

SEMANTIC NARROWING IN THE SAHIH INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATION OF 'ADHĀB AND RIZQ: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS USING THE QURANIC ARABIC CORPUS

Muhammad Albie Fathurrahman¹

¹Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, muhammadalbie.2024@student.uny.ac.id

Titik Sudartinah²

²Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, titiksudartinah@uny.ac.id

Ach Fauzi³

³Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, achfauzi.2024@student.uny.ac.id

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Abstract

Translating Qur'anic theological terms into English presents a complex semantic challenge, as each term carries layers of theological, emotional, and cultural meaning that cannot be adequately represented by a single lexical equivalent. This study examines two key Qur'anic theological terms, 'adhāb (عذاب) and rizq (رزق), as rendered in the English translation available in the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC). Employing a corpus-based approach within the theoretical frameworks of Mona Baker's (1992) contextual meaning theory and Nida and Taber (1982)'s formal-dynamic equivalence theory, the study analyzes 377 occurrences of both terms in the Qur'an. The findings reveal that QAC predominantly employs formal equivalence: 'adhāb is rendered as punishment (318 of 322 instances), while rizq is rendered as provision (54 of 55 instances). This dominance of literalism produces significant semantic narrowing. The term 'adhāb, which encompasses metaphysical, eschatological, and socio-political dimensions, is reduced to a purely retributive legal concept. Similarly, rizq, encompassing both material and immaterial divine bestowals, including blessings, knowledge, and spiritual tranquility, is reduced to a mere physical subsistence notion. This study recommends more contextually sensitive translation strategies, including term retention, explicitation, footnotes, and contextual description, to preserve the theological accuracy and integrity of Qur'anic meaning in the target language.

Keywords: theological terms, contextual meaning, formal-dynamic equivalence, 'adhāb, rizq, Qur'anic translation

1. Introduction

Translating the Qur'an into English is among the most intellectually demanding and ethically consequential tasks in translation studies (Haleem, 2004; Kidwai, 1987). Unlike ordinary literary or technical texts, the Qur'an functions simultaneously as a linguistic, theological, spiritual, and ideological document (A. Ali et al., 2012). Each lexical choice in translation carries implications not only for the accuracy of meaning but also for the theological understanding and spiritual experience of its readers (Haleem, 1992). As Boumazourh (2024) argues, Qur'anic translation is not merely a linguistic transformation but an effort to preserve the theological integrity of divine revelation. This observation is significant because distortions in translation do not merely affect the aesthetic reception of the text; they can reshape doctrinal understanding, influence interfaith perceptions, and, in cases of sensitive verses, generate serious theological misreadings.

The central challenge lies in the semantic density of Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary. Qur'anic theological terms often carry stratified meanings that are simultaneously linguistic, spiritual, historical, and cultural in nature. These meanings resist reduction to a single target-language equivalent. When translated literally, such terms are frequently subject to semantic narrowing, whereby their multidimensional significance is compressed into a single, often inadequate, English

word. This problem has been extensively documented in the translation studies literature (Albahiri & Alhaj, 2024; Naji, 2021; Naudé, 2020). The consequence is that readers engaging with Qur'anic translations in English are often presented with a text that is semantically impoverished compared to the Arabic original, leading to partial or distorted understandings of Islamic theology.

Two theological terms that exemplify this challenge with particular force are *'adhāb* (عذاب) and *rizq* (رزق). The term *'adhāb*, which appears 322 times in the Qur'an, is routinely translated as punishment in the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC). Yet its Qur'anic semantic range extends far beyond legal-retributive punishment to encompass eschatological torment, personal suffering as divine trial, historical calamity, socio-political oppression, and even the anguish of spiritual estrangement. This semantic breadth reflects the Qur'an's function as a text of both warning (*indhar*) and guidance (*huda*), in which the consequences of moral failure are described across multiple dimensions. Similarly, *rizq*, appearing 55 times in the QAC dataset, is consistently rendered as provision, a translation that captures the material dimension of the term but obscures its Qur'anic theological breadth as a concept inclusive of spiritual, intellectual, and immaterial divine bestowals, including knowledge, health, guidance, and inner peace. These two terms were selected because they represent contrasting poles of Qur'anic theological address, *'adhāb* marking divine displeasure and consequence, *rizq* marking divine favour and sustenance, and because their combined 377 occurrences provide a corpus large enough to support systematic, corpus-based generalisation. Other theologically dense Qur'anic terms fall outside the scope of the present study and are noted as directions for future research in the Conclusion.

Despite growing scholarly interest in Qur'anic translation, the existing literature presents important gaps that this study aims to address. Specifically, three gaps can be identified: a lack of corpus-based analysis at the level of individual theological terms, a lack of systematic application of Baker's (1992) framework to Qur'anic corpus data, and a lack of attention to the theological consequences of translational choices. Broad comparative studies, such as those by Alhamshary (2025), Farah & Qureshi (2020), and Haleem (2004) examine translation strategies across multiple terms or multiple translators, but without the granular, term-specific corpus analysis that would reveal patterns of semantic narrowing at the level of individual theological vocabulary. Studies focusing on general translation theory frameworks (Baker, 1992; Toury, 2012; Venuti, 2017) also exist but have rarely been applied systematically to Qur'anic terminology using corpus-level data. Term- and verse-specific prior analysis remains limited: Abdelaal and Abdelaal & Md Rashid (2015, 2016) examine semantic loss in specific sūrah (Al-Wāq'ah and Al-A'rāf, respectively) but do not treat *'adhāb* or *rizq* as dedicated case studies across their full Qur'anic distribution. What is lacking is a focused investigation that, and what constitutes the novelty of the present study, (1) targets a specific, annotated digital Qur'anic corpus, the QAC and its hosted Sahih International translation, rather than comparing published print translations; (2) applies Baker's (1992) four-dimensional contextual meaning framework not merely as a post-hoc evaluative tool but as a structured analytical lens for measuring the degree of semantic saturation loss; and (3) foregrounds the theological stakes of translational choices by explicitly connecting patterns of semantic narrowing to their doctrinal consequences. The present study fills this gap.

