

## Unravelling Qur'anic Puns through AI English Translation and the Art of Human Post-Editing

Abdulrahman Fahad Albalawi<sup>1</sup>, Abdul-Qader Khaleel Abdul-Ghafour<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, <sup>2</sup>Queen Arwa University, Yemen  
Afbalawi@taibahu.edu.as<sup>1</sup>, Alsaqqafabdulqader2017@gmail.com<sup>\*2</sup>

### Abstract

This study investigates the intricate realm of puns, a linguistic feature characterized by its multifaceted meanings and significant role in enriching religious texts. Puns present a unique challenge in translation, especially within the context of the Holy Qur'an. To examine these challenges, this study employed the Newmark's approach, selecting ten purposive puns from the Holy Qur'an for analysis. Each selected pun was first translated by AI, then subjected to two rounds of editing by professional translators to enhance linguistic precision and stylistic elegance. A qualitative analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which the AI-generated and post-editing translations captured the intended meanings of the puns. The findings reveal that while AI translations provide a competent foundational interpretation of the text, they often lack the depth required to fully encapsulate the puns' dual or layered meanings. Human post-editing significantly refines these translations, enhancing linguistic accuracy and embracing the puns' aesthetic and theological richness. However, the accuracy in conveying the puns' intended meanings varied, with not all post-edited translations fully capturing the intricate balance of literal and metaphorical interpretations. The study underscores the vital synergy between AI and human expertise in achieving translations that balance accuracy with aesthetic appeal.

**Keywords:** Arabic Puns; AI translation; human post-editing; Qur'anic texts.

### INTRODUCTION

The Holy Qur'an stands as the ultimate spiritual compass for Muslims, revered not just for its deep theological insights but also for its unparalleled linguistic richness. This richness encompasses layers of meaning and intricacies of expression, including divine wordplay, which adds to the text's profound beauty (Ya'aqbah, 2015). An example of such word play include puns. A pun involves the clever manipulation of a word or phrase with significantly divergent meanings that are intricately linked, or of words that sound alike but have different meanings (Al Aqad et al., 2019). It operates on a dual-level concept of meaning: one that is "close," employing a direct reference, and another that is "far," utilizing a more obscure reference, with the latter typically being the intended meaning.

The "close" meaning is what initially comes to mind for the listener, but the speaker's aim is often the "far" meaning, using the "close" meaning as a veil (Al Aqad et al., 2019). An example of such puns is the one in this Qur'anic verse:

قال تعالى: "يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالِكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ ۗ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا (النساء: ٢٩)

*“O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: But let there be amongst you Traffic and trade by mutual good-will: Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily God hath been to you Most Merciful!” (Ali, 2001).*

As revealed in the Qur’anic verse above, the word لا تقتلوا (Do not kill or destroy) has two meanings; one is near while the other is far. The close meaning of the word لا تقتلوا "do not kill" in this verse refers to the act of taking a life, whether it involves an individual killing themselves, killing another person, or committing an act that warrants death (Al-Zamakhsharī, 2010). However, the far meaning of لا تقتلوا "do not kill" is interpreted as "do not commit sins," where Allah likens the act of committing sins and offenses to the killing of a person (Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

In fact, translating such linguistic nuances, especially puns of this kind, into English while preserving both meaning and expression presents a formidable challenge due to the varied interpretations of puns and the potential for misunderstanding between the pun's intended meanings and their fundamental concepts, leading to a degree of ambiguity (Al Aqad et al., 2019). This study is positioned at the crossroads of advanced technologies and human expertise, aiming to decode the secrets of Qur'anic puns.

In fact, translation serves as a pivotal bridge between languages and cultures, a task that becomes exponentially complex when it involves sacred texts like the Holy Qur'an. The unique challenge here lies in the balance between linguistic precision and the preservation of aesthetic beauty, given the complexities of divine wordplay embedded in the text's puns (Al-Kharabsheh & Houji, 2019; Alaqad, 2023). Recognizing that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun to reshape the translation landscape with its capacity to process vast linguistic data at remarkable speeds, this study investigates AI's role in translation. Yet, the nuanced nature of divine wordplay, deeply intertwined with religious and cultural contexts, requires a more sophisticated approach that automated processes alone cannot fulfil.

The rationale of this study is anchored in the fusion of linguistic exploration and technological innovation. Utilizing AI in translation, augmented by human post-editing, offers a promising strategy to navigate the complexities of Qur'anic puns. By dissecting these puns through a process that melds machine efficiency with human insight, this study aims at enhancing the fields of translation studies and the understanding of how technology can reveal the linguistic elegance of sacred texts. It is worth noting that the translation of the Holy Qur'an into English encounters significant hurdles due to the intricate linguistic, cultural, and theological nuances inherent in its verses. The task of translating Qur'anic puns is particularly daunting, fraught with challenges that stem from attempting to maintain the original text's accuracy, sophistication, and theological depth (Aqad et al., 2019; Alaqad, 2023). These challenges are amplified by the classical Arabic's eloquence, the unique cultural and religious backdrop of the Holy Qur'an, and the deep theological understanding required for accurate translation (Al-Kharabsheh & Houji, 2019). Furthermore, the endeavour to incorporate modern technologies like AI in translation underscores the necessity for human post-editing to capture the full scope of cultural and religious subtleties that AI might miss.

