

A FUNCTION-ORIENTED ANALYSIS OF PROPHET NAME TRANSLATION IN ABDEL HALEEM'S 'THE QURAN: A NEW TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The translation of prophets' names in the Quran often differs from their original form, with English translations frequently aligning more closely with the biblical figures. This raises the question of whether these translations still accurately reflect the Quranic depiction of the prophets. This study aims to examine the translation strategies applied by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem in translating the names of the twenty-five prophets in his 2004 English rendition of the Quran and how these translations maintain the intended meaning. The research employs a 'Function-Oriented' translation approach, which focuses on the socio-cultural function of translation within the recipient's context. Using Hermans' (1988) four strategies for translating proper names—pure borrowing, naturalization, adaptation, and literal translation—Abdel Haleem applies the naturalized strategy to nine prophet names and the adaptation strategy to sixteen names. These strategies enable the translation to remain culturally appropriate and intelligible for the target audience while still representing the Quranic names. The study highlights the cultural challenges inherent in translation, as understanding the names depends on the target culture, necessitating a shared cultural understanding between the translator and reader. This research contributes to translation practices by emphasizing the importance of balancing linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptation in religious texts.

Keywords: *Prophets' Names; Translation of the Quran; Translation Strategies; Abdel Haleem; Cultural Adaptation*

INTRODUCTION

The Quran, regarded as the most significant book for Muslims, serves as a comprehensive guide for life and a divine miracle bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad (Thahir, 2021). Translating the Quran into English presents unique challenges due to the fundamental differences between Arabic and English in linguistic, pragmatic, and semantic aspects. (Akki & Larouz, 2021). Beyond its spiritual guidance, the Quran contains detailed accounts of the prophets' lives, with Muslims being required to memorize and understand the 25 names of the prophets. Translating these names accurately is crucial to preserving their identity and cultural significance.

The translation of proper names, particularly in sacred texts, has long been a subject of debate among experts. Vermes (2001) They argued that the translation of proper names depends on the translator's orientation. Translators leaning toward the source language (SL) tend to retain the original names, while those oriented toward the target language (TL) adapt them to fit the cultural and linguistic norms of the audience. This approach, however, can result in the loss of cultural elements inherent in the names, replacing them with the cultural context of the TL. Such choices hold profound implications in Quranic translations, where names carry significant theological and cultural meanings.

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One example that highlights these complexities is the translation of the Quranic name *Isa* into *Jesus*, commonly found in English translations, including Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem's *The Quran: A New Translation* (2004). While the translation aligns with established strategies like naturalization, it raises critical issues from an Islamic perspective. *Isa*, as described in the Quran, is a prophet who calls for the worship of Allah, whereas *Jesus* in the Christian tradition is considered divine—the son of God (Rogers, 2021). This distinction has theological implications that affect how readers perceive these figures.

Abdel Haleem, an esteemed scholar of Quranic studies, has made significant contributions to Arabic-English lexicography and Quranic interpretation. Born in 1930 in Egypt, he began memorizing the Quran as a child and later became a professor of Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. His notable works include *The Quran: A New Translation* (2004), *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, and collaborations such as the *English-Arabic Business Dictionary* (1984) and the *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (2005/2008) (Shah, 2009). His translation strategies, particularly in rendering the prophets' names, offer an opportunity to examine the balance between linguistic naturalization and cultural representation.

This study addresses two critical research objectives (1) to identify the strategies used by Abdel Haleem in translating the names of the prophets into English, and (2) To investigate the extent to which Abdel Haleem's translations align with the Quranic perspective on these names. By focusing on these objectives, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on translation strategies in sacred texts and the cultural

adaptation of proper names, shedding light on the implications of these choices for cross-cultural religious understanding.

METHOD

This study employs a *Function-Oriented* translation research approach, which focuses on analyzing the role of translation within the socio-cultural context of the target audience. (Saldanha, 2016). Specifically, it examines the translation of prophets' names from the Quran into English as rendered by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem in his work *The Quran: A New Translation* (2004). The research adopts a qualitative descriptive method, which is suitable for exploring translation strategies and their cultural implications. The primary data for this study consists of the names of the 25 prophets mentioned in the Quran, which serve as the core data, and the English translations of these names as provided in Abdel Haleem's translation.

