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THE ENDEAVOR OF TRANSLATING THE QUR'AN

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Keywords	*Abstract*
Translation, Endeavor, Aritificial Intelligence, Qur'an.	*Translating a text such as the Holy Qur'an is complex. The aim of this research is to: 1) explain the characteristics of various Qur'anic translations based on scholarly analysis into Spanish, 2) discuss the task of translating the Qur'an using basic communication model elements, 3) reflect on the impact of translation on non-Arabic-speaking communities like Mexico and Colombia, and 4) promote AI use as a tool, not authority. This research uses qualitative analysis to explore Qur'anic translation into Spanish, focusing on translator types, challenges, and cultural influences. The results of this research are: 1) An analysis of Spanish Qur'anic translations, addressing challenges like linguistic depth and cultural context, categorized based on Gottlieb's theory. 2) A communication model framework for translation, highlighting the translator's role in bridging cultural gaps. 3) Insights from interviews with Muslim converts in Mexico and Colombia, showing the importance of translations for spiritual growth and the eventual study of the Qur'an in Arabic. 4) A proposal for using AI as a tool for translation, emphasizing the need for human oversight due to AI's lack of cultural sensitivity.*

Introduction

Translating a text such as the Holy Qur'an is complex. We should start by understanding what "to translate" means and grasping the role of a "translator," who produces "translations" as the outcome of their work. A simple definition of "translate" is transferring a message in one language into a written message in another language.[1] Other useful concepts for this article are "source text" and "target text" and the implications of each. The source text, in this case, is the Holy Qur'an in its original Arabic language, and the target text is the book or document resulting from translating the Sacred Book into another language such as Spanish, English, etc. It is understood that the Qur'an in Arabic is fundamentally different from its translation into any other language. In this sense, the Qur'an has been fully translated into at least 47 different languages and partially into at least 114 languages.[2] However, not all translations are reliable.[3]

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[1] RAE, *Diccionario de La Lengua Española*, 2001, https://www.rae.es/drae2001/traducir.

[2] A. E.-S. Mossad, *The Challenges of Translating the Quran*, Globalization Partners International, 2017, https://www.globalizationpartners.com/2017/07/13/the-challenges-of- translating-the-quran/.

[3] M. Embarek, *¿Para Quién Se Escribe?, ¿para Quién Se Traduce? El Caso de La Literatura Marroquí*, Orientalismo, Exotismo y Traducción (Universidad de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2000), https://bit.ly/3BpVsfA; M. de. Epalza, "El Corán y Sus Traducciones: Algunos Problemas Islamológicos y de Traducción, Con Propuestas de Soluciones," *El Islam Plural*, 379–400; M. de. Epalza, "Seis Nuevas Traducciones Españolas Del Corán (1994-2002)," *Revista Del Instituto de*

In this work, I explain what a translation of the Qur'an entails. I also classify and describe the characteristics of translations that have been made of the Holy Qur'an based on scholarly analyses of translations specifically into Spanish. Furthermore, I offer an explanation about the task of translating a text like the Qur'an by applying basic elements from the communication model, as it is one of my areas of study. I provide some comments on the act of translating and discuss the impact translations have had on non-Arabic-speaking communities, such as Mexico and Colombia. However, it is important to clarify that it is NOT my purpose to critique a specific translation or to suggest which one is better, since each translator, belonging to different geographic and temporal contexts, provides a different translation. My aim here is to explain why these differences occur. Before concluding, I present my experience and opinion as a user of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and propose its use as a tool rather than an authority, advocating for the active rather than passive use of AI models.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis to examine the process of translating the Qur'an, particularly its translation into Spanish. The study focuses on the characteristics of the resulting translations, as well as the challenges and contexts that influence these translations. Data is gathered through literature review and interviews with Muslim converts in Mexico and Colombia who use various translations of the Qur'an. The researcher also analyzes different types of translators, from literary to technical translators, in order to understand the methodologies employed in translating this sacred text.

In addition, this research utilizes a basic communication model to illustrate how the message of the Qur'an is translated and understood by communities speaking different languages. The study explores how historical, cultural, and social factors influence the understanding of the translated text. Through interviews and analysis of existing translations, the researcher identifies differences in Qur'anic translations and provides insights for better translations in the future, especially within the context of Latin America.

Results and Discussion

Elements and Characteristics of A Translation

We should understand the task of translating as a process whose elements are the source text, the translator, and the target text (see figure 1). Each element must be considered with the contextual, cultural, and historical weight it possesses. The Qur'an in Arabic is the source text, while the translation, in this case into Spanish, is the target text. The Qur'an was revealed and compiled in a different era from when its translations were made. Both periods had or have (making difference between present and past) different lifestyles, with certain values holding more

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Estudios Islámicos En Madrid 35, no. Número especial: 117–39; I. García, *Traducción Comentada. El Corán*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.2307/602217; S. A. Pedraza, *Buscando El Verdadero Mensaje Del Islam En Las Traducciones al Español Del Sagrado Corán*, 2015, https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/es/ih_books/single/es_Buscando_el_verdadero_mensaje _de_Islam.pdf.

weight than others, distinct contexts, distant geographies, and what they have in common is that Arabic and Spanish (or any other language) are languages spoken and written by two different societies.
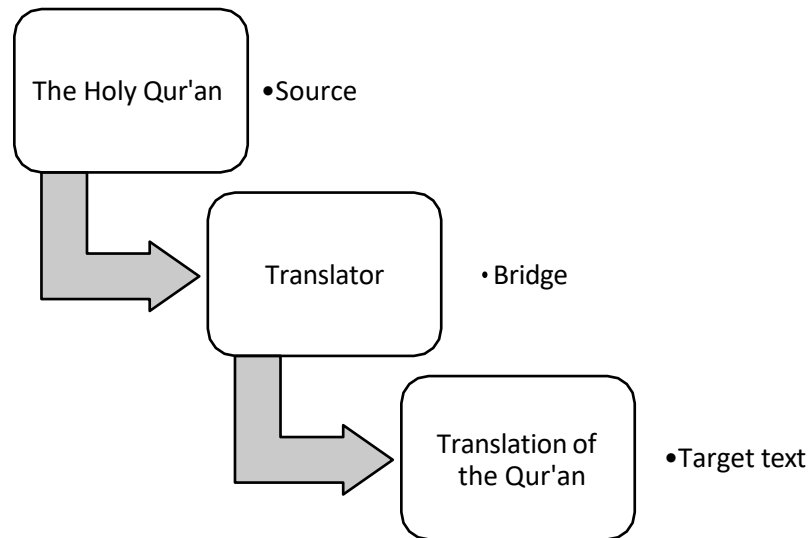

Figure 1. Elements of the translation process

The characteristics of the Qur'an as a source text include its status as a sacred book, making it highly significant for all humanity. It is written in Arabic and possesses a particular rhythm, making it poetic and melodious in phonetic terms. It includes exclusive codes of eloquence, symbolism, and linguistic depth. All these characteristics make translating the Qur'an a delicate task requiring extensive knowledge of languages, culture, history, and contexts across two distinct temporal and spatial dimensions. Qur'anic translation and the translator's work must be meticulous so that both worlds harmoniously interact through the translation process.

