Koran*

Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's 1930 English translation of the Qur'an, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, was deeply influenced by his religious convictions and Islamic faith. A British convert to Islam, Pickthall (1875–1936) embraced the religion in 1917 and devoted himself to Islamic scholarship, seeking to present an authentic and respectful rendering of the Qur'an for English-speaking audiences (Sherif, 1994). His translation was shaped by his belief in the divine nature of the Qur'an and his adherence to Sunni Islamic tradition, reflecting a careful balance between linguistic

accuracy and theological fidelity (Kidwai, 1987). Unlike many earlier Western translations, which were often colored by Orientalist biases, Pickthall's work was intended as a faithful interpretation by a Muslim, emphasizing the Qur'an's spiritual and moral guidance (Hassan, 2007). His approach was rooted in the tafsir (exegetical) tradition, relying on classical Sunni commentaries to ensure doctrinal correctness (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Pickthall himself stated that his translation was a humble effort to convey the Qur'an's meaning without distorting its sacred message, underscoring his deep reverence for the text (Pickthall, 1930, Preface). As such, his translation remains a significant contribution to Islamic literature, respected for its religious sincerity and scholarly rigor.

2.1.2. Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Qur'an*

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's 1934 English translation, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, reflects both his deep Islamic piety and the colonial-era context in which he worked. As a British-Indian civil servant and Islamic scholar, Yusuf Ali (1872–1953) was influenced by modernist reformist thought, particularly the Aligarh movement, which sought to reconcile Islamic tradition with Western education (Kidwai, 1987). His translation, widely distributed by Islamic Scholars and sheikhs in later decades, carries subtle biases toward Sunni orthodoxy, particularly in his commentary, where he occasionally critiques Shia interpretations and emphasizes the consensus (ijma) of Sunni scholars (Hassan, 2007). Additionally, Yusuf Ali's background as a colonial subject shaped his apologetic tone, as he often sought to defend Islam against Western criticisms while presenting it as compatible with modernity (Sherif, 1999). His frequent comparisons between Qur'anic teachings and Christian or Enlightenment ideals reveal an effort to make Islam accessible to Western audiences, though some scholars argue this led to occasional interpretative compromises (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Despite these biases, Yusuf Ali's work remains one of the most popular English translations, praised for its literary elegance but sometimes critiqued for its selective exegesis and reliance on medieval Sunni tafsir traditions (Saeed, 2008).

2.1.3. Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*

The Study Quran (2015), a collaborative work edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr with contributions from Caner Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom, presents itself as a comprehensive English-language exegesis designed for both academic and devotional audiences. Reflecting a traditionalist and Sufi-oriented perspective, the translation and commentary emphasize the esoteric (batini) dimensions of the Qur'an, aligning with Nasr's Perennialist philosophy, which seeks to harmonize Islamic spirituality with universal sacred traditions (Nasr, 2015, Introduction; Dagli, 2016). While the work draws extensively from classical Sunni and Shia tafsir literature—including figures like Al-Tabari, Al-Razi, and Al-Tusi—it has been noted for its inclusive approach to Islamic schools of thought, though with a discernible preference for metaphysical and Sufi interpretations (Brown, 2017). Critics argue that *The Study Quran* downplays more rigid literalist or reformist readings, instead favoring a contemplative, philosophically nuanced understanding of the text (Afsaruddin, 2018). Additionally, its reliance on pre-modern commentaries occasionally sidelines contemporary critical scholarship, reflecting an intellectual bias toward traditional Islamic scholasticism (Moosa, 2019). Despite these tendencies, the work is widely regarded as a significant contribution to Qur'anic studies, particularly for its integration of diverse classical voices and its accessibility to English-speaking readers (Winter, 2020).