Data Collection Procedures

The main research instruments include a data sheet to document and categorize the translation of each prophet's name based on Hermans' (1988) translation strategies and theoretical frameworks related to translation and ideology (Hatim & Mason, 1997) and cultural translation (Katan, 1999). The data collection process begins with the identification of the 25 prophets' names in the Quran, followed by the extraction of their English translations from Abdel Haleem's work. These names are then compiled into a data sheet and categorized based on Hermans' four translation strategies: pure borrowing, naturalized, adaptation, and literal translation.

Data Analysis

The analysis is conducted in two stages to address the research objectives. First, the translation strategies applied to each prophet's name are analyzed using Hermans' framework. Second, the translations are further examined using

Hatim and Mason's theory of translation and ideology as well as Katan's theory of cultural translation to explore the ideological and cultural considerations underlying the translation choices. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how the translation strategies represent the prophets' names

within the socio-cultural context of the target audience.

The clear data analysis path is presented in Figure 1 below, which outlines the sequential process from data collection to interpretation, ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the research process.

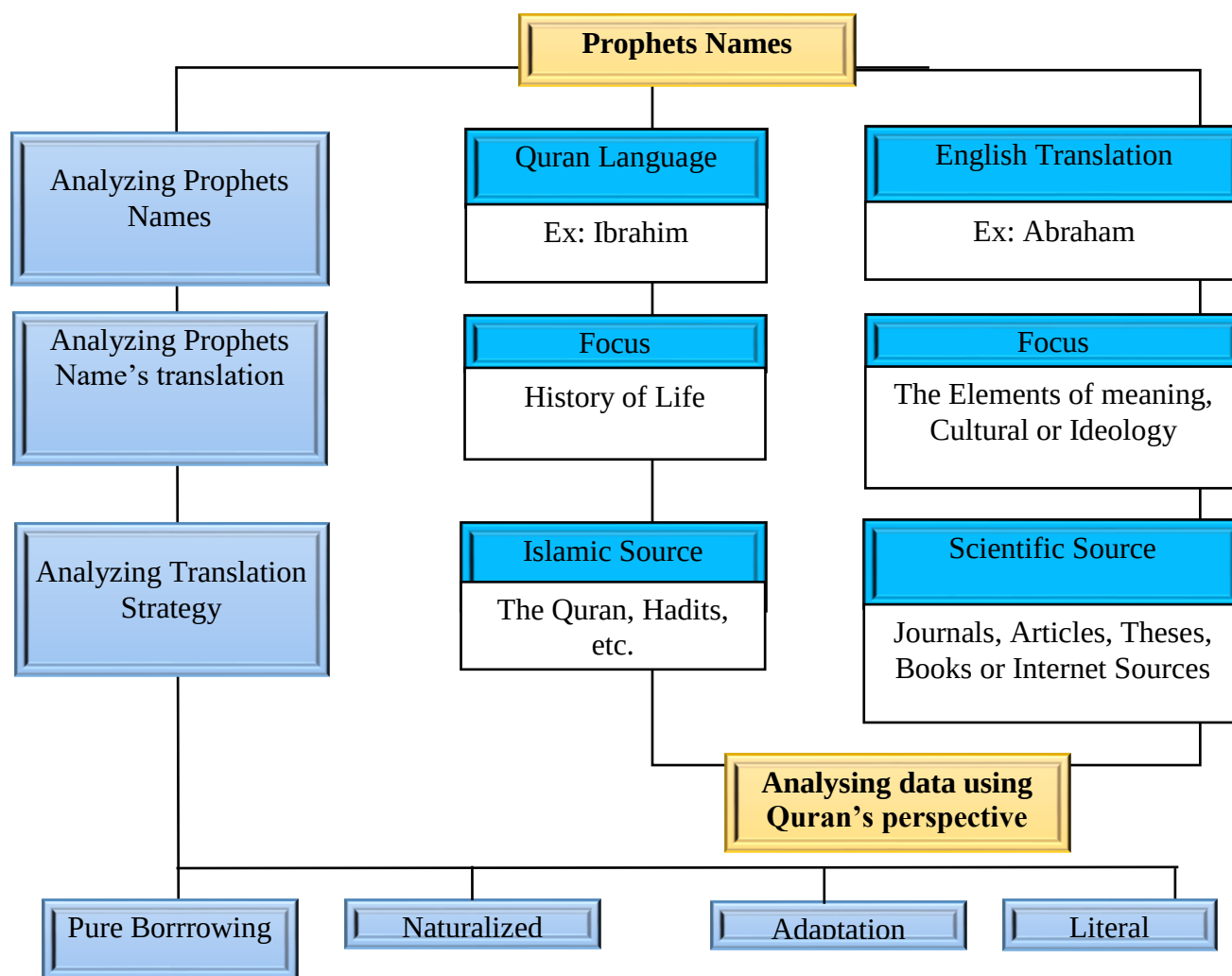


Figure 1. Data Analysis Path

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Abdel Haleem's Translation Strategy of Prophets Names.

Two translation strategies—naturalization and adaptation—were utilized in Abdel Haleem's translation of prophets' names. These strategies reflect the translator's effort

to balance fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience.

Naturalization Strategy

The naturalization strategy was applied to nine prophets' names by either transliterating the proper name or modifying the text and spelling to align with the target language.

This approach maintains phonetic consistency, helping readers connect the translated names to their source text origins. Elewa (2014) emphasizes that transliteration captures the phonic aspect, preserving vowel sounds that allow recognition of the word's source language.

