

Complex Predicates and Arabic Inceptive Verbs: A Functional-Semantic Study of Ten Renderings of Quran,7:22

Asst Prof. Dr. Jawad Kadhim Jabir

University of Basra/ College of Arts/ Department of Translation

Jawad.kadhim@uobasrah.edu.iq

Abstract:

This paper examines complex predicates in Arabic as well as their translation strategies into English. The scope of this study is on the Arabic inceptive verbs that characterize the initiation of action. The theoretical frameworks used to analyze the data include a triangulation of Al-Samarra'i (2007), Krzeszowski (1990), and Halliday (1973). The analysis concerns one token, *ṭafīqa* (طَفِقَ). It functions as a discourse-structuring element that reflects immediacy and continuity accompanied by imperfect verbs. The data include a case study involving ten English translations of the Qur'anic verse {وَطَفِقًا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ} (Al-A'rāf 7:22). The analysis reveals that the rendering of these inceptive verbs has different representations in English. The discrepancies resulting from their renditions reflect the linguistic and cognitive complexity of such constructions. Lexical economy and expressive precision are consolidated through the use of these inceptive verbs. Furthermore, the inceptive verbs conceptualize the metaphors of emergence and intentionality, representing a challenge to translators.

Keywords: inceptive verbs, compounding, Qur'anic translation, Al-Samarra'i, Halliday, Krzeszowski, Arabic syntax, discourse analysis

المسندات المركبة وافعال الشروع في النحو العربي: دراسة وظيفية دلالية لعشر ترجمات إنجليزية للقرآن الكريم، ٧: ٢٢

الاستاذ المساعد الدكتور جواد كاظم جابر
جامعة البصرة كلية الآداب

المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث العبارات الفعلية المعقدة في اللغة العربية بالإضافة إلى استراتيجيات ترجمتها إلى اللغة الإنجليزية. ومع ذلك، فإن نطاق هذه الدراسة هو على افعال الشروع العربية التي تنطوي على عملية شروع الحدث. وتتضمن الأطر النظرية المستخدمة لتحليل البيانات تنظيماً منهجياً يشمل نظريات السامرائي وكرزيسوفسكي وهاليداي. وينطوي التحليل على وحدة واحدة من افعال الشروع وهو الفعل (طَفِقَ). ويعمل هذا الفعل كعنصر في بنية الخطاب يعكس معاني مثل المباشرة والاستمرارية المصحوبة بالأفعال الناقصة. وتتضمن البيانات دراسة حالة تتضمن عشر ترجمات إنجليزية للآية القرآنية {وَطَفِقًا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ} (الأعراف ٧:٢٢). ويكشف التحليل أن ترجمة افعال الشروع هذه لها تمثيلات مختلفة في اللغة الإنجليزية. وتعكس التناقضات الناتجة عن ترجماتها التعقيد اللغوي والمعرفي لمثل هذه التراكيب. ويُعزز افعال الشروع هذه

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36317/kja/2026/v1.i67.20998>

Kufa Journal of Arts by University of Kufa is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
مجلة آداب الكوفة - جامعة الكوفة مرخصة بموجب ترخيص المشاع الإبداعي ٤.٠ الدولي.



استخدام الاقتصاد المعجمي والدقة التعبيرية. علاوة على ذلك، تُصوّر هذه الأفعال استعارات الظهور والقصدية، مما يُمثّل تحديًا للمترجمين.
الكلمات المفتاحية: الأفعال المبدوءة، تركيب الكلمات، ترجمة القرآن الكريم، السمراني، هاليدي، كرشوفسكي، البنية النحوية في اللغة العربية، تحليل الخطاب

1. Introduction

Complex predicates have a group of predicates in one clause. In linguistic theory, they are problematic in areas of the lexicon, morphology, and syntax (Amberber, Baker & Harvey, 2010). Accordingly, they pose a challenge in the process of translation. The translation of the Qur'an into English poses some obstacles in terms of linguistic and theological issues, particularly in reproducing the detailed semantic and syntactic nuances of the original Arabic text. One of these obstacles is the translation of inceptive verbs. Their function is to denote the beginning of an action, which often encapsulates aspectual and syntactic features that are hard to reproduce precisely in English. The researcher selects the Qur'anic verb phrase (طَفَعًا) in (Al-A'rāf 7:22). Translating this inceptive construction is accomplished through a range of translational equivalences.

