



## Anaphoric Reference Shifts in English Translations of the Quran: A Skopos- and SFL-Oriented Analysis of Communicative Function

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تحولات الإحالة المرجعية الاسترجاعية في الترجمات الإنجليزية للقرآن الكريم: تحليل في ضوء نظرية  
Skopos واللسانيات الوظيفية النسقية.

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## Abstract:

This article examines anaphoric reference shifts in selected English translations of the Quran by Pickthall, Abdullah Ali, and Abdel Haleem, drawing on Skopos theory and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The study analyzes six purposively selected Quranic verses that contain significant shifts in vocative, personal, and audience references across the three English translations. It investigates shifts in vocative, personal, and audience references as communicative strategies for achieving communicative adequacy in translation while maintaining theological and rhetorical consistency in the translated text. The analysis shows that these shifts in anaphoric references are not merely random or stylistic variation but functionally motivated, constituting evidence of translators' attempts to reconcile their loyalty to the source text with their perceptions of English readers' cognitive, cultural, and interpretative needs. Drawing on key SFL concepts, including ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, the study demonstrates that translators' negotiation of meaning, interpersonal relations, and textual organization enhances the communicative adequacy, interpretive accessibility, and relevance of Quranic discourse for English readers who may otherwise be linguistically and culturally distant from the source text. The findings further suggest that anaphoric reference shifts serve as strategic translational resources that facilitate target-reader comprehension while preserving the core semantic and rhetorical functions of the source text.

**Keywords:** Anaphoric reference shift, Quran translations, Communicative Adequacy, Skopos theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics.

## المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث تحولات الإحالة المرجعية الاسترجاعية (Anaphoric Reference) في مختارات من الترجمات الإنجليزية للقرآن الكريم التي أنجزها بيكتال Pickthall وعبد الله يوسف علي Abdullah Yusuf Ali ومحمد عبد الحليم Abdel Haleem، مستنداً إلى كلٍّ من Skopos Theory واللسانيات الوظيفية النسقية Systemic Functional Linguistics وتحلل الدراسة ست آيات قرآنية اختيرت قصدياً لاحتوائها على تحولات بارزة في الإحالات الندائية، والضميرية، وإحالات المخاطب عبر الترجمات الإنجليزية الثلاث. وتهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف تحولات الإحالة الندائية، والضميرية، وإحالات المخاطب بوصفها استراتيجيات تواصلية تسعى إلى تحقيق الكفاية التواصلية في الترجمة، مع الحفاظ في الوقت نفسه على الاتساق اللاهوتي والبلاغي للنص المترجم. وتُظهر نتائج التحليل أن هذه التحولات في الإحالة المرجعية ليست مجرد تنوعات أسلوبية أو تغييرات عشوائية، بل هي تحولات ذات دوافع وظيفية، تعكس محاولات المترجمين للتوفيق بين وفائهم للنص المصدر وإدراكهم للاحتياجات الإدراكية والثقافية والتأويلية للقارئ الإنجليزي. واستناداً إلى المفاهيم الرئيسة في اللسانيات الوظيفية النسقية، ولا سيما الوظائف الكبرى الثلاث: الوظيفة التجريبية، والوظيفة التفاعلية (بين الأشخاص)، والوظيفة النصية، تبين الدراسة أن تفاوض المترجمين حول المعنى، والعلاقات بين أطراف الخطاب، والتنظيم النصي يسهم في تعزيز الكفاية التواصلية، وسهولة الوصول إلى التفسير، وملاءمة الخطاب القرآني للقارئ الإنجليزي الذي قد يكون بعيداً عن النص المصدر من الناحيتين اللغوية والثقافية. كما تشير النتائج إلى أن تحولات الإحالة المرجعية الاسترجاعية تمثل موارد ترجمية استراتيجية تُيسر فهم القارئ في اللغة الهدف، مع المحافظة على الوظائف الدلالية والبلاغية الجوهرية للنص المصدر.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحولات الإحالة المرجعية الاسترجاعية، ترجمات القرآن الكريم، الكفاية التواصلية، نظرية Skopos، اللسانيات الوظيفية النسقية.