The "two worlds" involved in translation are, first, the world from which the document originates—its creation, writing, publication, language, social and historical context—and second, the world it aims to reach, that is, the target text, which includes the cultural and historical context, language, and crucially, an understanding of the cultural symbols of the target audience.

There are various types of translations, and Gottlieb has classified them according to their characteristics.[4] Qur'anic translation, in particular, is a verbal and interlinguistic translation from one language to another, thus named intrasemiotic. It is also a diachronic translation, as the source text belongs to a different era from the target text. It is a dialectal translation due to its different geographical locations, different societies, generations, and target audiences. Within the translation from Arabic to other languages, particularly Spanish, transliteration is also used, which involves transcribing the phonetics of an Arabic word using the alphabet of the

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[4] H. Gottlieb, L. G. González, and A. Kuznik, "La Semiótica y La Traducción," *Hermeneus. Revista de Traducción e Interpretación* 24 (2022): 643–75.

target language, especially for words without direct translation or those requiring extensive explanations for comprehension, such as the word jilbab (see table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of a translation of The Qur'an

Characteristics of the translation of the Qur'an	*Explanation*
Interlinguistic	The translation process occurs from one language to another (eg. from Arabic to Spanish)
Intrasemiotic	Because the source and target languages are spoken and written by two different societies.
Diachronic	The translation belongs to a different era from the source text.
Dialectal	It involves different geographic locations, societies, generations, and target audiences.
Use transliterations	There are Arabic words without direct translations into the target language, requiring the use of transliteration—transcribing the phonetics of Arabic words using the target language's alphabet.

The language of the Qur'an is classical Arabic, and a translation can be made into any other language, whether written using letters and words or languages created for people with auditory or visual disabilities, such as Braille and sign language. Recently, interpretations using drawings have started to be made for those who cannot read and write, such as very young children. Table 2 presents some basic data about the Qur'an, and Table 3 presents two examples of translations, one into Spanish and another into English. The objective is to clarify that a translation is distinct from the source text and that each translation must consider temporal, geographic, and target audience contexts.

Table 2. Basic data of the source text: The Holy Qur'an

Source Text	
	Language: Classic Arabic *Title*: Al Qur'an Al Karim (The Great Qur'an) *Revealed*: Into de person of the prophet Mohammad (saw) between the years 610 y 632 of our era First compilation: during the Califate of Umar Ibn Al Khattab (ra) Canonization of the Qur'an: During Califate of Uthman ibn Affan (ra) on the year 650 aprox. It has eloquence, it is poetic and melodious and contains deep symbolism and profound eanings

Table 3. Two examples of target text: Qur'an translations

Target text	
	Language: Latin American Spanish *Translator*: Isa García *Published:* 2013 It includes footnotes and parentheses for additional clarification. The cover page clearly indicates that it is a translation. *Title*: "Commented Translation. The Qur'an."
	Language: English *Translator*: Muhammad Assad *Published*: 1980 Commented and contextualized translation The cover page clearly indicates that it is a translation. *Title*: The Message of The Qur'an.

The question is, why is it important to highlight this difference that seems obvious? Certainly, the Qur'an is a revelation in Arabic, while a translation is an interpretation of the Qur'anic message in a different language, intended to reach an audience that is temporally and geographically distant, and not Arabic-speaking. In the context of Latin American converts to Islam, there is often confusion about what exactly the Qur'an is, and translations are frequently mistaken for the original. Below, I provide two examples.

In my research, one of the questions included in the interviews was: "Have you read the original Qur'an?" The answer depends on whether the person has been exposed to the Arabic language or not, and whether they have an awareness of what it means to access the sacred book in its original language. Those who did not know Arabic replied, "Yes, I have read the Qur'an, several times," a response given by several participants.[5] However, the response of a person who knows Arabic or has begun studying the language to access the sacred book in Arabic, was different; she replied, "In Arabic, not yet, but in Spanish, yes, I have read it",[6] making the clear difference between a translation and the revelation in itself.

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[5] G. Mondragón, *En Búsqueda de La Religión: Cómo Las Mujeres Mexicanas Están Encontrando El Islam* (Editorial Maktaba, 2023).

[6] G. Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey* (NotionPress, 2024).

The Diachronic and Dialectal Aspects of Translation

When translations are produced diachronically—that is, across different times and eras—the target societies or audiences are inevitably different. Geography, climate, and seasons are experienced uniquely in each location. All these factors influence people's language, common expressions, proverbs, stories told, daily routines, etc. Language is part of culture, and the semantic value assigned to words can carry different layers of meaning.

To provide simple examples, in the Spanish language, the sun (el sol) is masculine, and the moon (la luna) is feminine, while in Arabic it is the opposite: the sun (ash shams) is feminine, and the moon (al qamar) is masculine. The same occurs with words such as tree (shayarah), car (sayiarah), and ship (safinah); all these words are feminine in Arabic, yet masculine in Spanish. In English, however, all these nouns fall under the category of things without gender and are referred to by the personal pronoun "it." Thus, for example, if a text states that a community worships "the sun" as a god, in Spanish it would be explicitly masculine, but in Arabic it would be a goddess, feminine.

These simple examples illustrate the complexity involved in translating a text not only from one language to another but also from one culture to another, from one geography to another, and from one era to another. This is why semiotics and hermeneutics come into play,[7] allowing deeper exploration of contextual meanings of words and concepts. Translation becomes even more complicated when the Qur'an addresses definitions and characteristics related to gender roles, social values, and the management of political and economic power.