Studies on translating Qur'anic puns into English details the complexities and strategies involved in maintaining semantic integrity and rhetorical depth. Azaryoun and Ghabanchi (2016) analysed how translators like Arberry, Pickthall, Shakir, and Yusuf Ali

utilize "pun to non-pun" strategies, highlighting the challenge of recreating "homonymic" puns in translation. Al Aqad et al. (2017) extended this exploration by using Delabastita's strategies and Newmark's methods to delve deeper into the specific challenges posed by puns in the Qur'an. Following this, Al Aqad et al. (2018) and Al Aqad et al. (2019) further studied the difficulties related to the dual meanings of words and the ambiguities that arise from them, employing Delabastita's typology and Nida's translation techniques. Al-Kharabsheh and Houji (2019) proposed a context-driven approach using exegesis-driven paraphrasing to address the translatability of Qur'anic puns, suggesting more nuanced translation strategies.

The most recent research by AlAqad et al. (2023) focuses on specific Qur'anic verses, comparing translations by Yusuf Ali and Shakir to pinpoint the semantic and rhetorical losses in English translations, using Delabastita's and Newmark's frameworks. This body of work underscores the necessity of sophisticated translation methods that balance linguistic precision with cultural and theological depth, paving the way for this study's innovative approach that combines AI with human post-editing to enhance translation accuracy and stylistic elegance.

Therefore, the present study examines the complex task of translating Qur'anic puns into English, aiming to balance linguistic fidelity with aesthetic preservation using AI and human expertise. It sets out to make the Qur'an's puns accessible globally without losing their linguistic and cultural essence. The current study is designed around several objectives, including analysing the contextual meanings of the selected Qur'anic puns through exegesis, evaluating AI's ability to capture and preserve these puns' nuanced meanings, and assessing the improvement of AI-generated translations through human post-editing for linguistic precision and stylistic elegance. Additionally, it investigates the synergy between AI and human expertise in translation, aiming for a balance between accuracy and aesthetic appeal.

This approach addresses the challenges in translating sacred texts and suggests a collaborative model between technology and human insight as a solution. This study has implications for Qur'anic scholarship, interfaith dialogue, and cultural exchange, aiming to contribute to fields like translation studies, linguistics, Islamic studies, and AI development for natural language processing. By examining the translation of Qur'anic puns through AI enhanced by human expertise, it seeks to offer innovative methodologies for translating sacred texts and to inform AI technology development to handle complex linguistic and cultural nuances. This study could provide valuable insights for translators and interested researchers, suggesting ways to maintain accuracy and literary elegance, thereby enhancing the global appreciation of the Qur'an's linguistic beauty.

## METHOD

This section discusses the study design, corpus of the study, translation and post-editing and methods of data analysis. This study adopts the qualitative approach for analysing the collected data. This approach is conducted to analyse both the contextual meanings of the selected Qur'anic puns, AI-generated translations and human post-editing. It is useful for achieving the objectives of the current study.

The corpus of the study includes all Qur'anic puns. Due to the limitations of the present study, ten puns are selected for analysis through purposeful sampling. The selected sample will encompass diverse themes and linguistic styles to ensure comprehensive coverage of the Qur'anic puns. The analysis unfolds in stages, beginning

with an examination of each pun's contextual meanings based on the selected exegeses of the Holy Qur'an (section 3.4), followed by an analysis of AI translation and a subsequent analysis of human post-editing for each pun.

ChatGPT 4 (paid version) was used for translating the selected Qur'anic verses which include puns. Two professional translators with expertise in Qur'anic studies performed the post-editing process of AI-generated translations of the selected Qur'anic puns. They focused on refining linguistic nuances and preserving the aesthetic and theological dimensions of divine wordplay i.e. puns.

Qualitative analysis involves in-depth examinations of the contextual meanings of the selected puns based on the exegeses of the Holy Qur'an, the AI translation and the human post-editing process, employing methods like content analysis to uncover the interpretative choices made by post-editors. The exegeses (Ibn 'Ashūr 1984), (Ibn Kathīr 1999), (Al-Ṭabarī 2001), Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003), (Al-Qurṭubī 2006), Al-Zamakhsharī (2009), among others, are consulted in this study to identify the contextual meanings of the selected Qur'anic puns. These widely recognized exegetical works approach the Holy Qur'an from a linguistic and rhetorical perspective.

The present study adopts Newmark's (1988) model for translation analysis and criticism, which encompasses semantic and communicative translation methods, offers a nuanced framework that can be adapted to the analysis of Qur'anic puns translation. This model was applied to the multi-step analysis of the data involving Qur'anic puns as follows:

#### *Explanation of the Meanings of Selected Puns Based on Exegeses*

This initial step aligns with Newmark's concept of semantic translation, where the focus is on the precise meanings of words and phrases as they are understood in their cultural and theological context. The exegeses of the Holy Qur'an provide the necessary background to understand the puns in their original linguistic and cultural settings. Semantic translation prioritizes fidelity to the source text's meaning, which is crucial for explaining the layered meanings of Qur'anic puns.