In Abdel Haleem's translation, names such as Adam, Idris, Hud, Salih, Syu'ayb, and Muhammad were directly transliterated, while others, including Dhu'l-Kifl, Ishmael, and Zachariah, underwent pronunciation adjustments to accommodate the target language. For instance, in Dhu'l-Kifl (Arabic: ذُو الْكِفْلِ), the translator substitutes the Arabic letter ك with *dh*, a sound not present in English, and inserts a hyphen to separate the two components, indicating the original two-word structure.

Similarly, Ishmael (Arabic: إِسْمَاعِيل) involves a pronunciation adjustment where the letter *i* is replaced with *e* to conform to English phonology, as in the word "eagle." The translator also adds an *h* to *s* for phonetic clarity, transforming the pronunciation closer to "Isymael." For Zachariah (Arabic: زَكَرِيَّا), the letter *k* changes to *ch*, reflecting English naming conventions such as in "Michael" or "Pinocchio." These nuanced decisions demonstrate an effort to align with target cultural norms while maintaining a connection to the source text.

A detailed comparison of these transliteration processes is presented in Table 1, which showcases how names transitioned from their original form to the translated version.

Table 1. *Process of Transliteration*

Source Language	Transliteration	Text adjustment	Target Language
آدَمَ	→ 'Ādam	→ -	→ Adam
إِدْرِيسَ	→ 'Idrīs	→ -	→ Idris
هُودَ	→ Hūd	→ -	→ Hud
صَالِحَ	→ Ṣāliḥ	→ -	→ Salih
إِسْمَاعِيلَ	→ 'Ismā'īl	→ Adding the letter /h/ and replacing the letter /i/with/	→ Ishmael
شُعَيْبَ	→ Shu'ayb	→ -	→ Shu'ayb
ذُو الْكِفْلِ	→ -	→ The translator does his transliteration.	→ Dhu'l-Kifl

Adaptation Strategy

The adaptation strategy replaces proper names with those familiar to the target culture, often aligning with Christian traditions. Abdel Haleem applied this method to 16 prophets' names, which are well-known in English, as can be seen in Table 2. Names like Noah (نُوح), Abraham (إِبْرَاهِيمَ), and Moses (مُوسَى) reflect a deliberate shift to culturally recognized equivalents. This approach ensures that the translation is accessible and resonates with the target audience.