## 1. Introduction:

The very nature of translation, as the transfer of meaning from one language and culture to another, has been widely recognized as a fundamentally communicative and goal-oriented practice rather than a purely mechanical one. Scholars have consistently emphasized that translation is shaped by the linguistic, cultural, and communicative characteristics of both the source and target languages (Schäffner, 2012; Sabrina et al., 2025; Laribi, 2024). Meaning construction is not universal; rather, each language encodes experience, interpersonal relations, and discourse organization through distinct semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic systems (Bekouche & Elsaid, 2024). These differences become particularly significant in the translation of religious texts such as the Holy Quran, where meaning is inseparable from theological, rhetorical, and communicative dimensions (Abdelaal & Rashid, 2015; Abdelaal, 2019; Asiri, 2020; Al-Hamzi, 2026; Hummadi et al., 2020; Najjar, 2020).

The Quran occupies a unique position as a sacred text believed to be the literal word of God (Allah), characterized by a highly distinctive and inimitable linguistic and rhetorical style (Gaskaree et al., 2023). Consequently, any modification in its linguistic form during translation raises concerns regarding distortion, misinterpretation, or semantic loss (Al-Tarawneh, 2025). For this reason, Quranic translation has long been associated with debates on fidelity, equivalence, and translatability. While traditional translation theories emphasize fidelity to both form and content, scholars such as Jakobson (2000) and Ghazala (2025) argued that complete equivalence between languages is unattainable due to structural and cultural asymmetries. These challenges are further intensified in sacred discourse, where linguistic forms often carry layered rhetorical and theological meanings.

One of the most challenging aspects of Quranic translation lies in the treatment of anaphoric reference and referential cohesion. Quranic discourse frequently exhibits shifts in grammatical categories such as person, number, gender, and voice—phenomena traditionally referred to as *iltifāt*. As noted by Alduhaim (2021) and Abdul-Latif (2023), such shifts are not arbitrary but serve important rhetorical functions, including audience engagement, emphasis, and stylistic dynamism. While these features are natural and rhetorically effective in Arabic, they may appear abrupt or incoherent when rendered literally into English, a language that generally favors referential stability and pronominal consistency.

For instance, in Quran 35:9, there is a shift from third-person reference to God (“He”) to first-person plural (“We”), which in Arabic conveys majesty and divine authority. However, in English translation, such shifts may disrupt readers’ expectations of referential continuity and narrative coherence. This creates a translational dilemma: whether to preserve the original referential pattern or adapt it to enhance clarity and communicative effectiveness in the target language. In practice, translators often employ strategies such as restructuring, explicitation, and the capitalization of divine pronouns to address this issue.

Despite the growing body of research on Quranic translation, a clear gap remains. Previous studies have largely focused either on the rhetorical function of *iltifāt* in the Arabic source text (e.g., Alduhaim, 2021; Abdul-Latif, 2023) or on general issues of equivalence and translatability in Quranic translation (e.g., Baker, 2004; Asiri, 2020). Other studies have examined cohesion and coherence in translation but tend to treat referential shifts as isolated stylistic or grammatical phenomena. However, there is still limited research that systematically investigates anaphoric reference shifts across multiple English translations of the Quran as communicative strategies, particularly through an integrated functional framework that combines Systemic Functional Linguistics and Skopos theory. More specifically, prior research has not sufficiently explored how

such shifts operate simultaneously at ideational, interpersonal, and textual levels to achieve communicative adequacy in the target context. This study addresses this gap by offering a functionally grounded, comparative analysis of anaphoric reference shifts in selected English translations.

From a theoretical perspective, the complexity of referential phenomena highlights the limitations of purely equivalence-based models of translation. Approaches that prioritize structural correspondence often overlook the communicative and functional dimensions of translation, potentially resulting in texts that are formally accurate but communicatively ineffective (Baker, 2004). This has led to an increasing recognition of the need to reconceptualize fidelity in terms of the successful realization of meaning within the target context.

Neumann's (2021) theoretical frameworks—Skopos theory and SFL—are particularly relevant. SFL views language as a resource for meaning-making, where ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions interact to construct experience, social relations, and discourse organization. From this perspective, anaphoric reference is not merely a grammatical feature but a key component of meaning-making and textual cohesion. Consequently, shifts in referential expressions in translation can be understood as functional adjustments within these systems.

Similarly, Skopos theory emphasizes the purposive nature of translation, arguing that translation strategies are determined by the intended function (Skopos) of the target text within its cultural context. This framework allows for structural modifications—including referential changes—provided they contribute to communicative effectiveness.

Drawing on these complementary perspectives, this study adopts an integrated analytical approach to examine anaphoric reference shifts in English translations of the Quran. While SFL enables a detailed analysis of how referential structures contribute to cohesion and interpersonal meaning, Skopos theory provides a rationale for the strategic modifications introduced by translators to meet the expectations of the target audience.