#### *Examination of Post-Editing Improvements*

The process of refining AI translations through professional post-editing can be seen as an application of communicative translation. This approach focuses on rendering the message in a way that is both accurate and easily understandable to the target audience, without losing the original's intent.

#### *Reflection of the Meanings of the Puns*

The final analysis, which examines how well the intended meanings of the puns are reflected, requires a balanced application of both semantic and communicative translation. This step is intended to examine the extent to which translators ensure that the depth and nuance of the original puns are maintained (semantic translation), while also making these meanings clear and impactful for the modern reader (communicative translation).

This model is adopted for this study as it acknowledges the complexity of translating Qur'anic puns and the necessity of employing both semantic fidelity and communicative effectiveness to achieve translations that are true to the original while resonating with contemporary readers. It underscores the iterative process of translation, where initial drafts are refined through successive layers of analysis and adjustment,

ensuring that both the letter and spirit of the original text are preserved. By employing this comprehensive methodology, the study aims to unravel the intricacies of divine wordplay in Qur'anic puns, providing valuable insights into the collaborative potential of AI and human post-editing in achieving precision and elegance in translation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun “ضَلَّالِكَ” (Your error)

**Table 1** The translation of Qur'anic Pun “ضَلَّالِكَ” (Your error)

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ إِنَّكَ لَفِي ضَلَّالِكَ الْقَدِيمِ" (سورة يوسف) (95)	"They said, By Allah, indeed you are in your old error" (Yusuf: 95).	1. "They exclaimed: By Allah! Indeed, you persist in your ancient confusion". 2. "They declared: By Allah! Truly, you remain engulfed in your old delusion".

### Contextual Meanings of the Qur'anic Pun

This verse is interpreted as follows: The brothers of the Prophet Yusuf asserted to their father i.e. Jacob, 'Truly, you persist in your old ways of error,' referring to his unwavering devotion and his persistent anticipation of reuniting with him, despite the considerable passage of time (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003). The analysis of the meaning of the pun in this Qur'anic verse reveals that the pun ضلال "misguidance" has two meanings: one is the close meaning of misguidance as opposed to guidance, implying that they seek to refute and disprove his statement, to demonstrate its falsehood, and to elucidate its misguidance, which is to perceive the scent of Yusuf. However, this close meaning is not intended in this Qur'anic verse. As for the other meaning (i.e. the far meaning) of "misguidance", it is a distant implication: love. Their intention by this is that it signifies love, thus Jacob's sons used the term misguidance metaphorically to denote love (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of the Qur'anic verse (Table 1) focused on a straightforward interpretation of "misguidance", primarily capturing the literal meaning associated with "ضلال" (misguidance or error). Furthermore, the first post-editing translation introduced "confusion" to hint at a broader range of interpretations, while the second used "delusion" to suggest deeper emotional or psychological implications, potentially alluding to the nuanced meaning of love embedded in the original term. However, both AI and post-edited versions primarily captured the literal sense of being misguided, with only a subtle nod to the pun's complex layer of signifying love. Neither explicitly addressed the metaphorical interpretation of "misguidance" as love, leaving the deeper theological and emotional dimensions implied by the original text more implicit than directly explored.

## Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun “كافة” (All)

Table 2 The Translation of Qur'anic Pun “كافة” (All)

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ" (28) (سورة سبأ)	"And We have not sent you except as a bringer of good tidings and a warner to <u>all</u> humanity, but most people do not know". (Saba: 28)	1. "Indeed, We have sent you (O Muhammad) solely as a herald of joy and a <u>warner to all</u> of mankind; yet, the majority of people remain unaware." 2. "We dispatched you not but as a <u>universal</u> messenger to humanity, offering glad tidings and issuing warnings, but most of mankind does not comprehend."

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

This verse is interpreted as follows: We sent you, O Mohammed, to all people, with "*kāffatan*" highlighting the inclusivity of "mankind" and placed before "*li'l-nās*" (for people) to emphasize its significance. You are to bring glad tidings of Paradise to the believers and warnings of punishment to the disbelievers (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003). However, many, including the disbelievers of Mecca, are unaware of this mission. Besides, Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) stated that the use of the word '*kaffah*' in the verse is a form of wordplay (pun) because it has two prominent meanings. The first is already explained above which is also supported by Al-Zamakhsharī (2009) who believes that this word '*kaffah*' indicates that the message is meant to be universal. However, the second (far meaning) is that '*kaffah*' means a preventer, that is, it prevents them from disbelief and sin—this is the more far-fetched meaning.

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of the Qur'anic verse (Table 2) provides a direct interpretation focusing on the Prophet's role as a universal herald without exploring the pun inherent in '*kaffah*'. In contrast, two professional post-editing translations introduce subtle nuances that aim to capture the layered meanings of '*kaffah*'. The first post-edit emphasizes the Prophet's mission to all of mankind and suggests an ongoing unawareness among the majority, potentially nodding to '*kaffah*'s' preventative aspect against disbelief and sin. The second explicitly labels the Prophet as a "universal messenger," directly aligning with one aspect of the pun that denotes the message's universality, as supported by Al-Zamakhsharī's (2009) interpretation. Both attempts refine the original AI translation by infusing it with a deeper theological sensitivity towards '*kaffah*'s' dual implications.