Double Decoding

Due to my professional education, it is easy for me to think of the Qur'an translator's work as mass communication, in which the goal is to deliver a message to an audience with particular temporal and characteristic features. In simple terms, we understand that Allah (swt) is the sender of a message, the Qur'an, which is transmitted through a code—the Arabic language—and reaches a receiver, humanity at large, encompassing multiple languages. Only a small percentage of this humanity shares the linguistic code of the Qur'an, which is Arabic (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Simplified model of Qur'anic communication

The translator is an expert in communication.[8] One of Jakobson's (1960) contributions to the communication model was the concept of "code" in its metalinguistic function, highlighting the richness of language itself and arguing that

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[7] Gottlieb, González, and Kuznik, "La Semiótica y La Traducción."
[8] P. V. Páez and B. S. Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación," *Revista Comunicación* 11, no. 002 (2000).

messages carry semantic weight beyond the literal meaning of each word. He proposes that the sender and receiver must share the same code to effectively send, transmit, and receive the message, thereby achieving connection.[9] In this communication process to connect the sender with their audience, the sender "encodes" the message, and the receiver "decodes" it upon receiving and attempting to understand it.[10]

When both sender and receiver understand the same language, they share the same communication code. Despite this, different Muslim scholarship traditions (for example, from Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, India, Pakistan, etc.) and the major schools of jurisprudence (such as Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Hanbali) perform decoding throughout the evolution of societies, creating interpretations from Qur'anic Arabic into a modern Arabic- speaking societies. This is why different tafaasir or interpretations of the Holy Qur'an exist, such as Tafsir Al-Tabari (year 923), Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (year 1273), Tafsir Ibn Katheer (year 1373), among others. Thus, what can we expect from a translation into another language? Translations are interpretations—decodings aimed at a specific target audience.

Below, I illustrate how the sender and receiver might share the same linguistic code, but this is not the only code involved. Historical backgrounds, geographical settings, and even climate and seasonal differences produce distinct semantic meanings for words.[11] To demonstrate this, I use an author very well-known in the Spanish-speaking world, especially to understand the complexity involved in translating into Spanish as a first decoding, and the final reader's interpretation as a second decoding.

The Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, who wrote in his native language, can more easily reach his audience when the reader speaks and understands Spanish. The connection between the writer and reader is stronger when, in addition to language, they also share a common cultural framework—for instance, when considering a Latin American (the colonized), or specifically Colombian audience with whom it is easier to connect compared to a Spanish audience (the colonizers), despite both speaking and understanding the same language. In these cases, the Latin American reader of García Márquez's literary works requires only a single decoding process, since the author and reader share similar characteristics. However, a European Spanish-speaking reader, specifically from Spain, might need to perform additional historical and contextual research to fully grasp the meanings of García Márquez's works, because the cultural and historical codes convey concepts that a Spanish reader might not fully comprehend, even though both parties speak and understand the same language.

Professor Ramadan has written about the cultural connection or disconnection that can be experienced, particularly in literature, humor, and expressions of affection, love, and care; everything is a matter of perspective—we

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[9] P. Cobley and P. J. Schulz, *Theories and Models of Communication* (In P. Cobley & P. J. Schulz (Eds.), Theories and Models of Communication, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110240450.273.
[10] Páez and Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación."
[11] J. Ortiz García, "Los Estudios de Traducción y El Mundo Hispánico: Conceptos y Ubicación," *Revista Electrónica Matices En Lenguas Extranjeras* 10 (2011): 72–96.

perceive according to our personal, social, and historical background.[12] An audience unfamiliar, for example, with oppression and lack of opportunities cannot empathize with or fully comprehend a poem or literary work describing an oppressive situation that includes limited opportunities for education, work, business, or social mobility. If a reader wants to have and adventure with an author that has a different perspective, different geography, different timeline, then the reader needs to do more work for decoding the message of the sender, in this case, the writer.

During a literary translation conference, a speaker explained the difficulties of translating into Malay an Anglican poem about winter, containing imagery such as snowstorms or the scent of firewood—concepts foreign to a culture without cold seasons. He pointed out that both the vocabulary and the emotions evoked by these images might lose their impact in a tropical context such as the Malaysian one.

Let us think of the Qur'an in its original language, Arabic, which was revealed, compiled, and canonized at a specific time. Consider its cultural, temporal, historical, and economic context; even climate and seasons influence the words we find in the Qur'an. For a contemporary Mexican or Colombian reader to connect with the sacred text of the Qur'an, revealed and transcribed over 1400 years ago, its translation must undergo a process of "double decoding." The first decoding is the delicate task performed by the translator, who interprets from Arabic into Spanish, from one historical time to another, from one type of climate and seasons to another, etc. And the second decoding is what the final reader typically undertakes when reading any text in their native language, without forgetting that even the final reader usually undertakes time and efforts to try to complete the second decoding level of the message of the Qur'an (see figure 3).
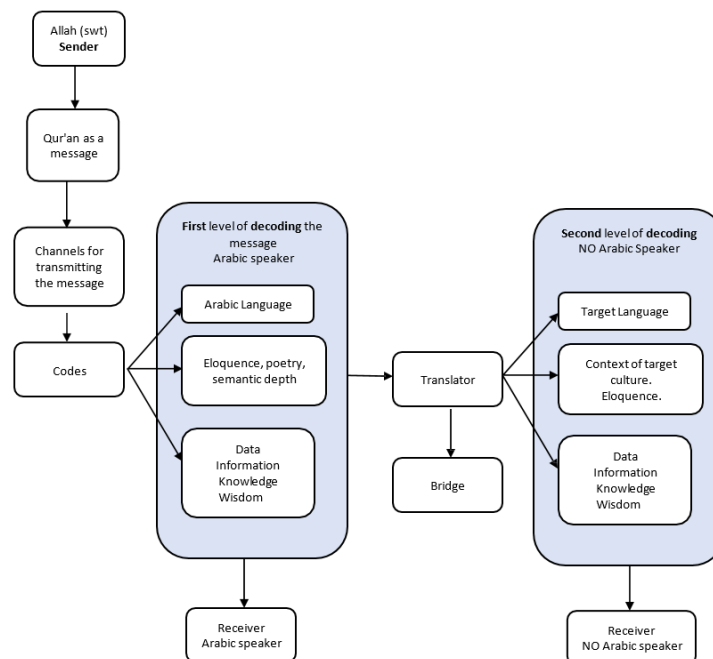

Figure 3. Codes and decoding levels of the Qur'anic message

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[12] T. Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning. Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (Penguin Booka, 2010).