Against this theoretical background, the present study investigates anaphoric reference shifts in selected English translations of the Quran, arguing that such shifts constitute deliberate and functionally motivated translation strategies. By analyzing these shifts through the combined lens of SFL and Skopos theory, the study contributes to ongoing debates on fidelity, equivalence, and the translation of sacred texts, highlighting the need to view translation as a complex process of functional mediation rather than a purely linguistic operation. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What types of anaphoric reference shifts are employed in the selected English translations of the Quran, and how do these shifts function within the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of discourse from an SFL perspective?
- (2) How can the identified anaphoric reference shifts be interpreted as Skopos-oriented translation strategies that contribute to communicative adequacy while preserving the theological and rhetorical functions of the Quranic source text?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 From Equivalence to Functional Approaches in Translation**

Early translation theories were largely grounded in the notion of equivalence, treating translation as a process of replacing source-language elements with target-language counterparts. For instance, Catford (1965) conceptualized translation as the substitution of textual material

between languages and introduces the concept of shifts as a response to non-equivalence. While influential, this approach has been widely criticized for reducing translation to formal correspondences and overlooking pragmatic, cultural, and contextual dimensions.

Similarly, Jakobson (1959) highlighted the structural asymmetries between languages, arguing that full equivalence is unattainable. This recognition prompted a shift toward more communicative models, such as Nida and Taber's (1982) dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes receptor response over formal similarity. Baker (2004) further developed this trajectory by proposing multiple levels of equivalence (lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic), thereby acknowledging the complexity of meaning transfer.

Despite these developments, equivalence-based approaches remain limited in explaining translations where formal deviation is not only inevitable but functionally necessary. In particular, they offer insufficient explanatory power for texts—such as the Quran—where linguistic form is deeply intertwined with rhetorical and theological meaning. This limitation has led to the emergence of functionalist approaches that reconceptualize translation as a communicative act shaped by purpose and context rather than formal correspondence alone.

## 2.2 Anaphoric Reference and Rhetorical Shifts in Quranic Discourse

Research on Quranic discourse consistently emphasizes the centrality of cohesion and rhetorical structuring. A key feature in this regard is the phenomenon of *iltifāt*, involving shifts in person, number, and perspective within the same discourse. Studies such as Alduhaim (2021) and Abdul-Latif (2023) demonstrated that these shifts are not arbitrary but serve important rhetorical functions, including emphasis, audience engagement, and discourse dynamism.

However, while these studies provide valuable insights into the rhetorical significance of anaphoric shifts in the source text, they largely remain descriptive and text-internal. They do not sufficiently address how such shifts are handled in translation or how their communicative functions are reconfigured in the target language.

At the same time, discourse-oriented studies (e.g. Dukes, 2011) have argued that Quranic cohesion operates beyond surface grammar, encompassing semantic and pragmatic relations. This perspective is particularly relevant for translation, as it implies that preserving meaning may require restructuring surface forms, including referential patterns. Yet, these studies stop short of offering a systematic framework for analyzing how such restructuring occurs across different translations.

## 2.3 Translation Shifts and Their Functional Reinterpretation

The concept of translation shifts, initially proposed by Catford (1965), has been central to understanding deviations between source and target texts. Subsequent research, including House (2006, 2015, 2023), expands this concept by linking shifts to pragmatic and functional considerations rather than merely structural differences.

In the context of Quranic translation, scholars such as Abdel Haleem (1992) and Al-Tarawneh (2019) argue that shifts are often necessary to mediate between the rhetorical density of Arabic and the expectations of English readers. This perspective challenges the traditional view of shifts as loss or deviation, reframing them instead as strategic adaptations.

However, much of this work treats shifts in general terms and does not isolate anaphoric reference as a distinct analytical category. More importantly, it lacks a unified framework that explains how such shifts simultaneously affect meaning, interpersonal relations, and textual

cohesion. This gap suggests the need for an approach that can account for both the linguistic and communicative dimensions of referential change.

## 2.4 Skopos Theory

Skopos theory represents a major shift toward functionalism by foregrounding the purpose (*Skopos*) of translation as the primary determinant of translation strategies (Reiss, 2000). Within this framework, shifts—including changes in referential structure—are justified insofar as they contribute to the communicative effectiveness of the target text.