However, they primarily highlight the universal scope of the Prophet's mission, with only the first translation indirectly approaching the preventative connotation. Consequently, while these post-edits enrich the narrative by slightly engaging with the pun's multifaceted meanings, they do so with varying degrees of explicitness and depth, mainly emphasizing the message's intended reach across humanity without fully delving into the pun's complex theological and aesthetic dimensions.

## Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun “بأعيننا” (Under Our eyes)

**Table 3 The Translation of Qur'anic Pun “بأعيننا” (Under Our eyes)**

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءً لِمَنْ كَانَ كُفِرًا" (سورة القمر) (14)	"It flows under <u>Our eyes</u> as a reward for he who had been disbeliever". (54:14)	1. It sailed under <u>Our watchful gaze</u> , a retribution for one who was dismissed in disbelief". 2. She sailed beneath <u>Our observation</u> , as a compensation for him who was scornfully rebuffed".

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

This verse is interpreted by (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003) as follows: The verse "sailing before Our eyes" signifies being under Our protection or observation, implying the vessel was safeguarded. The term "*jazā'an*" is used here to indicate retaliation or recompense, suggesting an underlying action of 'they were drowned as retribution'. This was in response to the rejection of the Prophet Noah, peace be upon him. The analysis reveals that “Our eyes” in the verse has two meanings. The first is the seeing eye, which is the close meaning, and in this noble verse, Allah attributes eyes to Himself, so He says "with Our eyes". Thus, Allah has eyes, but we do not liken His eyes to human eyes. As for the other meaning, it is the suggestive meaning: "flow under Our eyes" means under Our care, Our guardianship, and Our power (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of the Qur'anic verse (Table 3) offered a basic interpretation focusing on divine oversight. In contrast, the two professional post-edits added depth by emphasizing Allah's protective and intentional observation, with phrases like "Our watchful gaze" and "beneath Our observation," subtly addressing the pun of "Our eyes" to include both literal and metaphorical meanings. These refinements better captured the dual aspects of divine vigilance and care, aligning more closely with the theological and aesthetic nuances implied by the original text. The post-edits thus offered a more layered interpretation, enhancing the understanding of divine oversight as both seeing and a metaphor for guardianship and authority, showing a deeper consideration of the pun's intended meanings compared to the AI's straightforward approach.

## Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun “بيدك” (In your body)

**Table 4 The Translation of Qur'anic Pun “بيدك” (In your body)**

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِيَدِنَا لِيَتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلَقَكَ آيَةً؛ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ عَنِ آيَاتِنَا لُعَافِلُونَ" (سورة يونس) (٩٢)	"So today we will save you in <u>your body</u> , that you may be to those who succeed you a sign. And indeed, many among the people, of Our signs, are heedless"	1-Today, We shall preserve <u>your body</u> so that you may serve as a warning to those who follow, though indeed, many among humanity remain oblivious to Our Signs". 2-On this day, We will save <u>your body</u> to be a sign for those who come after you; yet, truly, many among mankind disregard Our Signs".

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

This Qur'anic verse above is interpreted by Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) as follows: On this day, you will be rescued; specifically, your lifeless body will be extracted from the sea to serve as a warning and lesson for future generations, highlighting the consequences of your actions. This serves to teach about the importance of obedience and the dangers of rebellion. Ibn Abbās cited in (Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003) noted that some among the Children of Israel were skeptical about his death, thus his body was displayed as proof. However, many people, particularly those from Mecca, often ignore these signs and fail to learn from them. It is noticed that the pun "your body" in this verse has two meanings. The first is that "body" refers to armours (Ibn Qutaybah, 1978) and the other meaning (intended) is the body, meaning a body without a soul. It has been said that "with your body" means in the form by which you are recognized (Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of the verse (Table 4) presents a direct interpretation of saving "your body" to serve as a sign for future generations, without exploring the nuanced pun that "body" can refer to both armour and a soulless form. The two professional post-edits attempt to refine this interpretation, with the first emphasizing the warning aspect of the preserved body and the second simplifying the message to highlight the body's role as a lesson for posterity. Both versions enhance the narrative by focusing on the theological significance of the body's preservation as a divine sign, but they do not fully delve into the dual meanings of "body" implied by the original Qur'anic text. While they successfully underscore the importance of the sign for future generations and humanity's general obliviousness to divine signs, their treatments of the pun are limited, prioritizing straightforward clarity over the exploration of deeper linguistic and theological layers. This approach aligns with the broader intent of the verse to serve as a cautionary symbol but leaves the pun's complex implications largely unaddressed, reflecting a balance between enhancing narrative focus and maintaining accessibility in translation.

### Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun “مخلدون” (Eternal)

**Table 5 The Translation of Qur'anic Pun “مخلدون” (Eternal)**

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى: "يَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ" (١٧). (الواقعة)	"Eternal youths will circulate among them".	1- <u>verlasting youths</u> will move amongst them, serving. 2- <u>ouths of eternal youthfulness</u> will attend to them, circling.