The analytical framework of this study integrates two complementary theories. The formal-dynamic equivalence framework developed by Nida & Taber (1982) provides a classification scheme for assessing whether translations privilege the lexical form of the source (formal equivalence) or the communicative meaning and impact in the target language (dynamic equivalence). Baker's (1992) contextual meaning framework introduces four dimensions of

meaning that are particularly vulnerable to loss in translation: (a) propositional meaning (the factual, referential content of the text); (b) presupposed meaning (the background theological, historical, and cultural assumptions that the text takes as given); (c) expressive meaning (the emotional, rhetorical, and affective dimensions of language); and (d) evoked meaning (the cultural and religious associations activated in the target-language reader). The two frameworks are combined because they operate at complementary analytical levels: Nida & Taber's (1982) formal-dynamic distinction classifies the type of translational choice made for each occurrence, whereas Baker (1992) four-dimensional model explains which aspects of meaning are gained or lost as a consequence of that choice; used together, they allow the quantitative translation pattern to be linked directly to its qualitative semantic consequences. The reason why the expressive and evoked dimensions are especially at risk in the case of *'adhāb* and *riḡq* is that both terms function in the Qur'an not merely as informational labels but as nodes of theological resonance: *'adhāb* is designed to produce fear, awe, and moral accountability in the reader, while *riḡq* is designed to evoke gratitude, spiritual dependence, and recognition of divine generosity. When these terms are rendered by semantically impoverished equivalents, the Qur'an's intended emotional and spiritual impact on the reader is fundamentally compromised.

It is important to clarify the scope of "meaning" addressed in this study. The analysis is oriented toward semantic narrowing, that is, the loss or compression of a term's established sense relations and componential meaning when rendered by a single target-language equivalent. Baker's (1992) propositional meaning corresponds directly to this semantic core, while her presupposed, expressive, and evoked dimensions are used here to show how contextual and co-textual factors reveal what has been semantically lost, rather than as an independent pragmatic analysis of speech acts, implicature, or reader inference. Accordingly, this study does not adopt a separate pragmatic theoretical apparatus; where contextual or exegetical material (e.g., *tafsīr*) is consulted, it functions as evidence for establishing each term's semantic range in classical Arabic usage, not as an analysis of language use in interactional context.

The theological urgency of this issue cannot be overstated. Reducing *'adhāb* to the single English equivalent punishment introduces a specific and consequential distortion: it frames the concept exclusively within a retributive justice paradigm, obscuring the Qur'anic understanding that divine *'adhāb* can also be corrective, purificatory, and a function of divine mercy in its broader operation. Classical Islamic theology distinguishes between *'adhāb* as chastisement intended to redirect the soul toward righteousness and *'adhāb* as an eschatological consequence of persistent unbelief. Collapsing both into the single English word punishment conflates these distinctions and presents a simplistically punitive image of the divine. Similarly, reducing *riḡq* to provision erases the theological concept of divine sovereignty over all forms of sustenance, material and spiritual, and risks reducing the Qur'anic worldview of human dependence on Allah to a merely logistical concern.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What are the semantic dimensions of *'adhāb* and *riḡq* in the Qur'an, comprising their propositional, presupposed, expressive, and evoked meaning (Baker, 1992)? (2) What are the tendencies of formal and dynamic equivalence in the QAC (Sahih International) translations of these terms? (3) What translation strategies can better preserve the theological precision of these terms in English?

2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods design using the Concurrent Embedded model (Creswell & Clark, 2017), in which qualitative analysis of contextual meaning constituted the primary analytical strand, while quantitative frequency data functioned as an embedded, supporting component whose role was to strengthen and direct the qualitative interpretation rather than to stand as an independent analytical strand. This design was chosen because the central research problem, semantic narrowing in Qur'anic translation, was fundamentally an interpretive phenomenon that required qualitative depth to illuminate, yet benefits from quantitative systematicity to ensure that interpretive claims were empirically grounded across the full corpus rather than derived from selectively chosen examples.

The integration of the two strands was deliberate, functional, and bidirectional. In the first direction, quantitative patterns of formal versus dynamic equivalence were used to identify which terms and which contextual categories exhibited the highest concentration of literalism, thereby determining where qualitative investigation was most urgently needed. In the second direction, each quantitative finding was directly correlated with qualitative evidence of the specific dimensions of meaning, propositional, presupposed, expressive, or evoked, that were lost or distorted as a result of that literalism. Specifically, quantitative shifts toward formal equivalence, measured as the percentage of occurrences rendered through a single stable lexical substitution, would be correlated with instances of semantic narrowing identified in the qualitative phase. For example, the near-total dominance of “punishment” as the rendering of *'adhāb* (98.8% of occurrences) functioned not merely as a descriptive statistic but as the empirical trigger for the qualitative question: which dimensions of *'adhāb*'s Qur'anic meaning, its eschatological, purificatory, spiritual, and socio-political registers, were systematically suppressed by this uniform rendering? This prevented the frequency data from operating as isolated descriptive statistics and instead positioned quantitative concentration as the diagnostic instrument that identifies where semantic narrowing is most severe and qualitative analysis most necessary.