The Translator: A Bridge Between Two Cultures

The task of translating the Qur'an requires considerable sensitivity and knowledge.[13] In this task, the translator acts as a bridge that must overcome cultural barriers between two texts, two cultures, two temporal contexts, and two languages, allowing both worlds to interact within the final result of their work—the translation of the Qur'an.[14] One is the source context, and the other is the target context.[15] This is why a Spanish translation produced in the 19th century may not be relevant to a Spanish-speaking audience in the 21st century. Consequently, the Qur'an has been translated countless times into different languages and will continue to be translated as the times and social circumstances of each community and society change.

On the other hand, from an anthropological perspective, the author of a translation belongs to a specific historical period and limited space, and their work is shaped by a particular cultural configuration; their native language and culture determine their worldview and thus their translation.

An example is the first translation of the Qur'an into English made by Robert Ketton in the year 1142, considered orientalist.[16] Orientalist translations, described as "anti- Islamic weapons," especially in medieval Europe, sought to understand and attack Islam and Muslims, with translators often freely modifying the content of the Qur'an based on their own thoughts and imaginations.[17] Within translation studies, it is necessary to delve deeper into the translator's origins and personality and their influence on the result of their work, aiming to observe how the translator impacts the translated text, which in turn affects the final readers. This is why translators can be considered authors of their translations, and instead of remaining "invisible," their work should be recognized and cited accordingly.[18]

In the case of translators of the Qur'an, this is especially important. Some of the participants I interviewed for the book "From Qur'an to Conversion",[19] the female Muslim converts are aware of who the translator is, where he comes from, and his general history of conversion and/or growth within Islam. This is particularly significant for the participants because, in their words, "by reading

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[13] Páez and Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación."

[14] E. Y. Montes Incin and A. A. Sánchez Hernández, "El Rol Del Traductor Como Puente Entre Dos Culturas: Una Profesión Subestimada En Un Mundo Globalizado," *UNAM Blog de Egresadxs. Perspectivas Sobre Temas de Relaciones Internacionales*, 2020.

[15] A. Hennecke, "Traducción y Cultura: Reflexiones Sobre La Dimensión Cultural de Textos y Su Importancia Para La Traducción," *Cuadernos de Lingüística Hispánica* 26 (2015): 104–19.

[16] A. Rivera, "El Corán Latino de Robert de Ketton (s. XII) - Análisis Comparativo Árabe-Latín de La Traducción de La Sura XII, vv. 1-57," *Tesis de Licenciatura, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (2015), https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4718.5688.

[17] J. Martínez Gázquez, "Las Traducciones Latinas Del Corán, Arma Antislámica En La Cristiandad Medieval," *Cuadernos Del CEMYR* 13, no. diciembre (2005): 11–27; J. Martínez Gázquez, "Las Traducciones Latinas Del Corán , Una Percepción Limitada Del Islam En La Europa Medieval y Moderna," *Humanismo y Pervivencia Del Mundo Clásico, Homenaje al Profedor Juan Gil* V. 2 (2015): 663–82.

[18] J. Delisle and A. M. Salvetti, "La Historia de La Traducción: Su Importancia Para La Traductología y Su Enseñanza Mediante Un Programa Didáctico Multimedia y Multilingüe," *Íkala* 8, no. 14 (2003): 221–35.

[19] Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey*.

more than one translation, I expand the knowledge about the Qur'an and the understanding of Islam." These were responses from four participants, GC-5-MX, KA-6- CL, LH-7-CL and LI-8-CL, who had the opportunity to study the Qur'an in Islamic countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.[20] Especially for those deeply committed to studying the sacred Qur'an, even though they already read, recite, and understand the Qur'an in Arabic, they still express the need to read and consult translations and interpretations both in their native language and other accessible languages such as English, German, Turkish, or others.

I found it particularly interesting that one participant (LI-8-CL) stated she uses English translations for her own learning and Spanish translations for da'wah, meaning spreading the message of Islam among Spanish-speaking friends and family. Meanwhile, four other participants (RM-1-MX, SU-2-MX, MC-3-MX, and SV-4-MX), particularly those who study the Qur'an online from their countries of origin, whether Mexico or Colombia, expressed feeling more connected or identified with certain translations more than others. Among these translations, they mentioned Isa García from Argentina[21] and Melara Navío (1996) from Spain. One of the findings of this research is that female Muslim converts from Mexico and Colombia who have started their Qur'anic studies emphasize the relevance of translations and highlight the importance of knowing the translator and understanding his perspective and vision when performing his translation work.

The translator, consciously or unconsciously, translates according to his own time, context, and the culture to which he belongs, guided by his own interests or those of the institution or group he represents. The translator's competence known as "knowing-how-to-be" encompasses socio- personal issues and consists of attitudes, motivations, beliefs, reflections, and ways of being and thinking.[22] I perceive that self-criticism and self-awareness must also be faculties of the translator, especially when it comes to translating the sacred Qur'an. The translator must be conscious of being included among those addressed by the verses where Allah (swt) states in the Qur'an that this "is a message for all humanity" (Qur'an 14:52, 38:87, 81:27).

This makes it clear that there are different types of translators, depending on the purpose of their translation. Literary translators use their creativity and the ability to imagine solutions to the problems posed by the language of the source text, to make it coherent and appealing in the target language. Technical translators, on the other hand, focus on exploration and discovery but run the risk of attempting literal, word-for-word translations (see table 4). Translating the Qur'an requires more than merely knowing the Arabic language and its grammar.[23]

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[20] Ibid.

[21] García, *Traducción Comentada. El Corán*.

[22] H. Libreros and I. Schrijver, "La Competencia Traductora y Los Saberes : Una Revisión Analítica y Dialógica Aplicada a La Didáctica de La Traducción," *TRANS* 28 (2024): 69–89.

[23] N. Roser Nebot, "La Des-Traducción Del Corán: Recurso Sustitutivo de La Traducción. El Asunto de Amr," *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes* 21 (2010): 99–122.

Said Pedraza,[24] in a review of Qur'anic translations into Spanish, classifies these translations into five categories: those intended to discredit Islam, those aimed at refuting Islam and supporting false doctrines, those made from ignorance, acceptable translations, and translations distinguished by their fidelity to the Qur'anic message and their quality in the Spanish language. Isa García,[25] as a translator of the Qur'an into Latin American Spanish, writes that in his own experience reading Qur'an translations, he observed both a lack of knowledge about Islam and insufficient linguistic competence in handling both Arabic and Spanish.