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) interpreted this Qur'anic verse as follows: "They will be waited on by immortal youths resembling young boys never ageing". It is noticed that the pun "*mukhalladun*" (eternal) in the verse has two meanings. The first meaning, which is the close one, is from eternity; meaning that these boys will remain in paradise in one condition, they do not age, do not go gray, and do not change. Their state is always that of youth, unchanging (Ibn 'Ashūr, 1984). As for the second meaning of "*mukhalladun*," it means adorned with earrings. It is said for earrings "*al-khuldah*" in Arabic (ibid).



### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of the verse (Table 5) introduces the concept of "eternal youths" circulating among the inhabitants of paradise, focusing on the primary meaning of "*mukhalladun*" as unaging. The two professional post-edits further refine this interpretation by emphasizing the perpetual service and eternal youthfulness of these beings, with one highlighting their role in serving and the other accentuating their continuous attendance and movement. While these enhancements enrich the description and deepen the theological implications of eternal youth in paradise, both post-edits, like the AI translation, primarily concentrate on this aspect without delving into the secondary, pun-related meaning of "*mukhalladun*" concerning adornment with earrings. This selective engagement illustrates the translators' focus on the more immediately accessible meaning of eternal youth, thereby providing a nuanced yet incomplete exploration of the pun's full spectrum. Consequently, the challenge of capturing the Qur'anic text's layered nuances, especially when a word carries multiple meanings or serves as a pun, remains evident, as the secondary meaning related to adornment remains largely unaddressed, underscoring the complexities inherent in translating and interpreting religious texts.

### Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun "ربي" (My Master)

Table 6 The Translation of Qur'anic Pun "ربي" (My Master)

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "وَرَاوَدَتْهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَغَلَّقَتِ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْبَتَ لَكَ، قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَايَ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ" (سورة يوسف) (٢٣)	"And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him from his (true) self: she fastened the doors, and said, 'Now come, you (dear one)! He said: 'Allah forbid! Truly (your husband) is <u>my master</u> ! he made my sojourn agreeable! Indeed, no wrongdoers will succeed".	1- The woman in whose house he resided tried to seduce him. She secured the doors and said, 'Advance towards me!' He replied, 'God forbid! Indeed, <u>my lord</u> has provided me with a good lodging. Surely, those who act unjustly shall not prosper". 2- In that house where he dwelled, the lady attempted to entice him, locking the doors and beckoning, 'Come to me!' He protested, 'I seek Allah's refuge! <u>My master</u> has been kind in my stay. Undoubtedly, wrongdoers shall not find success".

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

The Qur'anic verse above is interpreted by Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) as follows: Zulaykhā, the woman of the house where the Prophet Yusuf resided, tried to tempt him into lying with her by securing the house's doors and inviting him provocatively. He refused, declaring his refuge in Allah from such acts, acknowledging the man who provided him with a respectable home as his master, and expressing his inability to betray him by dishonouring his household. He emphasized that those who commit such wrongdoings, like fornication, do not succeed. It is revealed that the pun "my Master" in the verse has two meanings: The first one is Allah, the Almighty, and the meaning of the verse is that Allah, my Lord, has taken care of me with His kindness, so I do not commit what He has forbidden (Al-Andalusī, 2003; Al-Baghawī, 1999). The second meaning is the noble master (i.e., it is not appropriate for me to betray him, as he has honoured my abode and trusted me) (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

In translating the verse from Surah Yusuf (Table 6), both the AI and two professional post-edits navigate the complex pun of "my Master" that embodies dual references to Allah and Yusuf's earthly master, without fully unravelling its intricate layers. The AI's rendition sets the stage by portraying Yusuf's refusal to succumb to seduction, emphasizing his loyalty and moral stance. The first post-edit subtly enhances this narrative by highlighting Yusuf's appreciation for his good lodging and his principled stand against injustice, indirectly suggesting the pun's dual meanings through Yusuf's gratitude and ethical refusal. The second post-edit further clarifies Yusuf's reliance on divine protection while recognizing his earthly master's kindness, slightly leaning towards the pun's first meaning but still not making a stark distinction between the divine and terrestrial protectors. While both post-edits enrich the translation by suggesting a dual allegiance through nuanced linguistic choices, they predominantly focus on the moral and theological implications, engaging with the pun's intended meanings to a degree. They manage to convey Yusuf's integrity and the moral lesson embedded in the narrative, yet they shy away from explicitly dissecting the pun's full aesthetic and theological richness, showing a careful balance between narrative clarity and the exploration of Qur'anic linguistic complexity.

### Analysis of the Qur'anic Pun "وثيابك" (Your garments)

**Table 7 The Translation of Qur'anic Pun "وثيابك" (Your garments)**

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "وَتِيَابِكَ فَطَهِّرْ" (سورة المدثر)	"And purify your <u>garments</u> "	1-And cleanse your <u>clothes</u> thoroughly". 2-And ensure your <u>attire</u> is purified".