The primary data source was the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) (available at <https://corpus.quran.com/>), a morphologically and syntactically annotated digital resource developed by Dukes et al. (2013). It is important to clarify that this study does not critique the QAC as a linguistic annotation platform per se, but rather the English translation that the QAC hosted for its parallel text interface, namely the Sahih International translation (1997). The Sahih International translation was one of the most widely used contemporary English Qur'anic translations globally and was notable for its commitment to formal equivalence as a guiding principle. By focusing on a single, internally consistent translation, this study achieved the methodological precision necessary for corpus-level analysis: all observations about translation tendencies refer specifically to the choices made by the Sahih International translators as documented in the QAC, not to translation practice in general. This corpus-based procedure follows established principles of corpus linguistic analysis, in which systematic retrieval and classification of naturally occurring language data support empirically grounded generalisation (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

The combined dataset comprises 377 occurrences: 322 instances of *'adhāb* and 55 instances of *riḡq*. All 377 occurrences were examined and tabulated in the quantitative phase, in which each occurrence was classified as an instance of formal or dynamic equivalence. The qualitative contextual meaning analysis employed Baker's (1992) four-dimensional framework, however, was

applied selectively to prototypical cases rather than exhaustively to all occurrences. This selective approach was methodologically justified on two grounds: first, corpus linguistics recognized that not all occurrences of a term contribute equally to establishing its semantic range, since many occurrences were contextually similar and would yield redundant analytical results; and second, the purpose of the qualitative phase was to identify and explain the most significant patterns of semantic narrowing, which were most clearly visible in cases where the contextual function of the term diverges most sharply from the default translation equivalent. A verse was considered prototypical for qualitative analysis if it met one or more of the following criteria: (a) it represented a contextually distinctive use of the term that differed from the dominant semantic function, for example, *‘adhāb* deployed in reference to human oppression rather than divine eschatological punishment; (b) it was a case in which the chosen translation equivalent produced a demonstrably misleading propositional, presupposed, expressive, or evoked meaning as measured against the classical *tafsīr* baseline; or (c) it was one of the rare instances in which the translators employed dynamic equivalence, thereby revealing an implicit recognition of the limitations of the default formal rendering. This criteria-based selection ensured analytical rigour and prevented the qualitative analysis from becoming either exhaustively incoherent or arbitrarily impressionistic.

The criteria for classifying each translation as formal or dynamic equivalence were operationalized through explicit linguistic markers. A translation was categorized as formal equivalence when it employed a stable, one-to-one lexical substitution that preserved the surface form of the source term regardless of contextual variation: the clearest indicator was the consistent use of a single English word, such as “punishment” for every occurrence of *‘adhāb*, irrespective of whether the verse concerned divine eschatological retribution, immediate worldly affliction, human-inflicted oppression, or spiritual suffering. A translation was categorized as dynamic equivalence when the translator departed from the default lexical substitution and selected a contextually motivated rendering that better conveyed the communicative meaning or emotional impact of the term in its specific co-text: indicators included lexical variation across occurrences of the same source term (e.g., torment, suffering, or affliction in place of punishment), the use of explanatory or qualifying language that contextualized the term’s function, or the introduction of rhetorical emphasis that mirrored the affective weight of the Arabic original. For Baker (1992) expressive meaning specifically, the indicator for loss was the absence of emotional or rhetorical force in the English equivalent compared to the Arabic original, assessed through a comparison of the semantic prosody (Sinclair, 1996; Stubbs, 1996) of the source and target terms using standard English lexicographic resources (Oxford English Dictionary, 2026). Where the Arabic term carried a strong negative prosody, as *‘adhāb* did across its full Qur’anic distribution, but the English equivalent carried a weaker or more neutral prosody in general usage, expressive meaning was considered to have been narrowed.

The classical *tafsīr* literature, including al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, al-Qurṭubī’s *Tafsīr*, and Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, and Arabic lexical authorities including Ibn Manẓūr’s *Lisān al-‘Arab* and al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī’s *al-Mufradāt* served not as post-analysis validity checks but as the semantic baseline against which the English translations were measured throughout the analysis. The exegetical standard established by classical Islamic scholarship defines the full range of meanings that each term carried across its Qur’anic contexts; the English translation was then evaluated by asking to what extent it captured or failed to capture that range. Concretely, the *tafsīr* sources were consulted at the categorization and dimensional analysis stages to establish what each

verse's occurrence of '*adhāb* or *riḥq* means within its classical exegetical tradition before the English rendering was assessed. The degree of discrepancy between this exegetical standard and the translation equivalent constituted the operationalized measure of semantic narrowing in this study. To maintain coding consistency, classification and dimensional analysis were conducted by the author in an iterative process of cross-checking each classified instance against the *tafsīr* baseline described above; instances of uncertainty were resolved by returning to the primary exegetical sources until a consistent classification was reached.