Isa García[26] further states that translating the Qur'an requires two factors: firstly, adequate knowledge of Islam and its history, and secondly, distancing oneself from literary stylistics in translation, not only regarding meaning but also the word order.[27] Anyone who has undertaken the task of translating the Qur'an has testified that the text possesses specific characteristics and presents unique translation challenges.[28] Epalza[29] describes another approach to translating the Qur'an, which he calls expansive translation, aiming to provide greater accuracy in conveying the senses and semantic richness of the text. The author explains the methodology used to translate the Qur'an into Catalan language, offering better comprehension of its meanings through explanatory insertions in parentheses or brackets, or even footnotes. This method is also found in Isa García's translation.[30]

In Muhammad Assad's translation, The Message of the Qur'an (1980), we observe that he adds an explanation at the beginning of each Surah indicating the moment of revelation, the reason behind the naming of each Surah, and a general overview of the themes contained within. Additionally, throughout his translation, he includes footnotes to comment on specific words, phrases, or entire verses (ayaat). These comments vary from historical context to meanings, or interpretations that may be applicable to our current era (see Table 4).

Table 4. Types of Qur'an translators

Type of Translator	Translation Methodology
Literary Translators	They use their creativity and imagination to solve translation problems posed by the source language to make

[24] Pedraza, *Buscando El Verdadero Mensaje Del Islam En Las Traducciones al Español Del Sagrado Corán*.

[25] García, *Traducción Comentada. El Corán*.

[26] Ibid.

[27] S. Esam and E. Sadiq, "La Traducción Del Noble Corán al Español: Su Historia, Motivos y Los Traductores Más Importantes (Estudio Histórico y Crítico)," *Journal Ishraqat Tanmawya* 30, no. March (2022): 21–43.

[28] Epalza, "El Corán y Sus Traducciones: Algunos Problemas Islamológicos y de Traducción, Con Propuestas de Soluciones"; Epalza, "Seis Nuevas Traducciones Españolas Del Corán (1994-2002)"; García, *Traducción Comentada. El Corán*; Roser Nebot, "La Des-Traducción Del Corán: Recurso Sustitutivo de La Traducción. El Asunto de Amr"; N. Roser Nebot, "La Traducción Del Corán: Labor y Circunstancias," *ReiDoCrea: Revista Electrónica de Investigación Docencia Creativa* 13, no. 4 (2024): 35–61.

[29] Epalza, "El Corán y Sus Traducciones: Algunos Problemas Islamológicos y de Traducción, Con Propuestas de Soluciones."

[30] García, *Traducción Comentada. El Corán*.

	the target text coherent and appealing.
Technical Translators	They adopt an exploratory and discovery-focused approach but risk translating literally word-for-word, potentially omitting deeper meanings of the Qur'an.
Expansive Translators	They aim to provide greater accuracy in conveying the semantic richness of the text, employing their knowledge of Arabic, Islamic history, and historical as well as contemporary contexts. Use the "expansive" technique by offering explanations in parentheses, brackets, and footnotes. Examples: Isa García (Spanish), Epalza (Catalan).
Translators and Commentators	Aim to explain the historical context of revelation through introductory explanations. Following the translation, they further expand on the meaning of words or phrases with footnotes that clarify historical revelation contexts or semantic meanings. Example: Muhammad Assad (English).

The translator of the Qur'an must engage in conscious self-reflection and objectively examine his own culture to achieve an honest perspective of the two worlds he intend to connect through his work.[31] This means the translator should develop an ethical vision along with moral and social responsibility when performing his translation. He must critically analyze the prevailing values of the era he lives in, aiming to build fairer, more noble, dignified, and respectful communities. The society at large seek harmonious and plural coexistence, understanding that equity does not mean providing everyone the same in equal measure, but rather ensuring fair distribution according to the specific needs of each person or social group—and this is ideally what the translator should strive for in his work.

Translating: A Look into Two Worlds

The Holy Qur'an is the source text. It is a message revealed by Allah (swt) approximately 600 years after the birth of Jesus, son of Mary (as). We, Muslims believe it to be the word of Allah (swt). Non-Muslims have developed their own theories and questions about who authored the Qur'an. In both cases, there is no doubt that it is considered a sacred book for humanity, holding the same status as the Gospels, Psalms, and the Torah. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (saw) over a period of 23 years during which Islam emerged and became established in Mecca and Medina. The Qur'an was canonized 27 years later, by which time Islam had already spread throughout Arabia and parts of Western Asia and North Africa.

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[31] Páez and Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación."

The society of Arabia and its surroundings experienced significant changes during those first 50 years of the revelation and canonization of the Qur'an.

Its original language is Arabic. Initially, it was revealed to the immediate community of Prophet Muhammad (saw), known as the tribe of Quraysh, an idolatrous society that played no significant or dominant role and posed no major geopolitical threat at that time. Pre-Islamic Arabian society had two great neighboring empires: the Byzantine Empire to the north and the Persian Empire to the east. The Byzantine Empire, with its capital in Constantinople, represented Christian power. The Persian Empire was Zoroastrian, worshipping fire as a god, and possessed a rich history as well as considerable political and military power. These two powers viewed the Arabian Peninsula as a harsh and infertile territory due to its desert conditions, perceiving Arabs as powerless, uncivilized nomadic shepherds without influence. While these two neighboring empires had structured governments, urbanization, extensive religious and educational institutions, architectural designs, military power, and organization, Arabian society lacked all of these. However, pre-Islamic Arabian society upheld strong values such as hospitality, generosity, communal work, family and tribal protection, keeping promises, and honoring one's word. Its inhabitants were resilient and accustomed to living in desert conditions characterized by scarcity of water and other resources.[32]

Now let's consider the current context. In the 21st century, more than 1,400 years after the initial revelation of the Qur'an, characterized by technological development, the digital era, and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), humanity finds itself transitioning between postmodernity and—what some theorists have termed—metamodernity.[33] We live in an era of instant communication, where information is transmitted from one continent to another in seconds, and translations from virtually any language to another can be obtained instantly. There is a tendency to rely on digital and virtual sources as primary means of information and entertainment, promoting immediate gratification and avoiding feelings of boredom or frustration. However, this immediacy can become a barrier to developing cognitive skills such as managing two or more languages, language proficiency, creativity, reflective and critical thinking.

In this era, there is a rejection of absolute truths, moral relativism, and irony (a legacy of postmodernism), deep questioning about the existence of God, and a fading of the criteria used to distinguish right from wrong. This has polarized opinions on issues such as abortion, prostitution, the sexualization of women, children, and animals, and not just sexual orientation, but also surgical interventions for biological gender changes. On the other hand, political and economic power are interconnected; nations with higher per-capita income typically have greater influence and control in the global arena. We live in capitalist societies, where

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[32] Firas Alkhateeb, *Lost Islamic History : Reclaiming Muslim Civilisation from the Past* (C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 2014); T. Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes* (PublicAffairs, 2009), https://doi.org/10.59151/.vi14.157.