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

Al-Mahallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) suggest two interpretations of the command to purify your clothes (Table 7): firstly, to cleanse them from any physical impurities, and secondly, to shorten their length as opposed to the Arab custom of wearing long robes that trail on the ground out of pride, which risks them becoming tainted by impurities. More importantly, it is found that the pun "garments" has two meanings: The first meaning is Clothes, i.e., the garments that a person wears to cover his nakedness. Hence, the meaning of the verse is "Arise, O Muhammad, from your covering and warn the people, exalt Allah, and wash your garments with water" (Al-Qurṭubī, 2001). As for the second meaning of "your garments," it is the heart. The Arabs used to refer to the heart as garments, thus the meaning of the verse would be "Purify, O Muhammad, your heart from sins, wrongdoings, hatreds, and grudges, etc." (Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation and two professional post-edits of the Qur'anic verse from Surah Al-Muddathir (Table 7) focus on the literal aspect of purifying garments, with each version introducing nuances that emphasize thoroughness and responsibility in the act of purification. However, all three translations primarily address the physical cleansing of clothes and do not examine the deeper, metaphorical meaning associated with "garments" as referring to the heart, a dual significance that encompasses both the external act of washing clothes and the internal process of purifying the heart from sins and moral

failings. While the post-edits refine the linguistic expression and suggest a deeper level of care in purification, they stop short of explicitly exploring the pun's dual meanings. This approach highlights a focus on the verse's surface-level instruction, subtly hinting at deeper theological and moral implications without directly engaging with the metaphorical interpretation of "garments" as the heart, thus considering the intended meanings of the pun to a limited extent and leaving the rich, layered nuances of the Qur'anic language largely unexplored.

### Analysis of the Qur'anic pun “عرفها” (Which He has made known to them)

**Table 8 The translation of Qur'anic pun “عرفها” (Which He has made known to them)**

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "سَمِّدِيهِمْ وَيُصَلِّحْ بَالَهُمْ (5) وَيُدْخِلُهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ عَرَفْنَا لَهُمْ (6) (سورة محمد)	"He will guide them and improve their condition. And He will admit them to Paradise, <u>which He has made known to them</u> ".	1- He shall guide them and amend their affairs, and He shall welcome them into the Garden <u>He has disclosed to them</u> . 2- He will lead them to the right path, enhance their well-being, and grant them entry to the Paradise <u>He has described to them</u> .

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) interpreted this verse (Table 8) as follows: Allah will guide individuals in both this life and the afterlife towards what is beneficial for them and will properly arrange their circumstances and minds through His guidance. This includes those who were not killed but are encompassed in the reference to "those who were slain" due to the focus on the martyred. Furthermore, Allah will grant them entrance to Paradise, a place He has revealed to them, ensuring they can find their way to their homes, spouses, and servants there without needing directions. The pun عرفها has two meanings. The close meaning is "made it known to them" while the second "made its fragrance known to them" (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). The second meaning of "made its fragrance known to them" is "informed them and clarified it to them," so that everyone knows their respective status and rank in Paradise... meaning the inhabitants of Paradise are guided to their dwellings therein and do not err (Al-Zamakhsharī, 2009).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of a verse from Surah Muhammad and its subsequent professional post-edits (Table 8) primarily address the divine promise of guidance and entry into Paradise, focusing on the informative aspect of "made it known to them" without exploring the pun's layered meanings. The first post-edit introduces a sense of welcome and disclosure, hinting at an intimate revelation of Paradise, while the second emphasizes guidance, well-being, and a descriptive revelation, both aligning with the pun's clarification and information aspect. However, neither post-edit explicitly engages with the pun's sensory dimension of making Paradise's fragrance known, which would add a deeper, experiential layer to the understanding of Paradise. While they enrich the narrative by suggesting a more detailed revelation of Paradise and enhance clarity about its promise, they do not delve into the aromatic nuances implied by the original pun. This approach reflects a focus on the theological promise and divine guidance aspect, considering the pun's intended meanings to a degree but leaving the sensory, experiential

implications largely unexplored, thus engaging with the broader theological message rather than the pun's full aesthetic and theological richness.

### Analysis of the Qur'anic pun “الخيط” (Thread)

Table 9 The translation of Qur'anic pun “الخيط” (thread)

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ" سورة البقرة (187):	"And eat and drink until the white <u>thread</u> of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black <u>thread</u> [of night]...."	1. Consume food and beverages until you clearly distinguish the dawn's white <u>thread</u> from the night's black thread 2. Feast and hydrate <u>until the break of dawn</u> reveals the white strand apart from the <u>dark strand</u>

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

This verse (Table 9) is interpreted by Al-Maḥallī and Al-Sayyūṭī (2003) as follows: One is permitted to eat and drink throughout the night until the arrival of true dawn, marked by the clear distinction between the white and black threads—symbolically representing the light of dawn and the darkness of night. The analogy uses the imagery of white and black threads to illustrate the transition from night to dawn. Fasting should, then, continue from this point of dawn until nightfall, which begins after the sun has set. It is shown that the pun “white thread from the black thread” has two meanings: one of them is literal, which is the thread that a person uses to weave. While the other meaning, which is the figurative one, is that the verse intends by “thread” the light of dawn from the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the day, and this is the intended meaning (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūṭī, 2003). Therefore, interpreting “thread” in the verse in the first apparent sense and neglecting the second could result in the loss of a legal ruling, and the one who does so may fall into sin without realizing it.