This perspective is particularly useful in explaining why translators of the Quran may adjust anaphoric patterns to enhance clarity and coherence for English readers. However, Skopos theory has been subject to significant criticism. Scholars argue that its emphasis on purpose can be overly permissive, potentially allowing almost any translational choice to be justified post hoc. More importantly, it has been questioned whether a purpose-driven approach is appropriate for sacred texts, where fidelity to the original form may itself constitute an essential part of the communicative and theological function.

In response to these critiques, this study adopts a constrained functionalist position. Rather than treating purpose as unlimited, it conceptualizes the translation of the Quran as governed by multiple, and sometimes competing, purposes—most notably fidelity to the sacred source text and accessibility for the target audience. Within this framework, shifts in anaphoric reference are not seen as arbitrary but as carefully negotiated solutions within these constraints.

## 2.5 Systemic Functional Linguistics and Translation

SFL, initiated by Halliday (1978, 2001) and further elaborated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) and Halliday & Hasan (2014), provides a comprehensive model for analyzing how language constructs meaning through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Unlike equivalence-based approaches, SFL treats language as a meaning-making resource embedded in social context.

In translation studies, SFL has been widely applied to analyze how meanings are reconfigured across languages. Scholars such as House (2015) used SFL-based register analysis to evaluate translation quality, while Hatim and Mason (1997) demonstrated how discourse and ideology shape translation choices. Importantly, SFL enables a fine-grained analysis of cohesion and reference, making it particularly suitable for examining anaphoric relations.

Nevertheless, SFL on its own remains primarily descriptive. While it can explain how meaning is constructed and altered, it does not provide a principled account of why translators choose to introduce specific shifts in relation to communicative goals. This limitation highlights the need for a complementary framework that addresses the purposive dimension of translation.

Although Systemic Functional Linguistics and Skopos theory operate at different levels of analysis, their integration can be theoretically justified and methodologically productive. Skopos theory functions at the macro level, explaining translation as a purposeful activity shaped by the target context, whereas SFL operates at the micro level, providing tools for analyzing how meaning is linguistically realized.

The complementarity between the two lies precisely in this division of labor. Skopos theory answers the question *why* certain shifts occur (i.e., to achieve communicative effectiveness), while SFL explains *how* these shifts are realized in terms of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings.

At the same time, their boundaries must be acknowledged: Skopos theory does not account for the internal organization of language, and SFL does not inherently justify translational decisions.

By combining these frameworks, the present study develops a multi-layered analytical model in which anaphoric reference shifts are examined both as functional strategies (Skopos) and as meaning-making adjustments within the linguistic system (SFL). This integrated approach not only avoids the descriptive limitations of SFL and the potential over-permissiveness of Skopos theory but also provides a more rigorous account of how translators negotiate between fidelity and communicative effectiveness in the translation of sacred texts.

### 3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative, corpus-based case study design that integrates Skopos theory with SFL to examine how English translations of the Quran render instances of Arabic *iltifāt* (rhetorical referential variation). Given the limited corpus size of six Quranic verses, the study does not aim at statistical generalization. Instead, it provides an in-depth interpretive analysis of selected cases, and the findings are explicitly limited to the analyzed data and interpreted as illustrative tendencies rather than general translation patterns. To avoid circularity in sampling, the verses were not selected on the basis of observed translation behavior. Instead, selection followed an externally defined criterion: verses were drawn from established rhetorical and exegetical sources that explicitly identify occurrences of *iltifāt* in the Quran (e.g., Alduhaim, 2021; Abdul-Latif, 2023). The initial pool consisted of Quranic verses repeatedly cited in the Arabic rhetorical and exegetical literature as clear examples of referential shifts involving changes in person, number, or mode of address. From this pool, six verses were purposively selected according to four criteria: (1) the verse had to contain an explicit and widely recognized instance of *iltifāt* documented by more than one scholarly source; (2) the verse had to represent a distinct pattern of anaphoric or referential shift to ensure analytical diversity; (3) the verse had to occur within different discourse contexts, including divine speech, narrative discourse, supplication, and descriptive passages, to capture variation in communicative function; and (4) the verse had to be fully translated in all three selected English translations without omissions or textual irregularities that could hinder comparison. These criteria were applied to narrow the larger pool to six representative cases that collectively reflect a range of referential-shift phenomena while remaining manageable for detailed qualitative analysis. The study analyzes three widely used English translations: those of Pickthall (1956), Ali (1968), and Abdel Haleem (2007), chosen for their historical range and differing translation orientations. *Pickthall* was selected because of his relatively source-oriented and conservative translation approach, *Ali* because of his explanatory and interpretive style, and *Abdel Haleem* because of his contemporary communicative orientation. The inclusion of these three translations enables a comparative examination of how different translation philosophies influence the treatment of anaphoric reference shifts and their communicative functions in the target text.