The analysis proceeded through a sequential, integrated four-stage workflow, summarized in Figure 1: (1) Identification, all occurrences of '*adhāb* and *riḥq* were retrieved from the QAC and documented alongside their *Sahih International* English renderings; (2) Categorization, each occurrence is classified as formal or dynamic equivalence using the operationalized linguistic markers described above, following Nida & Taber (1982) framework; (3) Dimensional Analysis, prototypical cases meeting the selection criteria were subjected to Baker's (1992) four-dimensional contextual meaning analysis, with *tafsīr* sources consulted to establish the semantic baseline for each case; and (4) Validation, findings were cross-referenced against the classical *tafsīr* and Arabic lexicographic sources to confirm or refine interpretive conclusions and to assess the overall degree of semantic narrowing. This workflow ensured that the quantitative frequency data, the theoretical classification, the qualitative semantic analysis, and the exegetical validation were functionally and sequentially integrated rather than operating as independent analytical procedures.

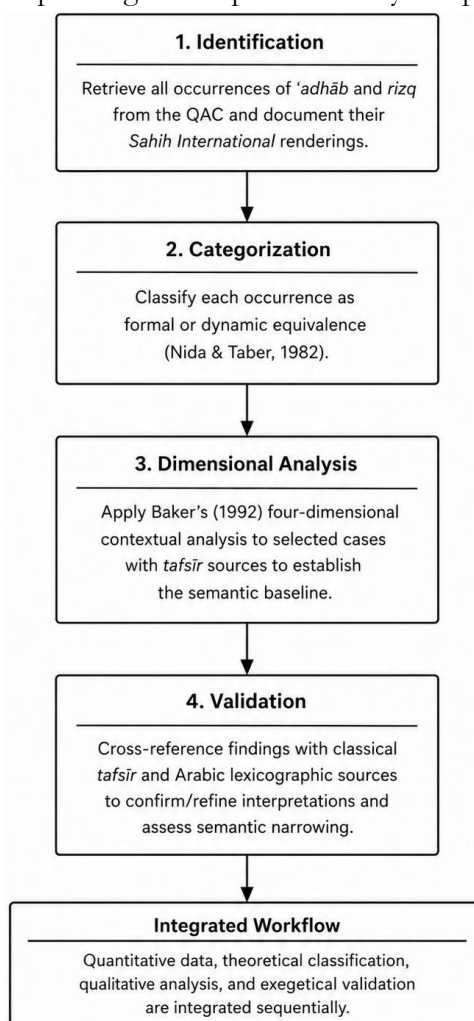


Figure 1. Integrated four-stage workflow

3. Results and Discussion

Overview of Translation Tendencies

The analysis of 377 Qur'anic occurrences of *'adhāb* and *riḥq* reveals a pronounced dominance of formal equivalence in the QAC translation (i.e., the Sahih International translation hosted by the QAC). Of the 322 occurrences of *'adhāb*, 318 (98.8%) are rendered using the formal equivalent punishment, while only 4 instances (1.2%) employ dynamic equivalents: torment (3 occurrences) and suffering (1 occurrence). For *riḥq*, 54 of 55 occurrences (98.2%) use the formal equivalent provision, with only a single instance (1.8%) employing the dynamic equivalent sustenance. The table below summarizes these distribution patterns.

Table 1. Distribution of Formal and Dynamic Equivalence

Term	Formal Equivalent	Formal (n)	Dynamic (n)	Total
<i>'adhāb</i> (عذاب)	<i>punishment</i>	318 (98.8%)	4 (1.2%)	322
<i>Riḥq</i> (رزق)	<i>provision</i>	54 (98.2%)	1 (1.8%)	55

Source: *Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC)*, analyzed by the authors

This table confirms a clear pattern: the QAC translation prioritizes terminological consistency through formal equivalence, applying a single standardized equivalent regardless of contextual variation. The discussion below interprets this result in relation to translation theory. However, equivalence as a guiding principle in translation has been widely problematized, with scholars arguing that linguistic correspondence alone cannot account for shifts in contextual and cultural meaning (Panou, 2013). In the case of sacred texts, this limitation becomes even more pronounced, as the semantic density and theological layering of Qur'anic vocabulary resist reduction to single lexical items (Abdelaal & Md Rashid, 2015).

Moreover, the use of uniform equivalents may reflect a domestication-oriented strategy that prioritizes fluency and reader accessibility while minimizing the semantic and cultural distinctiveness of the source text (Chouit, 2019). As a consequence, such translation practices risk producing systematic semantic narrowing, particularly in the rendering of theologically loaded terms such as *'adhāb* and *riḥq*.

The Translation of *'adhāb* (عذاب)

Semantic Range of 'adhāb in the Qur'an

The following paragraphs establish the classical semantic baseline for *'adhāb* from Arabic lexicography and tafsīr. This baseline is not itself a corpus finding; rather, it provides the interpretive standard against which the QAC translation patterns reported in the subsequent subsections are evaluated.

Etymologically, *'adhāb* (عذاب) derives from the Arabic root *'-dh-b* (ذ ب ع), denoting the fundamental sense of pain, suffering, or affliction (Manẓūr et al., 1997). Al-Iṣḥānī (1961) further conceptualizes *'adhāb* as *al-ālam*, a form of suffering that encompasses both physical and spiritual dimensions. However, in Qur'anic discourse, the semantic scope of *'adhāb* extends far beyond a narrowly defined notion of punishment. Classical exegetical authorities demonstrate that the term operates across multiple semantic domains: while frequently associated with eschatological retribution in the afterlife, it is also used to denote worldly afflictions such as natural disasters, collective destruction, and military defeat (Ath-Ṭabarī, 1903). Qurṭubī (1967) expands this

framework by including internalized forms of suffering, such as spiritual distress, remorse, and alienation from divine mercy.