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation and two professional post-edits of the Qur'anic verse from Surah Al-Baqarah (Table 9) use the metaphor of the “white thread” and “black thread” to delineate the time for ending the fast at dawn, capturing the verse's figurative intent to distinguish night from day as a guide for fasting. Both post-edits refine this interpretation by emphasizing the acts of eating and drinking and the clarity with which dawn separates from night, successfully preserving the metaphor's aesthetic and theological dimensions. They focus on the intended figurative meaning—dawn's arrival as the signal to end fasting—while not exploring the literal aspect of threads used in weaving, which serves more as a linguistic device rather than the primary intended meaning. This approach ensures the translations convey the practical and spiritual implications of fasting based on the visual cue of dawn, aligning with the Qur'anic guidance and avoiding potential misinterpretations that could impact the understanding of fasting's legal rulings. Thus, the translations effectively emphasize the transition from night to day as a crucial sign for fasting, encapsulating the pun's intended meaning and its implications for observance.

### Analysis of the Qur'anic pun "استوى" (established Himself)

Table 10 The translation of Qur'anic pun "استوى" (established Himself)

Qur'anic verse including a pun	AI translation	Post-editing of AI translation
قال تعالى "الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى" (5) (سورة طه)	"The Most Merciful [Allah] Himself established above the Throne".	1- "The Compassionate has <u>ascended over</u> the Throne in Majesty". 2- "The Merciful One has firmly <u>settled</u> Himself upon the Throne".

### Contextual Meanings of Qur'anic Pun

This verse above explains that the Merciful One, Allah, reigns over the Throne, with "*al-'arsh*" in classical Arabic signifying a royal seat, symbolizing a position of sovereignty appropriate for Him (Al-Maḥallī & Al-Sayyūfī, 2003). It is noticed that the word "*istawa*" is considered a pun because it has two meanings: The first refers to settling in a place, which is the proximate meaning, and accordingly the verse means that [He] settled upon the Throne, but in a manner that we do not know, and not as kings settle. The other meaning, the suggestive meaning of "*istawa*," is the far meaning and refers to domination, sovereignty, control, and greatness, meaning that Allah's authority extended and His majesty dominated over the Throne (Al-Zamakhsharī, 2009).

### Analysis of AI and Post-Editing Translations

The AI translation of a verse from Surah Taha and its professional post-edits (Table 10) tackle the term "*istawa*" with varying degrees of depth and nuance, each capturing different facets of its complex meanings. The AI's rendition focuses on the concept of divine establishment over the Throne, primarily addressing the proximate meaning related to settling. The first post-edit enriches this interpretation by introducing elements of sovereignty and grandeur, hinting at the far meaning associated with domination and authority through the use of "ascended over the Throne in Majesty," thereby subtly engaging with the pun's dual implications. The second post-edit further explores this complexity by emphasizing a deliberate and authoritative settling with "firmly settled Himself upon the Throne," blending the ideas of divine presence and supreme control. Both post-edits refine the initial translation by balancing between the literal act of divine establishment and the broader theological themes of sovereignty and majesty, considering the pun's intended meanings more comprehensively. They successfully navigate the term's nuanced implications, offering insights into the divine's transcendent relationship with the Throne that encompass both the physical act of settling and the abstract notions of control and greatness, thereby capturing the layered essence of "*istawa*" within the Qur'anic context.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of AI English translation's performance in capturing and preserving the meanings of selected Qur'anic puns reveals a nuanced yet foundational capability to convey the basic thematic elements and direct interpretations of the original text. While the AI demonstrates proficiency in presenting straightforward translations that are faithful to the surface meanings, its approach often lacks the depth required to fully encapsulate the dual or layered meanings inherent in Qur'anic puns. This limitation highlights the challenge AI faces in grasping the complex interplay between linguistic precision and

theological depth, which is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'anic discourse.

It is also revealed that the impact of human post-editing on refining AI-generated English translations is significant, particularly in enhancing linguistic precision and stylistic elegance. The professional post-edits tend to introduce nuanced interpretations that bridge the gap between direct translations and the multifaceted implications of the original Arabic text. Through careful word choice and syntactic adjustments, human editors enrich the translations with layers of meaning that reflect both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of Qur'anic puns. This process not only improves linguistic accuracy but also elevates the stylistic quality of the translations, making them more resonant with the aesthetic and theological nuances of the Qur'an. However, it is also noted that some professional edits might not fully capture the intended nuances of Qur'anic puns as unveiled by detailed analysis, highlighting the intricate challenge of translating complex religious texts, especially pun translation.

Furthermore, it is revealed that the synergy between AI and human intervention emerges as a crucial factor in achieving a harmonious balance between accuracy and aesthetic appeal in the translation of Qur'anic puns. AI serves as a foundational tool that provides a base translation from which human expertise can sculpt a more refined and nuanced rendition. This collaborative process leverages the strengths of both AI's computational efficiency and human editors' interpretative depth, allowing for translations that are both faithful to the original text and rich in aesthetic and theological significance. The interaction between AI-generated translations and human post-editing exemplifies a complementary approach where technology and human skill converge to enhance the translation of complex religious texts, underscoring the potential for continued innovation in the field of Qur'anic studies and beyond.