The analysis followed a three-stage replicable procedure. First, each verse was examined in its Arabic source form to identify instances of *iltifāt*, operationalized as referential variation involving shifts in grammatical person, pronoun reference, or mode of address. These instances were treated as reference variation units (RVUs). The identification of RVUs was conducted by the researcher using predefined linguistic criteria derived from the Arabic rhetorical literature on *iltifāt* and from previous studies on Quranic referential variation. To enhance analytical consistency, each verse was examined multiple times, and the identified RVUs were cross-checked against established exegetical and rhetorical sources that explicitly discuss the referential shifts occurring in the selected verses. Second, each RVU was aligned with its English translations and coded according to a

predefined and consistent taxonomy of translation strategies: retention (preservation of Arabic referential pattern), explication (making referents explicit), structural reconfiguration (syntactic restructuring affecting reference), and normalization (reducing markedness for English readability). Each translation (Pickthall, Ali, and Haleem) was coded independently, producing one observation per verse per translator. The coding process was conducted by a single researcher because the study involved a limited corpus and required specialized knowledge of Quranic Arabic, translation studies, and Systemic Functional Linguistics. To ensure coding reliability, the coding framework was developed prior to analysis and applied consistently across all data. In addition, coding decisions were documented in an analytical coding sheet and reviewed repeatedly throughout the analysis to maintain procedural consistency and minimize subjective interpretation. Third, the coded data were interpreted using Systemic Functional Linguistics in terms of ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, and further interpreted through Skopos theory to evaluate communicative purpose, coherence, and reader accessibility. The integration of these two frameworks enabled the analysis to move beyond the identification of linguistic shifts and examine their functional significance in relation to discourse meaning, communicative adequacy, and the intended purpose of the translated text.

Here, the integration of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Skopos theory enables a multi-layered interpretation of translation behavior, linking linguistic realization with communicative purpose and treating translation as functional mediation between Arabic rhetorical structure and English reader expectations.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion:

The analysis of the selected six Quranic verses reveals that anaphoric reference shifts in the English translations of Pickthall (1955), Ali (1968), and Abdel Haleem (2007) are systematically distributed across identifiable functional patterns rather than occurring randomly. As shown in **Table 1**, each instance of shift is associated with a specific configuration of interpersonal restructuring, ideational reconfiguration, and textual adjustment, which jointly serve distinct communicative purposes under Skopos-oriented translation strategies. Importantly, the findings indicate that despite differences in translation style, the three translators generally converge on maintaining the communicative force of the source text, albeit through different degrees of explication and pronominal adjustment.

**Table 1. Skopos-Oriented Anaphoric Reference Shift Analysis in Selected Quran Translations**

| Verse | Arabic & Transliteration                                                                                                         | English Translations                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Type of Reference Shift                        | SFL Functional Interpretation                                                                                                                                            | Communicative Function (Skopos)                                                   | Thematic Domain      |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 39:53 | قُلْ يٰٓاِبَادِيَ الَّذِيْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰۤى اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا<br>qul yā'ibādiya alladhīna asrafū 'alā anfusihi... | <b>Pickthall:</b> "Say: O My slaves who have been prodigal to their own hurt!"<br><b>Ali:</b> "Say: 'O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls!'"<br><b>Haleem:</b> "Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves | First-person vocative → descriptive collective | Interpersonal metafunction: vocative yā'ibādī constructs divine-human intimacy; descriptive expansion defines audience identity. Textual metafunction: cohesive grouping | Enhances accessibility while preserving divine mercy and interpersonal immediacy. | Divine-human address |