The researcher analyzes ten English translations of a specific Quranic verse. The task also reveals specific syntactic strategies, including periphrastic constructions, nominal clauses, and interpretive elaborations. The analysis is accomplished by triangulating the models of Halliday and Al-Samarra'i, and Krzeszowski's (1990) model of equivalence. Krzeszowski emphasizes the impact of propositional meaning and the form of the text in translation. With this integration of these models, the researcher attempts to adopt the translation strategies that are most effective in preserving the textual linguistic features and in making the text accessible and acceptable to English-speaking readership.

Jackendoff(2002) and Goldberg (2006) have studied the processing of complex predicates within the domain of cognitive linguistics. Research indicates that integrating semantic schemas is merged into these complex predicates. the. The same paradigm has been

applied by Al-Samarra'i (2007) in his semantic analysis of Arabic complex predicates. His data included Qur'anic and classical Arabic prose, indicating a natural corpus-based approach. His approach aligns with contemporary cognitive models that view language as a complex adaptive system. The language functions reflect a great deal of linguistic efficiency and dense strata of communication and inference. According to Al-Samarra'i, these complex verbs involve additional meaning. The event or action indicated also involves temporal and modal subtleties. Moreover, these complex verbs can signal the initiation of an event or action with subtle temporal and modal meanings. In this paper, the researcher also adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, which helps analyze these verbs in terms of the three metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The application of these three functions goes as follows:

1. Ideational metafunction: These verbs work as phase markers that enhance the temporal boundary of the event. For instance, *شرع* or *طفق* adds a durative aspect while *هَبَّ* adds suddenness.
2. Interpersonal metafunction: These verbs represent *stance*, *urgency*, or *speaker evaluation*. As for the verb *هَبَّ*, it reflects *immediacy and emotional investment*.
3. Textual metafunction: The transition point in discourse or narrative is signified by foregrounding these complex predicates.

Al-Samarra'i's (2007) account of the subtle discrepancies between the complex predicate verbs like (*هَبَّ* and *شرع*, *أخذ*, *طفق*) conforms to Halliday's notion that grammar reflects meaning potential. These verbs help ensure the effective meaning and tone of the clause in which such verbs are used. These complex predicates can also indicate the relatedness of syntax, semantics, and discourse function. The Arabic productive system reflects both lexical economy and deep expressiveness. Al-Samarra'i's (2007) rich treatment of inceptive verbs

can show how phase, modality, and stance are interwoven in Arabic predicate structure.

In this study, the researcher provides a linguistic account of Arabic complex predicates, and the translational strategies into English are negotiated. An instance of these verbs has been selected for this purpose: a representative example from the Qur'an, namely the verb phrase (طفق) in (Al-A'rāf 7:22). The study commences by introducing a working definition of complex predicates. One of these definitions is Butt's (1995), who defines a complex predicate in terms of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG). It is categorized into three tiers: the grammatical functional structure (f-structure), the argument structure (two or more semantic heads), and the phase structure (c-structure).

The researcher selects one type of these complex predicates, which is the class of inceptive verbs. To analyze the so-called (inceptive verbs) /af'aal al-shuroo'/as negotiated by Al-Samarra'i (2007) in his book (Meanings of Grammar) /ma'aani el-nahw/ from a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective.

1.2 Functional Analysis of Arabic inceptive verbs in SFL Terms

Arabic inceptive verbs include (شرع، هب، أخذ، طفق). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 497), the key function of a hypotactic verbal group complex, such as inceptive verbs, is "the Process in the experiential transitivity structure, and the Finite (...) Predicator in the interpersonal modal structure". As for the (in)finiteness of the verbal groups: the primary group carries the mood part of the clause, and this group can be finite, while the secondary group "is always finite" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 498), and the latter group may be perfective or imperfective. As shown in Table 8.2 regarding the distinction of being perfective or imperfective, inceptive verbs in the perfective sense can indicate an initial state or activating something (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 498). The semantic relation holding between a primary verbal group and a secondary one is that of Phase. Phase has two dimensions: time-phase and reality-phase (p.499).