The study concludes that the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with human post-editing presents a promising avenue for enhancing the English translation of Qur'anic puns. This novel approach not only improves linguistic accuracy and stylistic quality but also bridges the gap between traditional human translation methods and the potential offered by AI technology. The collaborative synergy between AI and human efforts has proven crucial in capturing the nuanced meanings and aesthetic nuances of the original text, highlighting the indispensable role of human intervention in refining AI-generated translations. By addressing a previously unexplored gap in the literature, this study underscores the value of combining advanced technology with human expertise to achieve superior translation outcomes in the context of religious texts.

The findings suggest that AI developers should enhance AI's capability to recognize and interpret complex linguistic and theological nuances, including puns, through advanced natural language processing techniques that can analyse context and multiple meanings. Translators are encouraged to use AI translations as a preliminary step and refine them with their knowledge of the original language's cultural, historical, and theological aspects, ensuring the preservation and clarity of both literal and metaphorical meanings. Future research should investigate how AI can integrate with traditional exegesis methods and be trained on exegesis literature to better grasp religious language intricacies. Collaborative efforts involving AI developers, linguists, theologians, and experienced translators could lead to more sophisticated translation tools that respect the aesthetic and theological dimensions of sacred texts. This multidisciplinary approach

aims to improve religious text translations and contribute to computational linguistics and its application in decoding complex human expressions.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research received grant no. (154/2023) from the Arab Observatory for Translation (an affiliate of ALECSO), which is supported by the Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission in Saudi Arabia.

### REFERENCES

- Al Aqad, M. H., & Abu-Alhaj, T. (2018). The possible reasons for misunderstanding the meanings of puns in the Holy Qur'an from Arabic into English. *International Journal of Translation and Interpreting*, (1), 1-13.
- Al Aqad, M., Kaur, K., Sapar, A. A. B., Kadhim, K. A., & Salleh, N. H. M. (2017). Translation of selected pun words from the Holy Qur'an into English. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology* (Special Issue for INTE 2017).
- Alaqad, M. (2023). Reframing the semantic and pragmatic aspects of pun words in the Holy Qur'an from Arabic into English. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 4(1) doi: 10.58256/rjah.v4i1.884
- Al-Baghawī, Al-ḥusayn Bin Mas'ūd (1999). *Al-Baghawī Exegesis (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)*. Abdul-Razaq Al-Mahdi (Ed.). Beirut: Dār 'Iḥyā' Al-Turāth Al-<sup>c</sup>Arabi. [www.shamela.ws](http://www.shamela.ws).
- Ali, A. Y. (2001). *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān: New Edition with Qur'anic Text (Arabic), Revised Translation, Commentary, and Newly Compiled Comprehensive Index*. 10th ed. Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Publications.
- Al-Kharabsheh, A., & Houji, K. (2019, December). On the translatability of Qur'anic pun. In FORUM (Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 127-148). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Al-Maḥallī, Galāl Al-Dīn. & Al-Sayyūṭī, Galal Al-Dīn (2003). *The Exegesis of Al-jalalān*. Fakhr Al-Din Qabawah (Ed.). Lebanon: Nashrūn Publishers. [www.waqfeya.com](http://www.waqfeya.com).
- Al-Qurtubī, Muḥammed Bin Aḥmad (2006). *The Comprehensive Compilation of the Rules of the Qur'an* (1-24 Volumes). Abdullah Abdul-Mohsen Al-Turki (Ed.). Beirut: Al-Risālah Publishers. [www.waqfeya.com](http://www.waqfeya.com)
- Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammed Bin Jarīr (2001). *The Exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī* (1-26 Volumes). Abdullah Abdul-Mohsen Al-Turki (Ed.). Cairo: Dār Al-Ma'rifah. [www.shamela.ws](http://www.shamela.ws).
- Al-Zamakhsharī, M. U. (2009). *The Exegesis of Al-Zamakhshari: The Revelation of the Realities of the Depths of Revelation* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Khalīl Ma'mūn Shayḥa (Ed.). Beirut: Dār Al-Ma'rifah.
- Aqad, M. H. A., Bin Sapar, A. A., Bin Hussin, M., Mohd Mokhtar, R. A., & Mohad, A. H. (2019). The English translation of Arabic puns in the holy Qur'an. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 48(3), 243-256.
- Azaryoun, M., & Ghabanchi, Z. (2016). Translation of Puns in the Holy Qur'an. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(2): 10-22.
- Ibn 'Ashūr, M. A. (1984). *The Exegesis of Ibn Ashur*. Tunisia: Al-Dār Al-Tunisiyah Publishers.
- Ibn Kathīr, I. O. (1999). *The Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaibah.

- Ibn Qutaybah, A. M. A. al-D. (1978). *The peculiarities of the Qur'an* (A. Saqr, Ed.). Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Lu, S. (2013). Aesthetic values in literary translation: Zhang's versus Dong's version of David Copperfield in Chinese. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 14(1), 99-121.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation* (Vol. 66, pp. 1-312). New York: Prentice hall.
- Ya'aqbah, W. N. (2015). *The Untranslatability of the Cognate Accusative in the Holy Qur'an and Methods of Compensation*. Master's Thesis submitted to An-Najah National University, Palestine.