This semantic plurality reflects the broader characteristic of Qur'anic language as semantically dense and theologically layered, where key terms simultaneously carry doctrinal, emotional, and historical meanings. As noted by Abdelaal & Rashid (2015), Qur'anic terms often resist direct lexical equivalence due to their cultural and theological specificity, leading to potential semantic loss in translation. Similarly, Abdul-Raof (2013) emphasizes that Qur'anic discourse is inherently multi-layered, requiring exegetical awareness to fully capture its meaning. In this respect, *'adhab* should not be understood merely as a term denoting punishment, but rather as a multidimensional theological construct encompassing eschatological torment, historical catastrophe, personal suffering, and socio-political oppression. Such semantic richness poses a serious challenge for translation, as reliance on a single English equivalent risks reducing these layers into a simplified and potentially misleading representation of Qur'anic meaning.

Formal Equivalence: Punishment

The following discussion interprets this dominance of punishment through Nida & Taber's (1982) and Baker's (1992) frameworks, focusing on what the choice of a single formal equivalent reveals about translational priorities rather than on further describing the distribution already reported above.

In the vast majority of QAC instances (318 of 322), *'adhab* is rendered as “punishment”, reflecting a clear tendency toward terminological consistency through formal equivalence. Such a strategy prioritizes lexical correspondence between source and target text as a means of preserving structural fidelity (Baker, 1992). However, as widely noted in translation studies, strict adherence to formal equivalence often fails to account for contextual and cultural dimensions of meaning, particularly in semantically dense texts such as the Qur'an (Abdul-Raof, 2001; Venuti, 2017). As a result, the use of a single standardized equivalent reduces the multidimensional semantic profile of key theological terms.

This limitation becomes evident when examining specific Qur'anic contexts. The first example is QS. Al-Qamar (54):18: “كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذْرٌ”, translated in the QAC as: “‘Ād denied; and how [severe] were My punishment and warning.” From an exegetical perspective, this verse refers to the historical destruction of the people of ‘Ād through a catastrophic natural event, as documented in classical tafsīr (Ath-Ṭabarī, 1903; Kathīr, 1996). At the propositional level, therefore, *'adhab* denotes a concrete historical calamity rather than an abstract legal penalty. Rendering it as “punishment” obscures this referential specificity, replacing a vivid historical event with a generalized juridical concept. Moreover, as Baker (1992) notes, expressive meaning in translation is highly sensitive to lexical choice; in this case, the rhetorical force of the verse, designed to evoke fear, awe, and moral warning, is significantly weakened by the neutral and institutional connotations of “punishment”. At the level of evoked meaning, the Arabic term activates a rich network of theological associations related to divine power and historical accountability, whereas the English equivalent remains semantically restricted.

A similar issue arises in QS. Ad-Dukhān (44):30: “وَلَقَدْ نَجَّيْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ”, translated as: “And We certainly saved the Children of Israel from the humiliating punishment.” Exegetical sources consistently interpret *'adhab* in this context as referring to the socio-political oppression and enslavement imposed by Pharaoh (Ath-Ṭabarī, 1903; Kathīr, 1996). In this case, the term

clearly denotes human-inflicted suffering rather than divine retribution. Translating it as “punishment” therefore introduces a theological distortion by implying divine agency where none exists. This illustrates what Abdelaal & Rashid (2015) identify as semantic loss in Qur’anic translation, where culturally and theologically embedded meanings are reduced or misrepresented due to reliance on generalized lexical equivalents. Such distortions are particularly problematic in sacred texts, where translation choices directly shape doctrinal interpretation and reader perception.

Dynamic Equivalence: Torment and Suffering

The four instances in which the QAC employs dynamic equivalence for *‘adhāb* demonstrate the value of contextually sensitive translation. From the perspective of translation theory, dynamic equivalence prioritizes the communicative effect of the message and the response of the target reader rather than strict lexical correspondence (Nida, 1964; Nida & Taber, 1982). This approach is particularly relevant in the translation of sacred texts, where meaning is often embedded in complex theological, cultural, and contextual layers that resist literal transfer (Abdul-Raof, 2013).

The most instructive case is QS. *Ṣād* (38):41, “إِنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الشَّيْطَانُ بِنُصْبٍ وَعَذَابٍ”, rendered as: “Indeed, Satan has touched me with hardship and suffering.” In this verse, *‘adhāb* refers not to divine punishment but to the personal suffering of Prophet Ayyūb (Job), who is portrayed in the Qur’an as undergoing prolonged affliction as a test of faith rather than as retribution for wrongdoing (Abdul-Raof, 2013). At the propositional level, the use of suffering accurately preserves the factual meaning of the source text by representing Ayyūb’s condition as an ordeal rather than a punitive act. This aligns with observations in Qur’anic translation studies that semantic accuracy often requires departing from literal equivalents to avoid misrepresentation of context (Abdelaal & Md Rashid, 2015).

At the presupposed level, the translation suffering maintains the theological assumption that Ayyūb’s affliction is a test, thereby preventing the doctrinal distortion that would arise if the term were rendered as punishment. This distinction is critical, as semantic misrepresentation in Qur’anic translation may lead to partial or total loss of intended meaning, particularly in cases involving culturally or theologically loaded terms (Abdelaal & Md Rashid, 2015). Moreover, Baker (1992) emphasizes that expressive and presupposed meanings are especially vulnerable in translation due to differences in cultural and contextual associations, which often cannot be preserved through direct lexical substitution.