[33] H. Freinacht, *An Open Invitation to Metamodern Sociology*, Metamodern.Org, 2024, https://metamoderna.org/an-open-invitation-to-a-metamodern-sociology/; T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5677.

businesses offer products and services to compete in the market rather than responding to consumer needs or demands. This has led to overproduction, fostering a culture of waste.

Democracy and the exercise of freedoms are fundamental values of postmodernity that are transcending into metamodernity. Among these are freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom of thought, association, strike and protest, freedom of political choice, access to information, and even freedom of gender identity. Democracy and these freedoms aim to create inclusive societies by fostering respect for diversity and individual rights. However, in many cases, misunderstood democracy may be reduced to "whatever the majority says or votes," as the correct thing to think or do, potentially endangering minorities within minorities, such as communities of converts to Islam or other religions, individuals with diverse disabilities, the elderly, migrants, or people with particular characteristics or circumstances.

On the other hand, the misunderstanding of freedoms can lead some individuals to spread hate speech against different cultures or ways of thinking, as well as the indiscriminate dissemination of content promoting anti-values such as violence and abuse under the guise of freedom of expression. Misinterpretations of freedoms may result in practices that threaten human dignity and bodily rights. This could include the normalization of surgical interventions and hormone consumption for gender transition without proper regulation. In an uncontrolled environment, these influences can easily reach vulnerable populations, such as children and youth, and generally impact women, men, families, and entire societies.

This entire scenario must be considered when translating the Qur'an in our era. The progressive advancement of human history continuously creates different societies across time, spaces, regions, and nations. Thus, a translation of the Qur'an into English or Spanish must be distinct, effectively conveying the sacred message of the Qur'an while remaining mindful of the context in which the target audience lives.[34]

Comments on the Work of Translating

The etymological origin of the word "translate" is traducere or from trans - latum, which means "to carry across" or "to bring across." It is also understood as "to move or transport something from one place to another".[35] This definition implies two different places and the existence of a barrier. The translator's task is to transport a message from one space-time context to a society that does not belong to the same place and time. This must be done with great delicacy to avoid betraying the message of the source text, while also ensuring the target audience is not lost.[36]

One of the areas of study within translation studies is precisely history. Roser Nebot has studied various translations of the Qur'an into Spanish and Catalan. In one

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[34] Hennecke, "Traducción y Cultura: Reflexiones Sobre La Dimensión Cultural de Textos y Su Importancia Para La Traducción"; Montes Incin and Sánchez Hernández, "El Rol Del Traductor Como Puente Entre Dos Culturas: Una Profesión Subestimada En Un Mundo Globalizado"; Páez and Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación."

[35] W. Pöckl, "Apuntes Para La Historia de Traducere / 'Traducir,'" *Heronymus* 4–5 (1997): 9–15.

[36] Páez and Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación."

of his articles, he states that "whoever accesses the translation is not reading (...) the Qur'an itself, but rather a version of the Qur'an, (that is) an adaptation by a particular translator".[37] Critically, on another page he continues, "the translation of the Qur'an does not seem aimed primarily at understanding its content (...) but rather at providing an image of it and its themes in a way that is sufficiently domesticated or understandable for the Western reader"[38], whether the translators are Muslim or not.

As a communication specialist, I understand Roser Nebot's[39] statement regarding the work of translating the Qur'an, because indeed, the audience must be taken into account when conducting any type of mass communication project, such as translating a sacred book intended to reach thousands of people. In the words of Delisle,[40] translations allow a text to reach a broader audience and more readers. Translations free us from needing to know the original language of the work, reducing the discomfort we feel when we are unaware or ignore something.[41]

The two studies I conducted among Muslim converts in Mexico and Colombia have demonstrated the positive effects of Qur'anic translations across various dimensions, including psychological-emotional well-being, cognitive skill development, and the adoption of new habits and practices that dignify individuals who embark not only on conversion to Islam but also on a journey of learning both the Qur'an and religious practices derived from the *Sunnah*.[42]

In the case of translations of the Holy Qur'an, considered a classical text of relevance to humanity, these translations fall into the category of "interpretive translations".[43] Texts like the Qur'an, which are translated repeatedly through successive translations, reveal new facets with each translation. Retranslations serve as updated rereadings of a text.[44]

It is important to mention the obvious: the community of converts, to which I belong, always consults translations and interpretations in our native language to understand what Allah (swt) is communicating to us in His sacred book, especially if we are in the process of converting to Islam and building a religious identity. This identity is strengthened when converts immerse themselves in the study of Qur'anic

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[37] Roser Nebot, "La Des-Traducción Del Corán: Recurso Sustitutivo de La Traducción. El Asunto de Amr," 104.

[38] Ibid., 108.

[39] Roser Nebot, "La Des-Traducción Del Corán: Recurso Sustitutivo de La Traducción. El Asunto de Amr."

[40] Delisle and Salvetti, "La Historia de La Traducción: Su Importancia Para La Traductología y Su Enseñanza Mediante Un Programa Didáctico Multimedia y Multilingüe."

[41] Ibid.

[42] Mondragón, *En Búsqueda de La Religión: Cómo Las Mujeres Mexicanas Están Encontrando El Islam*; Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey*.

[43] Delisle and Salvetti, "La Historia de La Traducción: Su Importancia Para La Traductología y Su Enseñanza Mediante Un Programa Didáctico Multimedia y Multilingüe"; Hennecke, "Traducción y Cultura: Reflexiones Sobre La Dimensión Cultural de Textos y Su Importancia Para La Traducción"; Montes Incin and Sánchez Hernández, "El Rol Del Traductor Como Puente Entre Dos Culturas: Una Profesión Subestimada En Un Mundo Globalizado"; Páez and Escalante, "Traducción y Comunicación."

[44] Delisle and Salvetti, "La Historia de La Traducción: Su Importancia Para La Traductología y Su Enseñanza Mediante Un Programa Didáctico Multimedia y Multilingüe."

Arabic and recitation techniques.[45] Here I highlight another function of the Qur'an's translations into various languages—the function of identity formation.[46] Translators actively contribute to the religious identity construction of convert communities, not only in Latin America but around the world.