Table 2. *Adaptation Translation Strategy*

Source Language	Target Language
نُوحَ	Noah
إِبْرَاهِيمَ	Abraham
لُوطَ	Lot
إِسْحَاقَ	Isaac
يَعْقُوبَ	Jacob
يُوسُفَ	Joseph
أَيُّوبَ	Job
مُوسَى	Moses
هَارُونَ	Aaron

دَاوُد \ دَاوُود	David
سُلَيْمَان	Solomon
إِلْيَاس	Elijah
إِلِيشَا	Elisha
يُونُس	Jonah
يَحْيَى	John
عِيسَى	Jesus

These names are deeply rooted in the target culture and religious tradition, facilitating understanding among English-speaking readers. As noted by Yahya (2019), this strategy reflects an inclination toward the target language to enhance cultural and theological relevance.

Abdel Haleem's choice of strategies highlights his dual focus on maintaining the Quran's authenticity while ensuring the translation's acceptability in the target culture. The naturalization strategy preserves the linguistic and cultural essence of the Quranic text, while the adaptation strategy bridges the cultural gap, making the translation more relatable. However, this duality raises questions about the balance between preserving the source text's sanctity and catering to the target audience's expectations.

For example, the decision to transliterate certain names while adapting others reflects a complex interplay between phonetic fidelity and cultural familiarity. This approach may result in varying levels of accessibility and recognition depending on the reader's background. A deeper exploration of how these strategies influence readers' perception of the Quran's message could provide further insights into the effectiveness of these methods.

Additionally, comparing Abdel Haleem's choices with other translations could reveal alternative approaches to resolving these challenges. For instance, some translators opt for consistent transliteration across all names, while others favor a full adaptation strategy. Such comparisons could enhance our understanding of the broader implications of

these translation strategies on intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

The Interpretation of the Quran on the Translation of the Prophets' Names

Foreignization

Foreignization is an ideology where the translator wants to present a translation that is very close to the author. In other words, the translator aims to introduce foreign terms created by the author and presented to the reader so that they can enjoy the foreign culture of the author without having to change it (Hoed, 2003).

Abdel Haleem applied a naturalized translation strategy to nine prophets' names. He transliterated and phonologically adapted the names. As a result, these names have meanings that are by the interpretation of the Quran and there is no possibility that these names refer to other figures because of the application of the Naturalized strategy.

Naturalized translation strategy when it is associated with the theory of Translation and Ideology, it can be concluded that the translator adheres to the ideology of Foreignization in translating the nine names. Foreignization ideology is an ideology views that a good translation as a translation that contains elements of source language culture or source language-oriented, so that readers can appreciate the presence of foreign cultures in the text. Another aim of this ideology is to provide readers with additional information about the culture or the names/terms introduced by the author (Hoed, 2003).

This is in line with the naturalized strategy in translating proper names, namely retaining the elements contained in the source language but with adjustments to the target language (Hermans, 1988). Consequently, the translation of these names still contains elements from the source language, such as elements of Arabic culture, Quranic ideology, and also prophetic identity.

Foreign cultural elements can be detected in the names of Adam, Idris, Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb, Dhu'l-Kifl, Ishmael, Isaac, Zachariah and Muhammad, because there is no significant change from Arabic as the source language. Where these names are introduced by the Quran as role models with heroic stories in spreading Islam. Readers can easily identify the figure based on his name. So it can be concluded that the nine translations of the prophet's name can represent the message/the meaning in the Quran.

Domestication

The translator used the adaptation translation strategy in translating 16 names. Consequently, the translation of these names is different from the names contained in the Quran as the source text. This indicates that the ideology of the translator is domestication, a translation ideology that strives to provide translations that are free from foreign terms of the source language. This ideology aims to bring the reader close to the target culture, which is the reason why the translator chose to apply an adaptation strategy.

The translator replaced the source language names with familiar figures in the target language. The problem is Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Aaron, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, John, and Jesus are names known in the Christian tradition. So that it could confuse readers who do not understand the cultural elements contained in the target language (Miangah, 2015), moreover Abdel Haleem presented a translation of the Quran without Arabic text which resulted in the loss of the original names of the figures.