The limited but strategic use of dynamic equivalents such as torment and suffering thus illustrates a higher degree of contextual fidelity. Unlike formal equivalents that rely on one-to-one correspondence, dynamic renderings more effectively capture the functional and experiential dimensions of meaning, which are essential in conveying the Qur’anic portrayal of human suffering as both a spiritual trial and a test of faith. This finding supports broader arguments in translation studies that dynamic equivalence is particularly necessary when translating semantically complex and culturally embedded texts, where literal consistency may compromise interpretive accuracy (Abdul-Raof, 2013; Nida, 1964). This selective departure from formal equivalence is consistent with Nida and Taber’s (1982) own argument that dynamic equivalence should be favoured precisely where strict formal correspondence would mislead the target reader, while formal equivalence remains the translators’ default elsewhere because it is procedurally simpler to apply consistently across a large corpus and preserves closer surface-level traceability to the Arabic source, a priority for a scripturally authoritative text..

The Translation of *Rizq* (رزق)

Semantic Range of Rizq in the Qur'an

As with 'adhāb above, the following paragraphs establish the classical semantic baseline for *rizq* rather than reporting corpus findings directly; this baseline is applied to the translation data in the subsections that follow.

Etymologically, *rizq* (رزق) derives from the Arabic root r-z-q, denoting the act of giving, distributing, or bestowing sustenance (Manzūr et al., 1997). Classical lexical and exegetical sources consistently emphasize that the term extends beyond material provision. al-Iṣḥāhānī (1961) defines *rizq* as everything that benefits human beings, encompassing both material and immaterial forms of sustenance. Similarly, Qurṭubī (1967) underscores that in Qur'anic discourse, *rizq* frequently denotes lawful (ḥalāl) provision granted by God, integrating ethical, legal, and spiritual dimensions. Kathīr (1996) further develops this notion by affirming that all forms of *rizq*, whether tangible or intangible, originate exclusively from God, thereby reinforcing a central theological principle of divine sovereignty and human dependence.

Beyond these classical definitions, contemporary scholarship has highlighted the semantic expansiveness of Qur'anic vocabulary, particularly in relation to key theological terms. As Abdul-Raof (2001) argues, Qur'anic lexis is characterized by a high degree of semantic layering, where a single term may simultaneously encode doctrinal, spiritual, and socio-cultural meanings. In this regard, *rizq* functions not merely as a reference to physical sustenance, but as a comprehensive concept encompassing material wealth, knowledge, guidance, health, and spiritual tranquility. This multidimensionality aligns with broader discussions in translation studies, where culturally and religiously embedded terms are often resistant to direct equivalence due to their semantic and pragmatic complexity (Baker, 1992; Newmark, 1988).

Moreover, studies on Qur'anic translation have demonstrated that theological terms such as *rizq* frequently lose part of their semantic scope when rendered into English, particularly when translators rely on generalized lexical equivalents such as "provision" or "sustenance." (Abdelaal & Rashid, 2015). Such renderings tend to foreground the material dimension of the term while marginalizing its spiritual and epistemological aspects, thereby narrowing its interpretive potential. As noted by Haleem (2004), many Qur'anic terms operate within a wider discursive and theological framework that cannot be fully captured through single-word translation. Consequently, the semantic richness of *rizq*, spanning material, ethical, and spiritual domains, poses a significant challenge for translation, as any reduction to a single lexical equivalent risks obscuring its role within the Qur'anic conceptualization of divine generosity and sustenance.

Formal Equivalence: Provision

The near-exclusive use of "provision" as the English equivalent of *rizq* in the QAC (54 out of 55 instances) reflects a clear commitment to lexical consistency through formal equivalence. While such consistency may enhance textual coherence and terminological stability, it also aligns with what Baker (1992) identifies as a tendency toward semantic generalization, where a single lexical item is repeatedly used to cover a wide semantic field. In the context of Qur'anic translation, this strategy becomes particularly problematic, as semantically rich terms such as *rizq* carry multiple layers of theological, ethical, and cultural meaning that cannot be adequately captured by a single

English equivalent (Abdul-Raof, 2013; Haleem, 2004). As noted in translation studies, uniform lexical choices often lead to semantic reduction, especially when culturally embedded concepts are rendered through neutral or generalized terms (Hatim & Mason, 1997; Newmark, 1988).

This limitation is evident in QS. Al-Baqarah (2):25: “Whenever they are provided with a provision of fruit therefrom, they will say, ‘This is what we were provided with before.’” In its Qur’anic context, this verse describes the recurring and ever-renewed delight experienced by the inhabitants of Paradise. Exegetical sources emphasize that the repetition expressed through *kullamā* (“whenever”) signifies continuous renewal, abundance, and divine generosity (Ath-Ṭabarī, 1903; Kathīr, 1996). At the expressive level, therefore, *rizq* conveys not merely sustenance but a form of spiritually infused bounty marked by joy, wonder, and divine grace. However, the English term “provision” is semantically constrained, typically associated with material supply or basic needs, and lacks the affective and eschatological resonance present in the Arabic term. As Baker (1992) argues, such loss of expressive meaning is a common consequence when semantic nuances tied to cultural and religious contexts are not reproduced in translation.