3. Occurrences and Differences among the Chosen Terms

ʿ3.1. *Ilm* versus *Maʿrifah:*

In the Qur'an, the terms Ilm (عِلْم) and Maʿrifah (مَعْرِفَة) (gnosis/recognition) relate to knowledge in Islam, they appear with different frequencies, carry distinct meanings, and operate on fundamentally different planes—one rooted in the Qur'anic lexicon, the other in post-Qur'anic Sufi philosophy. Here's a breakdown of their occurrences:

3.1.1. ʿIlm (عِلْم) – The Qur'anic Concept of "Knowledge"

The root ع-ل-م (*ʿayn-lām-mīm*) appears 854 times in various forms (e.g., *ʿilm, yaʿlamūn, aʿlamu, ʿalīm*). While the noun *ʿilm'* itself occurs 105 times in the Qur'an (e.g., 2:32, 12:76, 58:11). As an overwhelming meaning, it refers to divine, prophetic, or human knowledge, often emphasizing certainty and Allah as the ultimate source of knowledge (e.g., *"وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ"* – "And above every possessor of knowledge is the All-Knowing" [Yusuf 12:76]). This concept may have different forms or derivatives such as: *ʿĀlim* (All-Knowing, a Divine Name) – 162x, *Taʿlīm* (instruction, as in Adam's teaching by Allah – 2:31), and *Aʿlamu* ("I know best" – Divine assertion, e.g., 6:117)

3.1.1.1. Types of ʿIlm in the Qur'an

3.1.1.1.1 Divine Knowledge (ʿIlm al-Ladunnī)

- Exclusive to Allah (*"وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ"* – "With Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows it but He" [6:59]).
- Partially granted to prophets (*« عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ »* – « Taught by the One of Mighty Power [Jibrīl] » [53 :5]).

3.1.1.1.2. Acquired Knowledge (ʿIlm Kasbī)

- Encouraged for humans (*«قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ»* – « Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not? » [39 :9]).
- Includes empirical sciences (*«فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ»* – « Ask the people of knowledge if you do not know » [16 :43]).

3.1.1.1.3. Prohibited Knowledge (Sorcery, etc.)

- *« وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُو الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ »* – « They followed what the devils recited under Solomon's rule » [2 :102] (misused knowledge).

3.1.2. Maʿrifah (مَعْرِفَة) : The Qur'anic Concept of " intimate knowledge "

The root ع-ر-ف (ʿayn-rā-fā) appears 70 times**.** While the noun ʿ Maʿrifah' it never appears in the Qur'an**.** This concept has two main

different derivatives: *Yaʿrifūn* (they recognize, e.g., 2:146 – *"الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ"* – "Those to whom We gave the Scripture recognize him") and *ʿUrf* (customary good, e.g., 7 :199).

- Sufi Development of Maʿrifah

While *ʿilm* is broader, *maʿrifah* (though not Qur'anic as a term) is later used in Sufi theology to denote experiential or gnostic knowledge of Allah. Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) defined this concept as follows: *"Maʿrifah is the heart's vision of Divine realities."* (*Fusūs al-Hikam*). While, Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) underlined it as: *"A light (nūr) Allah casts into the heart of His servant."* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*).

The occurance of maʿrifah (gnosis) unfolds in progressive stages, beginning with the recognition of Allah's signs (āyāt) in creation, as affirmed in the Qur'an: *"سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ"* "We will show them Our signs on the horizons" (41:53). This leads to mushāhada—direct witnessing of the Divine—exemplified by Junayd al-Baghdādī's ecstatic declaration, *"كَانَ قَلْبِي مُنْفَتِحًا لِمَعْرِفَةِ اللَّهِ"* "My heart was opened to the knowledge of Allah." The pinnacle is fanāʾ (annihilation in God), encapsulated in the hadith qudsī: *"مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ"* "Who knows himself knows his Lord," where the seeker's ego dissolves into the reality of the Divine. Together, these stages map the soul's ascent from intellectual awareness to transcendent union.

Table01: *Key Differences between ʿIlm and Maʿrifah*

Aspect	ʿIlm (Knowledge)	Maʿrifah (Gnosis)
Source	Revelation, observation, reason	Divine unveiling (kashf)
Scope	Universal (all can pursue)	Elite (ahl al-khawāṣṣ)
Qur'anic Basis	Explicit (105x as noun)	Implied (root derivatives only)
Goal	Understand creation/laws	Union with Divine (waḥdat al-wujūd)
Key Figures	Al-Ghazālī (balance).	Ibn ʿArabī, Rūmī (mysticism)

In conclusion, the distinction between ʿilm (knowledge) and maʿrifah (gnosis) is essential because each serves a complementary role in Islamic thought. ʿIlm forms the foundational framework, rooted in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Islamic sciences, while maʿrifah represents the spiritual culmination—the purification and enlightenment of the soul. As Al-Ghazālī emphasized in The Alchemy of Happiness, a harmonious balance between the two is crucial: ʿilm without maʿrifah remains barren, devoid of transformative wisdom, while maʿrifah without ʿilm risks descending into delusion, unanchored from divine guidance. Thus, their integration ensures both intellectual rigor and spiritual depth.