The translator does not make his translation when implementing the adaptation strategy because the target culture already knows the names and after researching the sixteen prophets and their translations, the researcher finds that the similarity of stories between the Quranic narrative and the Biblical narrative could be

a consideration for the translator in determining the ideology of translation. The following will present the similarity of the story between the prophet in the Quranic narrative with Abdel Haleem's translation which refers to the Biblical narrative:

- a. Nūḥ and Noah were ordered to build a big ship because a flood would come as a punishment for the sins of mankind on earth (Kathir, 2019).
- b. 'Ibrāhīm and Abraham sacrificed their children to be slaughtered as evidence of obedience to God's commandments (Kathir, 2019).
- c. 'Ishāq and Isaac are the fulfillment of God's promise to their father (Cloud, 2016).
- d. Hārūn and Aaron were assistants to their brother who was appointed as a prophet (Römer, 2017).
- e. Mūsā and Moses were given the same mission, namely to save the Israelites from slavery by the Egyptians (Wheeler, 2013).
- f. Lūṭh and Lot live in a homosexual society (Claassens, 2021).
- g. Ya'qūb and Jacob lost their beloved little boy and were reunited when their son was an adult (Gardner, 2015).
- h. Yūsuf and Joseph are two handsome people who can interpret dreams (Fazl, 2020).
- i. 'Ayyūb and Job are two people who were tested by God with loss of property, and family and tested with skin disease (Hartley, 1988).
- j. Dāūd and David were two kings who ruled for the Israelites (Cohen, 2013).
- k. Sulaymān and Solomon are kings who inherited their father's kingdom (Kelle & Moore, 2006).
- l. Yūnus and Jonah were thrown from the boat and then eaten by big fish but they survived (Afsar, 2009).
- m. Yaḥyā and John are God's gifts to their fathers who always pray for children (Tottoli, 2009).
- n. 'Īsā and Jesus who were born of a virgin woman. They can heal disease and even

bring the dead back to life (Leaman, 2006).

The similarity of the story that has been described is a few of the many similarities of the story. As for 'Ilyās and Alyasa', there are no stories about these prophets. The Qur'an only mentions 'Ilyās name three times while Alyasa' is only mentioned twice in the Qur'an.

Jesus, as explained about the similarity of his story with Isa, actually has a major difference to him. Jesus declared himself to be the son of God. This contradicts the Quran which says that there is only one God. Lot impregnated his two daughters. Aaron made a golden statue for the Israelites to worship. David committed adultery with his commander's wife and impregnated her. John baptized Jesus and recognized him as the son of God. Solomon worshiped idols at the end of his life. All of these translations have different ideologies from the messages of the Quran in the stories of the prophets.

However, differences of opinion between Islam and Christianity are natural because each religion has its own opinion. Faiq (2018), explains that the translator cannot control the reader's impression, because a word can have a denotative or connotative meaning depending on the sentence that accompanies the word. Readers' impressions are also influenced by translation strategies and cultural differences between readers and translators. Therefore, if we find the word "Isa" in a text, it is not certain that the word refers to one of the prophets in the Quran because Jesus in the Turkish Bible is called Isa. So it can be concluded that Jesus, as the translation of Isa in Abdel Haleem's translation, refers to one of the prophet in the Quran.

The decision to employ foreignization or domestication reflects the translator's priorities in balancing cultural fidelity and accessibility. Abdel Haleem's naturalization of nine names adheres to the Quran's original meanings, emphasizing authenticity and respect for the source culture. This

approach effectively communicates the Quranic narrative while introducing readers to Arabic cultural elements.

Conversely, domestication simplifies the target audience's engagement with the text by presenting familiar names. However, this strategy risks diluting the Quranic message by introducing interpretations rooted in a different religious tradition. For readers unfamiliar with Islamic teachings, domestication could obscure the Quran's theological distinctiveness.