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                              |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                     |                             |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                   | by your own excess...”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                              | of addressed participants.                                                                                                                          |                                                                     |                             |
| 36:22    | وَمَا لِيَ لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ<br>wamā liya lā a'budu alladhī faṭaranī wa-ilayhi tur'ja'ūn                                                                      | <b>Pickthall:</b> “For what cause should I not serve Him Who hath created me, and unto Whom ye will be brought back.”<br><b>Ali:</b> “It would not be reasonable in me if I did not serve Him Who created me, and to Whom ye shall (all) be brought back.”<br><b>Haleem:</b> “Why should I not worship the One who created me? It is to Him that you will be returned.” | First-person singular → second-person plural | Interpersonal metafunction: shift from individual stance to collective address. Ideational metafunction: expansion from self to universal humanity. | Transforms personal reflection into universal moral accountability. | Individual believer's voice |
| 43:68–69 | يَعْبَادِ لَا خَوْفَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ... الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ<br>yā ibādi lā khawfun 'alaykumu l-yawm...                                                     | <b>Pickthall:</b> “O My slaves! For you there is no fear this day...”<br><b>Ali:</b> “My devotees! no fear shall be on you that Day...”<br><b>Haleem:</b> “My servants, there is no fear for you today...”                                                                                                                                                              | Vocative → third-person descriptive          | Interpersonal metafunction: reassurance through divine address. Textual metafunction: descriptive clause specifies recipient group.                 | Balances emotional immediacy with clarity of referential identity.  | Divine reassurance          |
| 35:9     | وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ... فَسُقْنَاهُ... فَأَحْيَيْنَا<br>Wal-llāhu alladhī arsala l-riyāha...                                                                                       | <b>Pickthall:</b> “And Allah it is Who sendeth the winds... then We lead it unto a dead land and revive...”<br><b>Ali:</b> “...and We drive them to a land that is dead...”<br><b>Haleem:</b> “...We drive them to a dead land...”                                                                                                                                      | Third-person singular → first-person plural  | Ideational metafunction: divine agency shifts across narrative processes. Interpersonal metafunction: pluralization expresses majesty.              | Reinforces divine power and rhetorical grandeur.                    | Divine action in nature     |
| 10:22    | هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلْكِ وَجَرَيْنَ بِهِمْ بِرِيحٍ طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا...<br>huwa alladhī yusayyirukum fī l-bari wal-baḥri | <b>Pickthall:</b> “He it is Who maketh <b>you</b> to go on the land and the sea till, when ye are in the ships and <b>they</b> sail with them with a fair breeze                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Multi-directional audience shifts            | Textual metafunction: cohesion through referential variation. Interpersonal metafunction:                                                           | Increases narrative vividness and experiential immersion.           | Divine–human interaction    |

|      |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                           |                                                                                                                     |                                                            |                  |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
|      | ḥattā idhā kuntum fī l-ful'ki wajarayna bihim birīḥin ṭayyibatin wafariḥū bihā...                        | and <b>they</b> are glad therein,...” <b>Ali</b> : “He it is Who enableth <b>you</b> to traverse through land and sea; so that ye even board ships;- <b>they</b> sail with them with a favourable wind, and <b>they</b> rejoice thereat...”<br><b>Haleem</b> : “It Is He who enables <b>you</b> to travel on land and sea until, when <b>you</b> are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favouring wind, a storm arrives...” |                                           | fluctuating address enhances engagement.                                                                            |                                                            |                  |
| 6:99 | وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ wahuwa alladhī anzala... fa-akhrajnā... | <b>Pickthall</b> : “He it is Who sendeth down water... and therewith <b>We</b> bring forth...”<br><b>Ali</b> : “...with it <b>We</b> produce vegetation...”<br><b>Haleem</b> : “...with it <b>We</b> produce the shoots...”                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Singular divine reference → plural agency | Ideational metafunction: divine creative process in nature. Interpersonal metafunction: plural expresses authority. | Emphasizes continuous divine provision and creative force. | Divine provision |

To further clarify the distribution of shifts across the corpus, **Table 2** isolates the analytical outcomes (shift type, SFL interpretation, Skopos function, and thematic domain). This allows for a clearer comparison of recurring functional tendencies across the six verses.

**Table 2. Distribution of Anaphoric Reference Shifts Across Analytical Dimensions**

| Verse    | Type of Reference Shift                        | SFL Functional Interpretation                                                              | Communicative Function (Skopos)                   | Thematic Domain             |
|----------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 39:53    | First-person vocative → descriptive collective | Interpersonal + Textual metafunction: intimacy expanded into referential clarity           | Enhances accessibility and maintains divine mercy | Divine–human address        |
| 36:22    | First-person singular → second-person plural   | Interpersonal + Ideational metafunction: personal voice generalized into universal address | Broadens moral implication to all humanity        | Individual believer’s voice |
| 43:68–69 | Vocative → third-person descriptive            | Interpersonal + Textual metafunction: reassurance + specification of addressees            | Clarifies recipients of divine promise            | Divine reassurance          |