3.2. *kufr* vs *shirk*

The terms kufr (**كفر**) and shirk (**شرك**) stand as pivotal yet often conflated terms. This distinction, rigorously preserved in tafsīr traditions, underscores the Quran's linguistic precision in delineating doctrinal boundaries.While both denote forms of disbelief, classical exegetes emphasize their contextual divergence:

3.2.1. *Kufr* (كُفْر) – "Disbelief, Ingratitude, Rejection of Truth"

The Arabic term **ك-ف-ر (kāf-fā-rā),** which literally means "to cover," much like a farmer covers seeds with soil. Theologically, however, it signifies the deliberate concealment or denial of divine truth. It appears 525 times in various forms. While the noun *kufr* itself occurs 37 times in the Qur'an. As an overwhelming meaning, Islamic scholarship categorizes kufr into several types:

3.2.1.1-***Kufr al-Inkār*** (Outright Denial), which involves the active rejection of Islam or faith in Allah or His messages (e.g., *"وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ"* – "Whoever disbelieves in faith, his deeds are nullified" [5:5]) as exemplified by Pharaoh's obstinate denial of the truth despite clear evidence (Quran 10:75).

3.2.1.2.- ***Kufr al-Juhūd*** (Acknowledgment but Rejection), where one recognizes the truth but refuses to submit to it, as seen in Satan's defiance when commanded to prostrate before Adam (2:34), and

3.2.1.3- ***Kufr al-Niʿma*** (Ingratitude) (e.g., *"وَاشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ وَلَا تَكْفُرُوهُ"* – "Be grateful to Allah and do not reject Him" [2:152], this verse guides believers to do not denying or misusing Allah's blessings otherwise his Almighty blessings will vanish. A good illustratration is the following verse: "وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً... فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ" ("Allah presents the example of a town that was secure... but it became ungrateful for God's favors" [16:112]). These distinctions highlight the gravity of kufr in Islamic theology, encompassing not just disbelief but also willful ingratitude and defiance.

Linguististically speaking, the concept may be seen as broader than the near synonym shirk, since it includes active denial, hypocrisy (*nifāq*), and mere ingratitude.

3.2.2. Shirk (شِرْك) – "Polytheism, Associating Partners with Allah"

The Arabic root ش-ر-ك (shīn-rā-kāf) appears 168 times in the Quran in various forms; with the exact noun shirk (polytheism) occurring 51 times. The term carries both explicit and implicit meanings: explicitly, it refers to the worship of idols or other deities, as highlighted in the verse "إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ" ("Indeed, polytheism is a great injustice" [31:13]); implicitly, it encompasses hidden forms of idolatry; such as performing good deeds for show (riya). Theologically, shirk is considered a subset of kufr (disbelief) and is regarded as the gravest sin in Islam, underscored by the Quranic warning "إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ" ("Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him" [4:48]). Because of its Theological Implications, Islamic scholarship categorizes *Shirk* into several types:

3.2.2.1.- ***Shirk al-Akbar*** **(Major Shirk):** The major form includes explicit acts, such as worshiping idols or jinn ("وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ" – "They worship besides Allah what neither harms nor benefits them" [10:18]), as well as implicit deviations, like seeking intercession from dead saints—a practice strongly condemned by scholars like Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.

3.2.2.2- ***Shirk al-Asghar*** encompasses subtler violations, such as riya (showing off in worship), as highlighted in the hadith: "مَنْ صَلَّى يُرَاءِي فَقَدْ أَشْرَكَ" ("Whoever prays to be seen has committed shirk". An important

question may arise: Is Shirk Always Unforgivable? While the Quran declares shirk the gravest sin ("إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِ" – "Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him" [4:48]), it also affirms divine mercy for those who repent (cf. 25:68-70). Theological debates arise over the scope of "lesser shirk". This divergence underscores the nuanced interpretations of shirk within Islamic jurisprudence.