The Problem of Culture in the Translation of Prophets' Names

Referring to the translation strategies that have been described, there are differences between the names of prophets in the Quran and their English translations raise significant cultural and theological questions. Abdel Haleem's translation strategy, particularly the use of adaptation, highlights the cultural complexities inherent in translating sacred texts. While adaptation enhances readability for the target audience, it can obscure the original cultural and theological nuances of the Quranic text.

The Role of Culture in Translation

The Researcher observes Abdel Haleem's translation by using the culture and translation theory. The Quran: A New translation is a target-language-oriented translation. So the researcher argues that culture seems to be the only way to answer the question "How does the English translation represent the meaning in the Quran?"

Katan, (1999), said that the function of the word in a culture is more important than the meaning of the word. This means that culture is the only way to understand language, and if language is closely related to culture, the researcher must understand the target culture's view of the translation of the prophet's name.

The main problem in Abdel Haleem's translation is the names of the prophets using the adaptation translation strategy

because it changes the names. As a result, these translations are different from the names listed in the Quran as described in table 2. Another problem is the translations of these names are also listed in the Bible, so there is a possibility that the translations are taken from biblical figures.

The translation of the Quran and the English Bible has the same position because they are both translations. For instance, Jesus is not a real name but a translation. Jesus as mentioned in the biblical narrative is a translation of the Hebrew, namely Yeshua. While the name Jesus mentioned in many translations of the Quran, including Abdel Haleem's translation, is a translation of the Arabic.

Yesu'a, Yehoshu'a, Yeshu'a, or Yeshua are products of the Bible and Hebrew, just as عيسى (Iisa) is a product of the Quran and Arabic. But Jesus is a product of culture, this is evidenced by Yeshua who has different names in various biblical translations such as يسوع (Yasu') in Arabic, Yesus in Indonesian, Ісус (Isus) in Ukrainian, イエス (Iesu) in Japanese, İsa in Turkish. The same case occurs in مُحَمَّد which is translated (Makhamad/Makhmad) Hebrew as stated in the bible the gospel of Barnabas (Al-Azami, 2019), Mehmet in Turkish like Sultan Mehmet II who conquered Constantinople.

A target-language-oriented translation will produce translations that are influenced by the target culture. This causes the proper name to change according to the culture and translation strategy applied. This is because each culture has its products which may not be understood when viewed from other cultures (Miangah, 2015). The translation of prophets' names by applying an adaptation strategy does look like the translator borrows the names of figures in the Bible and puts them into the translation of the Quran. However, if it is traced back to a cultural perspective, these names already exist in the target culture. As proof, the researcher studied The Quran: an

Encyclopedia (Leaman, 2006). This literature contains information about the Quran, it is stated that Jesus was the name of a Prophet before Muhammad was sent, Jesus is also known as Iisa. Researchers also studied the Britannica Encyclopedia Of World Religions (Odekon, 2012). This book contains information about religions in the world, it is stated that Jesus refers to important figures of the two largest religions in the world, namely Islam and Christianity. This proves that the names used by the translator to translate the names of the prophets are familiar to the target culture.

Cultural Negotiation in Translating Prophets' Names

Abdel Haleem's translation of the Quran demonstrates the complex relationship between language, culture, and religious texts. By using a target-language-oriented approach, the translation aims to make the Quran accessible to English-speaking audiences. However, this approach, particularly in the translation of prophets' names, opens a nuanced dialogue about the balance between cultural familiarity and theological fidelity.

Katan (1999) emphasizes that the function of a word in a culture often surpasses its literal meaning. This cultural lens is crucial when interpreting Abdel Haleem's decision to adapt prophets' names to align with Western linguistic norms. For instance, the translation of 'Īsā to "Jesus" aligns with the Christian tradition familiar to many English-speaking readers. However, this adaptation introduces risks of theological misinterpretation, as the Christian understanding of Jesus differs significantly from the Quranic portrayal of 'Īsā. In the Quran, 'Īsā is a prophet who emphasizes monotheism and denies divinity, while in Christian theology, "Jesus" is considered the son of God and part of the Holy Trinity. This adaptation, while culturally resonant, risks conflating two distinct theological narratives, potentially

obscuring the Quran's unique message for readers unfamiliar with Islamic teachings.