|       |                                             |                                                                             |                                              |                          |
|-------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 35:9  | Third-person singular → first-person plural | Ideational + Interpersonal metafunction: agency and majesty intensification | Reinforces divine power in natural processes | Divine action in nature  |
| 10:22 | Multi-directional audience shifts           | Textual + Interpersonal metafunction: cohesion through dynamic address      | Enhances narrative engagement                | Divine–human interaction |
| 6:99  | Singular divine reference → plural agency   | Ideational + Interpersonal metafunction: creation and sustenance processes  | Emphasizes continuous divine provision       | Divine provision         |

The findings demonstrate that anaphoric reference shifts in the selected Quranic translations are not random stylistic choices but are largely shaped by functional pressures arising from the interaction between source-text rhetoric and target-language communicative expectations. This observation aligns with the functionalist understanding of translation as a purpose-driven activity in which translational decisions are guided by the intended function of the target text (Reiss, Nord, & Vermeer, 2014; Nord, 1997; Vermeer & Chesterman, 2021). From this perspective, the observed shifts reflect strategic interventions aimed at ensuring communicative adequacy rather than formal equivalence.

However, the comparative analysis across Pickthall, Ali, and Abdel Haleem reveals that these functional strategies are not uniform. Pickthall tends to preserve Arabic referential structures more conservatively, often maintaining closer lexical and pronominal alignment with the source text. Ali, by contrast, introduces moderate levels of explicitation, particularly in clarifying audience scope and theological intent. Abdel Haleem demonstrates the highest degree of communicative adaptation, frequently restructuring reference chains and inserting interpretive framing to enhance readability for contemporary English readers. This gradient of intervention confirms earlier observations in Quranic translation studies that translators operate along a continuum between formal retention and communicative domestication (Abdel Haleem, 2007; Abdul-Raof, 2004).

A clear example of this divergence appears in Quran 39:53, where the Arabic vocative *yā ‘ibādī* (“O My servants”) is rendered with varying degrees of interpretation. While Pickthall and Ali largely preserve the vocative structure, Abdel Haleem expands the reference through explicit framing such as “[God says]”. This addition, while enhancing clarity, represents a shift in discourse framing that moves beyond linguistic translation into interpretive mediation. From an SFL perspective, this reflects a reconfiguration of the interpersonal metafunction, where the immediacy of divine address is partially redistributed into explanatory discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Eggins, 2004). While such explicitation improves accessibility, it also raises questions about whether interpersonal intensity—central to Quranic rhetoric—is diluted in the process.

Similarly, in Quran 36:22, the shift from first-person singular to second-person plural reference illustrates how translators negotiate between individual testimony and universal moral address. Pickthall retains a relatively formal structure, while Ali and Haleem more explicitly generalize the address to humanity. This aligns with Nida’s (1964) notion of dynamic equivalence, where meaning is prioritized over form to achieve receptor-oriented comprehension. However, as House (2015) cautions, such shifts may introduce functional overreach if the target text begins to restructure participant roles beyond what is linguistically necessary. In this case, the universalization of reference strengthens didactic clarity but potentially reduces the rhetorical individuality of the original speaker’s voice.

A more complex pattern emerges in Quran 35:9 and 6:99, where shifts between third-person singular reference to God (*He*) and first-person plural (*We*) are maintained across all three translations, though with varying consistency. Pickthall tends to preserve formal alternation more rigidly, whereas Ali and especially Haleem smooth transitions between referential forms. From an SFL perspective, these alternations operate simultaneously at the ideational level (divine agency in natural processes) and the interpersonal level (plurality as a marker of majesty) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). However, the translations differ in how explicitly this rhetorical function is made accessible to English readers. This supports Hatim and Mason's (1997) argument that ideological and pragmatic factors significantly shape translation choices, especially in religious discourse where linguistic form is semantically loaded.

Importantly, the case of Quran 10:22 highlights the limitations of uniform functional interpretation. While all three translators preserve the multi-directional shifts between third-person, second-person, and collective reference, they differ in how they manage narrative rhythm. Pickthall retains a more segmented structure that reflects Arabic rhetorical pacing, whereas Haleem restructures clauses for smoother narrative flow. This suggests that referential shifts are not merely grammatical phenomena but are embedded in discourse organization and narrative tension. As Abdul-Raof (2004) noted, Quranic cohesion operates through a dynamic interplay of syntactic and rhetorical movement rather than linear progression, which makes full equivalence particularly challenging in translation.