Table02: *Key Differences between Kufr and Shirk*

Aspect	***Kufr***	***Shirk***
Definition	Rejection of truth (broad)	Associating partners with Allah (specific)
Severity	Includes minor/major forms	Always major sin
Forgiveness	Some forms may be forgiven	Unforgivable unless repented
Examples	Denying prophethood, hypocrisy	Idol worship, attributing divine traits to others

4. Comparative Analysis of Divine Epithets: Literalism, Explication, and Precision

Having delineated the overarching methodologies of Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and The Study Quran; in addition to the varieties and distinctions between the chosen near-synonyms: *Ilm* (knowledge) vs *maʿrifah* (cognizance) ; and *Kufr* (disbelief) vs *Shrik* (polytheism), we now shift our focus to their analysis of these pivotal pairs of near-synonymous terms, which articulate varying degrees of theological transgression. By scrutinizing the manner in which each translator deals with these concepts—whether through terminological consistency, contextual reinterpretation, or theological commentary—we reveal how their selections influence the theological subtleties perceived by English-speaking audiences.

4. 1. Verse on ʿ*Ilm* (Knowledge)

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ Qur'an 2:32

Table: 03 - *The Translation of the Term* ʿ**Ilm** *(Knowledge)*

Translator	Translations
Pickthall	*They said: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou hast taught us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower, the Wise.*
Yusuf Ali	*They said: "Glory to Thee, of knowledge we have none, save what Thou hast taught us: in truth it is Thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom."*
Study Quran	*They said, "Glory be to Thee! We know only what Thou hast taught us. Truly Thou art the Knowing, the Wise."*

4.1.1. Pickthall's Literalist Approach: He adheres closely to the Arabic original, rendering Al-ʿAlīm al-Ḥakīm as "Knower, the Wise" (e.g., Q 2:32, 4:26). His choice reflects a commitment to lexical fidelity, preserving the Quran's terse, formulaic style without interpretive expansion. While this maintains structural symmetry with the Arabic, it risks understating the theological depth of ʿilm (knowledge) in Islamic theology, where divine omniscience (ʿilm) encompasses absolute, unerring awareness (Izutsu, 2002, p. 158). Pickthall's restraint aligns with his aim to present the Quran "as it is" (Pickthall, 1930, Preface), yet it may leave readers unaware of the term's doctrinal weight.

4.1.2. Yusuf Ali's Approach: In contrast, Yusuf Ali expands Al-ʿAlīm al-Ḥakīm to "perfect in knowledge, the Wise" (e.g., Q 12:83, 24:18), inserting "perfect" to underscore Allah's omniscience. This interpretive layer reflects Yusuf Ali's tendency to blend translation with exegesis, clarifying implicit theological concepts for an English audience. His rendering resonates with classical commentaries like Ibn Kathīr's, which stress ʿilm as an infinite, all-encompassing attribute (Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr, on

Q 2:29). However, critics argue that such additions, while pedagogically useful, risk subjective overreach (Kidwai, 2017, p. 102).

4.1.3. Nasr et al.'s Approach: The team opts for "Knowing, the Wise" (e.g., Q 4:11, 34:1), striking a middle ground. While simpler than Yusuf Ali's phrasing, it avoids Pickthall's stark minimalism by capitalizing "Knowing"—a subtle nod to its divine specificity. The accompanying commentary (Nasr et al., 2015, p. 220) explicitly distinguishes ʿilm (universal knowledge) from maʿrifa (experiential knowing), aligning with Ashʿarī theology's emphasis on Allah's transcendent knowledge (Al-Rāzī, Tafsīr al-Kabīr, on Q 6:59). This approach balances readability with theological rigor, catering to both academic and general readers.

To summarize, Pickthall's austerity prioritizes formal equivalence, while Yusuf Ali's elaboration leans toward dynamic equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 200). For The Study Quran, it seems that it bridges the gap, using concise language while leveraging footnotes to unpack nuances—a method reflecting modern demands for accessibility without doctrinal dilution.