A similar pattern of semantic narrowing appears in QS. Al-Nahl (16):67: “تَتَخَذُونَ مِنْهُ سَكْرًا وَرِزْقًا حَسَنًا”, translated as: “you take intoxicant and good provision.” In this verse, the phrase *rizqan ḥasanan* carries strong presupposed meaning rooted in Qur’anic ethical and legal discourse. Classical tafsīr consistently interprets *ḥasan* here as indicating lawful (*ḥalāl*) and wholesome (*ṭayyib*) provision, in contrast to intoxicants (*sakar*), which are prohibited (Kathīr, 1996; Qurṭubī, 1967). The phrase thus invokes an entire normative framework concerning divine legislation and moral conduct. However, the translation “good provision” reduces this juridical and theological richness to a vague evaluative adjective, which, in English, is typically interpreted in subjective or sensory terms rather than as a marker of religious legality.

This example illustrates what Abdelaal & Rashid (2015) described as a semantic loss through the underrepresentation of culturally bound meaning. Similarly, Abdul-Raof (2001) notes that Qur’anic lexical items often encode implicit theological presuppositions that are not recoverable through surface-level translation. The result is not merely linguistic simplification but a distortion of the presupposed meaning embedded in the source text. More broadly, such cases support the observation that formal equivalence, when applied rigidly, tends to foreground lexical sameness at the expense of contextual and doctrinal accuracy (House, 2014; Toury, 2012). Consequently, the repeated use of “provision” as a universal equivalent for *rizq* contributes to systematic semantic impoverishment, obscuring the term’s role within the Qur’anic conceptualization of divine generosity, ethical regulation, and spiritual nourishment.

Dynamic Equivalence: Sustenance

The single instance of dynamic equivalence in the *rizq* data occurs in QS. Al-A‘rāf (7):32, “قُلْ، مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ”, rendered as: “Say, ‘Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of sustenance?’” From a translational perspective, this choice reflects an instance of dynamic equivalence, where the translator departs from strict lexical consistency in order to better capture the functional and contextual meaning of the source term (Nida, 1964; Nida & Taber, 1982). This shift is particularly significant given the well-documented difficulty of translating Qur’anic lexical items that carry layered semantic, cultural, and theological meanings (Ali, 2020; Ereksoussi, 2021).

The selection of sustenance instead of provision suggests an implicit recognition that the latter is insufficient to convey the full semantic range of *riḥq*, especially in contexts linked to divine permission and ethical consumption. In classical Qur'anic exegesis, *riḥq* is not restricted to material provision but encompasses all forms of divine bestowal, including physical nourishment, spiritual well-being, knowledge, and existential support (Kathīr, 1996; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984). This expansive meaning aligns with the broader Qur'anic conceptualization of divine provision as both material and immaterial, a notion that resists reduction to a single lexical equivalent in English. As a result, literal translations frequently produce semantic loss, particularly when complex theological concepts are rendered into narrower lexical categories (Abdelaal & Rashid, 2015, 2016).

Furthermore, the verse explicitly invokes the concept of *al-ṭayyibāt* (good, pure, and wholesome things), which carries strong legal and ethical connotations in Islamic discourse. This term denotes not merely what is permissible (*ḥalāl*), but what is intrinsically beneficial, pure, and conducive to spiritual and moral well-being (Kathīr, 1996). The pairing of *riḥq* with *al-ṭayyibāt* thus situates the term within a broader semantic field that integrates theology, jurisprudence, and ethics. In this context, the use of sustenance partially succeeds in conveying the life-sustaining and holistic dimensions of *riḥq*, as it extends beyond material supply to imply nourishment necessary for survival and continuity.

However, despite this relative improvement, the translation remains incomplete at the level of expressive and evoked meaning. As noted in translation studies, culturally and religiously embedded terms often activate intricate networks of associations that cannot be easily reproduced in the target language (Baker, 1992; Obeidat & Binti Mahadi, 2020). In Qur'anic usage, *riḥq* evokes not only sustenance but also divine generosity, predestination, and the intimate relationship between the Creator and creation, dimensions that are only partially captured by the English term sustenance. This limitation reflects a broader challenge in Qur'anic translation, where even dynamic equivalence may mitigate but not fully eliminate semantic loss due to the inherent asymmetry between source and target conceptual systems (Abdelaal, 2019; Alhaj & Alwada'i, 2024). Nonetheless, this single instance of dynamic equivalence remains analytically significant. It demonstrates that even within a predominantly formal translation framework, there is an implicit awareness of lexical inadequacy in certain contexts. The selective use of sustenance suggests that context-sensitive translation strategies can enhance semantic fidelity, particularly when dealing with theologically dense terms. At the same time, it underscores the necessity of supplementary strategies such as explicitation, annotation, or transliteration to more fully preserve the multidimensional nature of Qur'anic meaning.

Comparative Analysis: Patterns of Semantic Narrowing

The foregoing analysis reveals consistent and systematic patterns of semantic narrowing operating across both *'adhab* and *riḥq*, primarily driven by the dominant use of formal equivalence. Having reported this pattern, the discussion below situates it within Toury's and Baker's theoretical accounts of translation norms and meaning loss. In both cases, the QAC translation privileges terminological consistency over semantic fidelity, reflecting what Toury (2012) describes as norm-governed translation behavior, where consistency is maintained even at the expense of contextual variation. While such standardization enhances lexical uniformity, it often fails to capture the semantic richness inherent in Qur'anic discourse, particularly in cases involving culture-bound and theologically dense vocabulary (Abdul-Raof, 2013; Haleem, 2004).