At the same time, the data reveal a limitation in purely Skopos-driven explanations. While Skopos theory effectively accounts for why translators modify reference structures (Nord, 1997), it does not fully constrain how far such modifications should extend. This is particularly critical in sacred texts, where formal features themselves carry theological and rhetorical significance. As Tymoczko (2013) argued, functionalist approaches risk becoming overly permissive unless anchored in genre-sensitive constraints. In the present data, this tension is visible in cases where explicitation enhances readability but potentially weakens rhetorical immediacy, especially in Abdel Haleem's rendering choices.

Therefore, a more robust explanation emerges when Skopos theory is constrained and complemented by SFL. SFL provides the micro-level analytical tools to trace how interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings are redistributed across translations (Halliday, 2001; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Halliday & Hasan, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2008), while Skopos theory provides the macro-level justification for why such redistributions occur in the first place. Their integration thus allows for a dual-level explanation: SFL explains how reference shifts function linguistically, while Skopos theory explains why such functions are activated in translation.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that not all shifts in the dataset are optimally motivated. In some instances—particularly where explanatory additions are introduced—the communicative gain in clarity may be accompanied by a reduction in rhetorical density. This suggests that functional adequacy is not absolute but involves interpretive trade-offs between fidelity to form and accessibility of meaning. Such tension reinforces the argument that Quranic translation cannot be reduced to either strict equivalence models or unrestricted functional adaptation, but must be understood as a constrained negotiation between competing communicative priorities (Baker, 2018; House, 2015).

## 5. Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated that anaphoric reference shifts in the selected English translations of the Quran are not random deviations or merely stylistic inconsistencies, but can be interpreted as functionally motivated translation tendencies observable in the textual data. By examining six systematically selected verses and comparing three major English translations, the analysis shows that shifts such as vocative-to-descriptive reformulation, changes in grammatical person, and variations in divine self-reference are consistently used to negotiate between the rhetorical density of Quranic Arabic and the interpretive expectations of English-speaking readers.

Rather than treating these shifts as losses of equivalence, the study reconceptualizes them as instances of functional mediation in which translators appear to prioritize intelligibility, coherence, and theological accessibility, as evidenced in their recurrent translation choices across different contexts and translators. However, it is important to note that the study does not claim access to the translators' conscious intentions; therefore, these patterns should be understood as inferred functional outcomes rather than explicitly stated or consciously designed strategies. These tendencies may also reflect established translational norms, exegetical traditions, or implicit stylistic conventions in Quranic translation practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support a combined SFL–Skopos framework for analyzing sacred text translation. SFL explains how reference choices contribute to interpersonal alignment, ideational structuring, and textual cohesion, while Skopos theory accounts for why translators allow such shifts in the first place, namely to fulfill communicative, pedagogical, and interpretive purposes in the target culture. Importantly, the study also shows that fidelity in Quran translation cannot be reduced to formal equivalence; instead, it operates as functional fidelity, where accuracy is defined in terms of preserved communicative effect and theological intent rather than surface linguistic form. This perspective positions the translator not as a passive transmitter of forms, but as an active mediator negotiating between sacred discourse authority and target-language readability.

The study further contributes to translation studies by highlighting that referential shifts are particularly concentrated in contexts involving divine–human interaction, evaluative address, and descriptions of divine agency. These are precisely the domains where Arabic rhetorical structure (including vocative address and pronominal variation) is most compact and where English requires explicit clarification or restructuring. Accordingly, the translator's decisions reflect a consistent pattern of discourse adaptation rather than isolated choices.

Practically, the findings suggest that the translation of religious texts benefits from a discourse-functional orientation that integrates linguistic analysis with communicative purpose. Training programs for translators of sacred texts should therefore extend beyond lexical and grammatical equivalence to include discourse analysis and functional pragmatics. For future research, two specific directions are recommended. First, expanding the corpus to include a significantly larger and systematically selected set of Quranic verses would allow for stronger generalization of the observed patterns across surahs and rhetorical contexts. Second, comparative studies involving a broader range of translations, including non-English target languages, would help determine whether the identified functional strategies are language-specific or reflect more universal tendencies in sacred-text translation. Together, these directions would deepen our understanding of how Quranic discourse is reconfigured across languages while maintaining its theological and communicative integrity.

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