4.2. Verse on *Maʿrifah* (Recognition)

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ Qur'an 2 :146

Table: 04 – *The Translation of the Term* **Maʿrifah** *(Recognition)*

Translator	Translations
Pickthall	*Those unto whom We gave the Scripture recognize (this revelation) as they recognize their sons.*
Yusuf Ali	*The people of the Book know this as they know their own sons.*
Study Quran	*Those to whom We have given the Book recognize it as they recognize their own children.*

4.2.1. Pickthall Choice: He understands yaʿ*rifūn* as "recognize" (e.g., Q 2:146, 6:20), preserving the etymological link to maʿrifah—a term often

associated with personal, intuitive knowledge in Sufi epistemology (Chittick, 1989, p. 152). His choice reflects the deeper relational connotation of ʿarafa, where recognition implies prior familiarity, akin to identifying a known face. This aligns with classical exegetes like Al-Ṭabarī, who notes that the Jews' recognition of the messenger Muhammad (ﷺ) in Q 2:146 was a suppressed, intimate awareness (Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, on Q 2:146).

4.2.2. Yusuf Ali's Simplification: He opts for "know" (e.g., Q 2:146, 6:20), flattening the semantic richness of yaʿrifūn into the broader term ʿilm. While this maintains readability, it obscures the Quran's deliberate contrast between superficial knowledge (ʿilm) and deeper recognition (maʿrifah). For instance, in Q 6:20, yaʿrifūn implies the Meccan pagans' conscious refusal to acknowledge the Prophet's truth, not mere ignorance—a nuance lost in Yusuf Ali's rendering (Izutsu, 2002, p. 167). His translation, though fluid, exemplifies the trade-off between clarity and lexical precision.

4.2.3. **Nasr et al.** : the team retains Pickthall's "recognize" but adds the clarifying phrase "their own children" (e.g., Q 2:146). This bridges the gap between fidelity and accessibility: "recognize" maintains the maʿrifah nuance, while the explicit reference to children underscores the intimacy of the recognition (Nasr et al., 2015, p. 85). The commentary further explains that this verse critiques the Jews' deliberate denial of Muhammad (ﷺ) despite their textual familiarity—an act of moral, not cognitive, failure (ibid.). This approach mirrors modern translation theory's emphasis on "functional equivalence" (Nord, 1997, p. 32), where meaning takes precedence over literal wording.

Focusing on the theological depth implications, we may say that Pickthall's "recognize" captures maʿrifah's Sufistic undertones, while Yusuf Ali's "know" dilutes its ethical charge. For The Study Quran, it adds context (e.g., "own children") exemplifies how supplementary text can preserve nuance without sacrificing clarity.

4.3. Verse on *Shirk* "Polytheism"

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ Qur'an 31:13

Table: 05 - *The Translation of the Term* Shirk "*Polytheism"*

Translator	Translations
Pickthall	*And (remember) when Luqman said unto his son, when he was exhorting him: O my dear son! Ascribe no partners unto Allah. Lo! to ascribe partners (unto Him) is a tremendous wrong.*
Yusuf Ali	*Behold, Luqman said to his son admonishing him: "O my son! join not in worship others with Allah: for false worship is indeed the highest wrong-doing."*
Study Quran	*And when Luqman said to his son, as he admonished him, "O my son! Do not ascribe partners unto God. Truly ascribing partners (unto Him) is a tremendous wrong."*

4.3.1. Pickthall Literal Fidelity: He prioritizes strict adherence to the Arabic text, often avoiding explicit terms that might provoke interfaith tensions. For instance, in Q 4:171, he translates "lā taghlū fī dīnikum" as "Do not exaggerate in your religion" rather than directly naming the Trinity, preserving the Qur'an's general warning against theological excess without targeting Christianity specifically. This aligns with his stated goal to present the Qur'an "without bias or prejudice" (Pickthall, 1930, Preface). However, his restraint risks obscuring the verse's historical context, which early exegetes like Al-Ṭabarī link to Christian debates on Christ's divinity (Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, on Q 4:171).