I also agree with other Latin American commentators and translators,[47] that it is very important to access more than one translation of the Qur'an in our native language and other languages, such as English, if possible. In the research I conducted, participants mentioned using multiple translations, especially when engaging with the Qur'an in its original language. They expressed questions and comments about certain translations, such as "Why does it have so many notes and explanations in parentheses?" (participant code SV-4-MX), or statements like, "I know the meaning of this verse is deeper than what the translation conveys," or "the translation of this verse does not capture the depth of meaning present in the Arabic Qur'an" (participant codes GC-5-MX and LI-8-CL).[48]

Most participants in this research strongly recommended reviewing and reading more than one translation of the Qur'an, as well as beginning to study the Qur'an in its original language immediately, in order to deepen their understanding and thereby strengthen their religious identity. At the same time, they acknowledged the importance of connecting with the Qur'an through their native language. Transitioning between different Qur'anic translations while gradually incorporating Qur'anic study in its original language proved to bring long-term satisfaction and served as a source of peace and mental harmony for the participants.[49]

Artificial Intelligence and Translation: An Opinion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) traces its roots back to 1940 with the origins of the computer and Turing's experiments to test whether a machine could demonstrate human-like intelligence. The official birth of the term came later in 1956 at the "Dartmouth Conference." After several decades of fluctuating experiments and funding, it was in 1993 that the first artificial neural network was created. Between 1993 and 2010, algorithms, machine learning, and natural language processing emerged, and from 2010 until today we have experienced what is known as the "Deep Learning Revolution".

Deep learning operates through an artificial neural network consisting of multiple layers. The more layers the network has, the more complex the problems it can solve. When physically observing an artificial neural network, we see interconnected circuits linked to a matrix or common base. A machine cannot operate independently but needs to be "fed" data provided by humans. These data can be visual, auditory, linguistic, as well as related to processes and decision-

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[45] Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey*.

[46] Delisle and Salvetti, "La Historia de La Traducción: Su Importancia Para La Traductología y Su Enseñanza Mediante Un Programa Didáctico Multimedia y Multilingüe."

[47] García, *Traducción Comentada. El Corán*; Pedraza, *Buscando El Verdadero Mensaje Del Islam En Las Traducciones al Español Del Sagrado Corán*.

[48] Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey*.

[49] Ibid.

making. Thousands or millions of data points are "labeled" by humans so the machine can identify differences between one thing and another, or between one situation and another.

The ethical implications of AI include vulnerability regarding privacy, algorithmic bias (particularly important to our topic), and transparency—that is, the difficulty of interpreting the "black boxes" of artificial neural networks. Another implication is responsibility: who will be accountable if AI commits serious errors? There is also the issue of job displacement, something we are already experiencing. (Personally, I have three friends working in the field of translation; one of them has already lost her job, and the other two are currently negotiating with publishing houses that prefer using AI to translate their books.)

AI is composed of data, algorithms, and models that form part of artificial neural networks, which operate based on mathematical operations and logic determined by the data with which they have been fed. AI does not think like a human being; it has no consciousness, no emotions, and no sensations, characteristics unique to human beings. The next question is whether AI can make mistakes, and the absolute answer is YES. AI does make mistakes. One type of error in AI models comes from "incorrect inputs" or "mislabeling" done by humans or from algorithmic bias. I will revisit this point to contextualize it within the main topic of this article, which is the translation of sacred texts, such as the Qur'an.

And the other question is whether AI has greater cognitive capacity than a human being. The definitive answer is, NO. Humans process data from various sources, both internal and external. Humans become ill, feel hunger, thirst, heat, or cold; they experience anger and sadness, get distracted by a flying insect or startled by a loud noise, or suddenly recall or reflect on something unrelated to the conversation. The human brain makes voluntary and involuntary efforts to maintain attention and concentration while engaging in other activities.[50] Humans do not perform mathematical operations to resolve theological, moral, or social injustice and disparity issues, yet they have the judgment to discern between right and wrong. AI is "democratic" (very much in quotation marks) and accepts as true what the majority states or what a biased algorithm indicates. It is now up to us, as users, to question whether it is truly democratic or not.

Although AI can be a very useful support tool, human judgment and thinking will always be necessary for resolving problems and conflicts involving humans themselves. Fostering critical human thinking must remain central to both individual and societal development. Critical thinking develops within various social and private domains, such as education at home, formal schooling, cultural and nationalistic products, and the creation and consumption of media, informational, and entertainment content across all channels—whether mass media, traditional, digital, or virtual.

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[50] B. Bruya and Y. Tang, "Is Attention Really Effort ? Revisiting Daniel Kahneman ' s Influential 1973 Book Attention and Effort," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, no. September (2018): 1–10; B. Bruya and Y. Y. Tang, "Fluid Attention in Education: Conceptual and Neurobiological Framework," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, no. September (2021), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.704443; J. M. Lodge and W. J. Harrison, "The Role of Attention in Learning in the Digital Age," *92*, 2019, 21–28.

In one of my reflections on the topic of using AI for translating sacred texts, I posed to ChatGPT the problem of cultural decontextualization. AI also cannot differentiate between what can be directly said in one culture and what must be said more softly in another. The translator's task is precisely to "contextualize" and carry a message from one language to another, from one context to another, from one time to another. A translator knows that a word, gesture, or onomatopoeia holds different meanings in different societies and times. What one community perceives as hopeful, "normal," or "regular" may be perceived as oppressive, irrelevant, or even aggressive in another. In other words, AI cannot perceive or understand the semantic weight of a word.

AI cannot interpret a sacred verse within a specific context because it does not consider the history of that community or country—for example, their struggles and battles, the marginalization endured by its people, or how its inhabitants experience spirituality. In the words of ChatGPT "AI is not born, does not grow, does not suffer injustices, does not experience cultural tensions, or spiritual conflicts. It has no history, no roots, and no attachments. It operates from a statistical and linguistic logic, not from human experience" (conversation with ChatGPT 4.0 on Abril 23rd 2025).

As Muslims, we hold the conviction that the Qur'an remains relevant for all times; however, the Qur'an requires interpretations according to the era and social context in which its teachings and wisdom are intended to be applied. Translating is also interpreting meanings, cultures, and sensitivities. The translator serves as a bridge—not only between languages but also between cultures, and in the case of religious texts like the Qur'an, between different temporalities and communities. An automatic translation may be useful as a starting point, but it should be used with critical awareness.