For *‘adhāb*, the overwhelming reliance on the equivalent “punishment” collapses a semantically multidimensional concept, encompassing divine cosmic retribution, existential suffering, historical catastrophe, and human oppression, into a narrowly legal-retributive framework. This reduction reflects the limitations of one-to-one lexical correspondence in translating polysemous religious terms, a phenomenon widely observed in studies of sacred text translation (Dickins, 2016; Saeed, 2008). Similarly, for *riḥq*, the dominance of the term “provision” reduces a complex theological construct, encompassing both material sustenance and immaterial blessings such as guidance, knowledge, and spiritual well-being, into a utilitarian and materialistic notion of supply, thereby obscuring its broader metaphysical implications (Abdul-Raof, 2013; Haleem, 2004).

From the perspective of Baker’s (1992) framework of contextual meaning, the most pronounced losses occur at the levels of presupposed and evoked meaning. Presupposed meaning, which relies on shared theological, historical, and cultural knowledge, is particularly vulnerable when translation prioritizes lexical equivalence over contextual interpretation. For instance, in QS. Ad-Dukhān (44):30, where *‘adhāb* refers to political oppression by Pharaoh, rendering it as “punishment” disrupts the presupposed narrative of victimhood and reconfigures it into an unintended theological interpretation of divine retribution. This aligns with broader findings in translation studies that literal translation strategies often fail to activate culturally embedded presuppositions in the target audience (Hatim & Mason, 1997; House, 2014).

Similarly, in the case of *riḥq* in QS. Al-Nahl (16):67, the rendering of *riḥq ḥasan* as “good provision” neutralizes its juridical and ethical implications within Islamic discourse, where the concept is closely tied to *ḥalāl* and *ṭayyib* (lawful and wholesome). This reduction exemplifies what Venuti (2017) identifies as the domestication effect, where culturally specific meanings are flattened to fit target-language norms, often at the expense of semantic depth. Consequently, both cases demonstrate how formal equivalence systematically suppresses presupposed meaning, leading to interpretive simplification.

Evoked meaning, defined by Baker (1992) as the associative and intertextual resonance of a word within a cultural-linguistic system, is likewise consistently diminished. The Qur’anic terms *‘adhāb* and *riḥq* activate extensive theological networks in the source language, including notions of divine justice, moral accountability, providence, and spiritual dependence (Izutsu, 2002; Saeed, 2008). However, their English counterparts, “punishment” and “provision”, fail to evoke comparable associations in the target reader, thereby weakening the interpretive and experiential impact of the text. This phenomenon reflects what Newmark (1988) and House (2014) identify as a loss of pragmatic and cultural meaning in translation, particularly when dealing with religious texts.

The expressive dimension, which encompasses the emotional and rhetorical force of Qur’anic discourse, is likewise significantly attenuated. Qur’anic language is highly performative, often designed to elicit specific emotional and spiritual responses such as fear, awe, hope, and reflection (Abdul-Raof, 2013). The eschatological urgency embedded in *‘adhāb* in warning narratives, as well as the sense of gratitude and spiritual joy associated with *riḥq* in paradisiacal contexts, are flattened into neutral and informationally adequate expressions in translation. This supports the observation that literal translation strategies tend to preserve referential meaning while sacrificing affective and rhetorical dimensions (Baker, 1992; Hatim & Mason, 1997).

These patterns demonstrate that semantic narrowing in Qur’anic translation is not merely a linguistic issue but a multidimensional phenomenon involving the loss of theological depth, cultural

resonance, and communicative effect. As argued in contemporary translation scholarship, the translation of sacred texts requires a balance between formal accuracy and functional adequacy, particularly in contexts where meaning extends beyond the lexical level into doctrinal and experiential domains (Boase-Beier, 2011; Long, 2005). The findings of this study thus reinforce the need for more context-sensitive translation strategies that move beyond terminological consistency toward semantic and theological fidelity.

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the QAC translations of *'adhāb* and *rizq* are characterized by a dominant formal equivalence strategy that, while achieving terminological consistency, systematically produces semantic narrowing across the propositional, presupposed, expressive, and evoked dimensions of Qur'anic meaning. The term *'adhāb*, rendered as punishment in 98.8% of instances, loses its metaphysical, eschatological, and socio-political dimensions, creating potential for serious theological misreading, particularly in verses dealing with personal suffering or human oppression. The term *rizq*, rendered as provision in 98.2% of instances, loses its theological breadth as an inclusive concept of divine bestowal encompassing both material and spiritual gifts, reducing it to a purely logistical notion of physical supply.

These findings carry significant implications for translators and institutions engaged in Qur'anic translation. The study recommends four complementary strategies. First, term retention: in cases where no English equivalent adequately captures the semantic and theological weight of a Qur'anic term, retaining the Arabic term in transliteration (e.g., *'adhāb*, *rizq*) prevents the semantic loss inherent in any single-word translation and invites readers to engage with the term's full meaning. Second, explicitation: expanding the translated equivalent with clarifying adjectives or phrases (e.g., "divine torment/retribution" for *'adhāb* in eschatological contexts, "divine provision, both material and spiritual" for *rizq*) can partially restore lost semantic dimensions. Third, footnotes and glossaries: contextual explanations provided in footnotes can communicate presupposed and evoked meanings that cannot be incorporated into the main text without disrupting its flow. Fourth, contextual variation: rather than applying a single equivalent across all occurrences, translators should adopt context-sensitive rendering, using torment or suffering for *'adhāb* in contexts of personal trial or political oppression, and sustenance or "God-given blessing" for *rizq* in contexts emphasizing spiritual or immaterial divine gifts.

Future research should extend this corpus-based analysis to additional Qur'anic theological terms, conduct comparative studies across multiple English Qur'anic translations, and employ empirical reader-response methods to assess the communicative impact of different translation strategies on diverse audiences.

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