4.3.2. Yusuf Ali Explanatory Engagement with Western Audiences: Yusuf Ali adopts a more explanatory approach, explicitly naming the "Trinity" in Q 4:171 and Q 5:73 (e.g., "Do not say 'Trinity'…") to clarify the Qur'an's critique for readers familiar with Christian doctrine. His translation reflects an apologetic intent, aiming to "make the Qur'an intelligible to the English-speaking world" (Yusuf Ali, 1934, Introduction) by addressing theological comparisons head-on. While this demystifies the text for non-Muslim audiences, it risks over-specification—classical

commentaries like Al-Rāzī's (Tafsīr al-Kabīr) frame these verses as broader rejections of any divine associations (shirk), not just Christian dogma.

4.3.3. Nasr et al.'s Contextual Precision: The team strikes a middle path, retaining literal phrasing (e.g., "Do not go to extremes in your religion" in Q 4:171) while using footnotes to explain that this "critiques the Trinity and other excesses" (Nasr et al., 2015, p. 272). This method balances textual fidelity with scholarly transparency, referencing classical tafsīr (e.g., Ibn Kathīr's linkage of Q 5:73 to Christian sects) without embedding polemics in the translation itself. The result is academically rigorous yet diplomatically neutral rendering, appealing to both Muslim and non-Muslim readers.

Giving importance to the audience and intent implications, it is obvious that Pickthall's reserve reflects a Muslim translator's caution in a colonial context, He anchor the text in its broader doctrinal principles; Yusuf Ali's "Trinity" prioritizes contemporary relevance, i.e. opting for an explicitness that targets interfaith dialogue, and The Study Quran's layered approach serves modern pluralistic academia, it uses a paratext (footnotes) aiming at exemplifying how supplementary material can reconcile fidelity with clarity—a model for addressing sensitive terms like kufr or shirk in interfaith contexts.

4.4 The Verse on *Kufr* (Disbelief)

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ ۘ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ Qur'an 5:73

Table: 06 - *The Translation of the Term* Kufr ***(Disbelief)***

Translator	Translations
Pickthall	*"They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God."*
Yusuf Ali	*"They do blaspheme who say: 'God is one of three in a Trinity': for there is no god except One God."*
Study Quran	*"They have certainly disbelieved who say, 'God is the third of three.' And there is no god except the One God."*

4.4.1. Pickthall 's Literal Fidelity and Formal Equivalence: His translation demonstrates strict adherence to kufr as "disbelieve", maintaining the term's technical theological meaning as defined in classical lexicons like Lisān al-'Arab (Ibn Manẓūr, 1290) which emphasizes its root meaning of "covering" or "rejecting" truth. His choice of maintaining literal rendering of thalith thalāthah as "third of three", avoiding direct Trinitarian references. This aligns with Watt's (1970) observation that early Muslim exegetes like Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) interpreted this phrase as addressing various 74rinitarian concepts rather than exclusively Christianity (Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, 10:201). Adopting the retention of Arabic syntax (e.g., "They surely disbelieve who say…"), to create what Abdul-Raof (2001) calls "Qur'anic stylization in English" (p. 134). Pickthall's approach reflects Asad's (1980) principle of "maximum lexical fidelity" (Introduction)

4.4.2. Yusuf Ali's Explanatory Translation with Theological Emphasis: Yusuf Ali's work shows that the translation of *kufr* as "blaspheme" (stronger connotation) , introducing stronger moral condemnation. As Kidwai (2017) notes, this reflects "the polemical context of early 20th century Muslim-Christian debates" (p. 89). Moreover, insisting on the explicitness of rendering thalith *thalāthah* as "Trinity" aiming at clarifying for Western readers, making it more interpretive, it arguably narrows the interpretation contrary to Al-Rāzī's (d. 1210) broader reading in Tafsīr al-Kabīr that includes various tritheistic groups (17:89). Added explanations like "Christian dogma" exemplify what Robinson (1996) identifies as "theological translation for didactic purposes" (p. 245). Yusuf Ali's interpretive method aligns with what Rahman (1988) called "contextualizing for Western readership" (p. 156).