These delicate tasks require a translator who is both knowledgeable and sensitive. As Muslims, we must actively participate in "feeding" AI models by providing appropriate inputs or prompts to train the model correctly. My proposal is to shift our approach when chatting with AI, guiding it towards correct information while considering various situations and contexts. We could also actively encourage reinforced learning in AI through trial and error, immediately citing and correcting errors whenever the AI produces an incorrect response. Here, an AI expert or engineer could further elaborate on this proposal technically and verify its feasibility.

As believers, as Muslims, we know that everything created by human beings, such as AI, is infinitely inferior to that created by the CREATOR of the universe—the Creator of the human brain, the Knower of the unseen and the apparent. We should use AI, but always place it in its proper context. It is a machine that operates through mathematical functions and algorithms, which can be biased, meaning we must always verify the responses obtained from it, carefully reviewing the translations it helps us produce. It is not about rejecting AI, but rather about "feeding" it with accurate, precise, and culturally sensitive inputs, so that it can serve the real communities in which we live. We must use it responsibly, thoughtfully, and actively participate in its training. This text is a call to writers, authors, translators, publishing houses, and producers of audiovisual and educational materials not to

delegate the sacred, the human, the cultural, the ethical, or the moral to a machine, but instead to use AI as a tool, never as an authority.

Using AI tools and models "passively" turns us into passive recipients. However, by using them "actively," we can develop our creativity and cognitive capacities through reading and the feedback we give and receive. This applies equally to translators, professionals of any other field, and users in general. As human translators, AI can be used as starting point of doing the job, but the translation always needs to be revised, corrected and verified by the professional. The translator needs to be highly aware of decontextualization, the algorithm bias and other problems that might occur while using AI. With the rapidly rise of AI models and tools, translators should not only be aware of their own culture, language, their personal and social history, that might determine the outcome of their work, namely the translations, however, translator should use their personal experience and sociocultural context with honesty and wisdom as fundamental tools for creating their translations not as barriers.

In the other hand, ideally those interested in reading and accessing the meanings of the sacred Qur'an, should read multiple translations reviewed and supervised by human scholars who possess Islamic knowledge and familiarity with the culture into which they are translating. In this way, the final reader (in Spanish or English) of a Qur'anic translation can interpret the verses (ayaat) of the Qur'an at various levels of depth using the different perspectives of different authors. Clearly, the processes of translation, interpretation, and decoding represent complex cognitive activities for translation professionals. Meanwhile, the effect of the work of translators, is a significant learning by the end-user of these translations, which can be objectively observed through tangible changes in their habits and customs, attitudes, behaviors, decision-making processes, and emotional management.[51]

Given the points previously discussed, this work adopts the stance that a literal translation does not truly exist, and that translating sacred texts should not be entrusted to AI—especially not texts such as the Holy Qur'an. However, it is possible to utilize AI as a tool, not as an authority. We should make use of translations already available, both word by word and expansive, to work on interpretive translations that could provide a more accurate approximation of the original message. It is essential to always remember the relevance of translations performed by professional human translators, as many people around the world convert to Islam as a direct result of the translations produced by individuals.[52]

Although opinions exist that criticize or discredit certain translations and validate others,[53] the reality is that the task of translation is immense and highly delicate. A translation should be read and studied within the context in which it was made, as certain concepts presented may no longer correspond to contemporary

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[51] Mondragón, *En Búsqueda de La Religión: Cómo Las Mujeres Mexicanas Están Encontrando El Islam*; Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey*.

[52] M. Al-Qwidi, "Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam, the Voices of British Converts," *University of Leeds* (2002), https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/485/; Mondragón, *En Búsqueda de La Religión: Cómo Las Mujeres Mexicanas Están Encontrando El Islam*; Mondragón, *From the Qur'an to Conversion, A Spiritual Journey*.

[53] Pedraza, *Buscando El Verdadero Mensaje Del Islam En Las Traducciones al Español Del Sagrado Corán*.

society. Here, I provided an explanation of the translation process and its implications, without delving into evaluating specific translations. Nor do I intend to justify the intentions of translators—intentions that only Allah (swt) knows— but rather to acknowledge and respect the valuable work performed by translators.

Simpulan hanya cukup menjawab permasalahan atau tujuan penelitian (jangan merupakan pembahasan lagi), atau menghasilkan sebuah teori baru; Jika tujuan hanya satu hal, maka simpulan ya cukup satu hal saja mengacu kepada tujuan tersebut.

Conclusion

In my research, I analyzed various translations of the Qur'an into Spanish, focusing on their distinctive characteristics. The Qur'an, originally in classical Arabic, presents unique challenges for translators due to its linguistic depth, poetic structure, and sacred status. Translations into Spanish must navigate differences in syntax, cultural context, and the subtleties of Arabic words that often lack direct equivalents. For example, the word "jilbab" in Arabic has no direct translation in Spanish, requiring the use of transliteration or extensive explanatory footnotes. Additionally, I classified these translations into categories such as interlinguistic, diachronic, and dialectal, based on Gottlieb's theory. These categories address the inherent complexities when translating sacred texts from one era and culture to another.

The translation of the Qur'an is framed within basic communication models, which involve three main components: the source text (Qur'an in Arabic), the translator, and the target text (the translation in Spanish). This model underscores the importance of maintaining the integrity of the original message while adapting it to a different linguistic and cultural context. Translators must bridge the gap between the Arabic-speaking world of the 7th century and contemporary Spanish-speaking audiences, considering the social, cultural, and historical distances between them. By applying these communication models, I demonstrate how translators act as intermediaries, ensuring that the Qur'anic message reaches its target audience with respect to its original meaning and significance.

I investigated how Qur'anic translations affect non-Arabic-speaking communities, particularly in Mexico and Colombia. Interviews with Muslim converts revealed that the translation of the Qur'an into Spanish has been crucial for their spiritual journey. Many converts mistakenly perceive the translated text as equivalent to the original Arabic Qur'an, which leads to confusion about the depth of meaning in the translation. My research highlights how translations shape religious identity and understanding, as participants in both countries expressed the necessity of consulting multiple translations and eventually studying the Qur'an in its original Arabic to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the sacred text.

In my research, I propose using Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool to assist with translation, rather than as an authority. AI has the potential to facilitate the initial stages of translation by offering quick, basic translations of the Qur'an. However, as AI lacks the cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding that a human translator possesses, I emphasize the importance of human oversight in refining these translations. I advocate for an active, collaborative approach, where

translators feed accurate, culturally aware data into AI models. AI should be seen as an auxiliary tool to enhance the work of professional translators, not as a substitute for human expertise and critical thinking, particularly in the translation of Qur'an.

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