The translator's application of adaptation for names like "Noah" (Nūḥ) and "Abraham" (ʿIbrāhīm) further illustrates a deliberate choice to prioritize cultural accessibility. This decision reflects the prevalence of these names in the Bible and their recognition in Western traditions. However, direct comparisons between Quranic and Biblical narratives reveal how this strategy can complicate the representation of the Quran's message. For example, in the Quran, Noah (Nūḥ) is portrayed as a prophet who warns against idolatry, while the Biblical account includes more detailed genealogical and covenantal themes. Similarly, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son is a test of obedience in the Quran, without specifying which son, whereas the Biblical narrative identifies Isaac, shaping differing theological interpretations. By not retaining original names, Abdel Haleem's translation risks glossing over these subtle yet significant differences.

The observation that proper names are cultural products is critical in understanding Abdel Haleem's approach. Names like Jesus and Noah are not inherently Christian but are shaped by linguistic and cultural contexts. For example, "Jesus" derives from the Greek "Iēsous," translating the Hebrew "Yeshua," while the Quranic ʿĪsā reflects Arabic linguistic traditions. Despite their shared origin, the cultural and religious connotations of these names diverge. Similarly, "Noah" originates from the Hebrew "Noach" but has been adapted in various linguistic traditions to fit local phonetics and cultural expectations. By adapting these names, Abdel Haleem ensures cultural recognition but at the cost of erasing the Quranic linguistic and cultural specificity.

Abdel Haleem's strategy of aligning Quranic names with those familiar in the target culture reflects an attempt to bridge cultural gaps. However, this approach comes

with dual responsibilities. First, it ensures cultural accessibility, as familiar names like "Jesus" and "Noah" foster comprehension and engagement for English-speaking readers. Second, it demands theological integrity, which involves preserving the Quran's unique linguistic and cultural elements, integral to its message. A more balanced approach might involve hybrid strategies, such as transliterating the original names (e.g., "ʿĪsā" instead of "Jesus") and providing explanatory notes or footnotes to clarify theological and cultural distinctions.

The translation of prophets' names in Abdel Haleem's work reveals the centrality of culture in translation. While his adaptation strategy aligns with target-culture norms, it risks diluting the Quran's theological and cultural identity. A deeper engagement with Quranic interpretations and a more nuanced comparison with Biblical adaptations could enhance the analytical depth of such translations. By integrating transliteration and cultural commentary, future translations can preserve the Quran's integrity while remaining accessible to diverse audiences. This layered approach addresses cultural expectations while respecting the Quran's unique theological framework, allowing readers to appreciate its depth and distinctiveness.

CONCLUSION

Abdel Haleem applied two translation strategies in rendering the 25 prophets' names from the Quran into English. The *naturalized strategy* was applied to nine names: Adam, Idris, Ishmael, Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb, Dhu'l-Kifl, Zachariah, and Muhammad. For the remaining sixteen names, the *adaptation strategy* was utilized, encompassing Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Aaron, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, John, and Jesus. The adaptation strategy results in names that differ from the source language, as the translator replaces the original names with those familiar in the target language.

These translated names adequately represent the prophets mentioned in the Quran, given their recognition and understanding within the target culture. This supports the study's findings, which address why the translation of prophets' names differs from their Quranic form.

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges its limitations and encourages further research on the translation of prophets' names from the Quran into English. A suggested avenue for future inquiry involves participant-oriented research. By providing participants with translations of the same prophet's name using different strategies—*adaptation* (target language-oriented) and *naturalized* (source language-oriented)—researchers can assess which approach is more comprehensible and culturally acceptable to readers.

These findings hold practical implications for Quranic translators and scholars, as they highlight the importance of balancing cultural familiarity with linguistic fidelity in religious texts. Such insights could inform best practices in translation, ensuring the effective transmission of meaning while preserving the integrity of the original text. Additionally, they emphasize the need for translators to consider the cultural and theological nuances of both the source and target audiences to avoid misinterpretation.

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