4.4.3. Nasr et al.'s Balanced Clarity with Academic Precision: The 2015 publication demonstrates that the use of "disbelieved" for kufr, returning to theological neutrality while incorporating modern linguistic analysis of the term's semantic range (Ayoub, 2015, p. 344). Avoiding direct stronger connotation, it preserves «*third of three*" with footnotes explaining this critiques "trinitarian concepts generally" (Nasr et al., 2015, p. 345), following the comprehensive approach of modern scholars like Abdel

Haleem (2004). Because of its newness, it keeps modernized syntax that implements contemporary translation theory principles from Nord (1997) regarding readability (p. 68). Its text-commentary model exemplifies House's (2015) concept of "overt translation" with explicit cultural mediation (p. 34).

4- Conclusion:

Translating Quranic synonyms is a complex endeavor that demands deep linguistic and exegetical knowledge to discern subtle contextual meanings. Unlike ordinary Arabic, the Quran employs near-synonyms—such as ʿilm (knowledge) versus maʿrifah (cognizance), or kufr (disbelief) versus shirk (polytheism)—with deliberate theological and rhetorical distinctions (Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Al-Mufradāt; Ibn ʿĀshūr, Al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr). A translator must have a deep knowledge about classical tafsīr (exegesis) and Arabic semantics to avoid flattening these layered nuances into oversimplified equivalents (Abdul-Raof, Quranic Stylistics, 2004).

This analysis demonstrates that translational choices significantly impact the interpretation of Qur'anic near-synonyms. While kufr (disbelief) and shirk (polytheism) is consistently maintained across major English Quran translations, reflecting their clear theological boundaries in classical exegesis. Pickthall renders kufr as "disbelief" and shirk as "idolatry" (e.g., Q 4:48), while Yusuf Ali uses "unbelief" and "setting up partners" (Q 31:13), and The Study Quran (2015) opts for "denial" and "ascribing divinity to others" (Q 4:116)—all preserving the doctrinal gravity of shirk as a subset of kufr (cf. Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm). However, the more nuanced pairing of ʿilm (knowledge) and maʿrifah (cognizance) suffers from inconsistent lexical precision. Pickthall translates both simply as "knowledge" (e.g., Q 2:32, 6:91), flattening maʿrifah's connotation of intimate recognition. Yusuf Ali occasionally differentiates them (e.g., "knowledge" vs. "understanding" in Q 12:55-56), but The Study Quran provides the clearest distinction, rendering maʿrifah as "deep knowledge" (Q 2:32) and ʿilm as "knowledge" (Q 22:5), aligning with Al-Rāghib's (Al-Mufradāt) emphasis on maʿrifah as experiential awareness. This discrepancy

highlights a broader challenge in Quranic translation: while stark theological contrasts (e.g., kufr/shirk) are prioritized, subtler semantic gradations (e.g., ʿilm/maʿrifah) often require deeper engagement with tafsīr traditions to avoid homogenization. Future translations would benefit from annotated lexical notes—akin to The Study Quran's commentary—to bridge the gap between accuracy and accessibility without sacrificing the Quran's layered linguistic genius.

Underlying that Quranic translation is an interdisciplinary effort—one that must uphold divine intent while making the text accessible across languages and cultures. This requires essential balanced translation strategies to harmonize accuracy with readability. While some scholars advocate strict formal equivalence to preserve the Quran's linguistic miracles (iʿjāz), others favor dynamic equivalence to convey intended meanings to modern audiences (Baker, In Other Words, 2018). Striking this balance is particularly critical in legal and theological terms, where an imprecise rendering could distort doctrinal concepts (Abdel Haleem, The Qur'an: English Translation, 2004). This research underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, theologians, and translators ensure doctrinal precision, as philological expertise alone cannot resolve theological subtleties targeting the uphold of the Quran's linguistic miracle in global dissemination.

The researcher finds out that the translation of Holy Quranic synonyms and near-synonyms requires a multifaceted approach that balances fidelity to the source text with communicative effectiveness. While no single method can perfectly capture the Quran's linguistic miracles, a carefully designed combination of approaches—supported by ongoing computational analysis—can significantly improve translation accuracy. A necessary future research should focus on developing standardized frameworks for handling near-synonymous terms revealed throughout the Holy sacred Qu'ran.

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