Inceptive verbs are included within the time phase. However, these two dimensions “are related to modality and tense,..., phase is interpreted as a hypotactic relation between two processes: a general one of becoming, that is then elaborated by the specific action, event, mental process or relation that is being phased in or out” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 501). This functional account is conducted according to the three Hallidayan metafunctions:

1. Ideational Metafunction: This encapsulates the process type and identifies the aspect. In SFL, verbs are categorized into six key process types: *Material* processes (of doing), *mental* processes (of thinking), *relational* processes (of being), *verbal* processes (of saying), *behavioral* processes, and *existential* processes. The Arabic inceptive verbs, such as (شَرَعَ، أخذ، طفق), function as "Phase verbs" in the sense that they modify the aspect of the main process that follows them. They are not the main process themselves but indicate the initiation of one. Some illustrative examples are the following:

شَرَعَ المعلم يشرحُ الدرسَ

(The teacher started explaining the lesson)

In this example, the verb "شَرَعَ" is the primary group and thus it operates as a phase marker within a complex predicate, similar to how English uses "began to explain". It carries the mood system of this clause. The complex predicate comprising the two verbs consists of both perfective and imperfective aspects. The primary verbal group here represents a material process that involves an inchoative aspect, indicating the start of the process of explaining the lesson by the teacher. This contributes to the ideational metafunction in that it refines the temporal boundary, i.e., the inception of the action, and it creates a semantic complex auxiliary process.



2. Interpersonal Metafunction: It concerns modality and the stance of the speaker. A clause is viewed as an exchange of “(a) **goods & services** or (b) **information**” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 107). In inceptive verbs, the clause is generally formulated to give information. In such a case, “the clause takes the form of a proposition” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 110). Although these inceptive verbs are not modal verbs in the traditional sense, Al-Samarra’i (2007) suggests that some of them signify an embedded speaker perspective, including *urgency*, *continuity*, or even *surprise*. Take the following illustrative example:

هَبَّ الرجلُ يجري

(lit. The man suddenly rushed running)

The primary verbal group “هَبَّ” reflects a nuance of suddenness and intensity. This verbal group carries mood and tense distinctions. Thus, it explains an interpersonal stance that reflects the initiation of the action, reflecting its manner. Such verbs express the time-phase, and lavish an interpersonal meaning to the clause in that they are either modulating intensity, expectedness, or urgency. According to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), modulation is a subcategory of modality type, and modulation has two parts: either expressing an obligation or an inclination (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 618). In other words, these verbal groups implicitly encode an evaluative stance.

3. Textual Metafunction: This metafunction represents the thematic foregrounding. In SFL, the first element in the clause is often the Theme, which is the point of departure of the message. It concerns the transitivity system, which “construes the world of experience into a manageable set of PROCESS TYPES” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 170). In English, the main types of processes are material, mental, and relational (p. 171). Having an inceptive verb like “أخذ” or “شرع” at the beginning of the clause foregrounds the initiation phase. The key event or action is involved in the secondary verbal group. Let’s examine the following example:

طَفَقَ الطالبُ يضحك

(The student began to laugh)

Analyzing this example in terms of its thematic structure, the Theme is represented by the primary verbal group "طَفَقَ الطالبُ": The point of departure, and the Rheme is the secondary verbal group (يضحك). This textual choice can signal a shift in narrative time or focus, placing attention on when or how an action began, rather than the action per se. according to SFL, in material processes, there should be an actor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 173), which is the student in the above example. Al-Samarra'i's (2007) analysis aligns with Halliday's (1973) notion that "grammatical choices reflect meaning potentials," and that seemingly similar verbs convey fine-grained distinctions in meaning and discourse function, where Halliday (1973) writes: "Language [...] is a range of possibilities, and an open-end set of options in behavior that are available to the individual in his existence as social man..." and "the meaning potential is the range of significant variation that is at the disposal of the speaker" (Halliday, 1973, p. 49). In his analysis of semi-active participles (2021) and paratactic constructions (2020), Jabir reveals that verbal groups, e.g., complex predicates, are used to express the interpersonal and experiential metafunctions of the clause, building upon data from Arabic religious discourse. These accounts signify the notion that Arabic complex predicates, which are often morphologically subtle, carry crucial discourse-structuring roles (Jabir, 2020; Jabir, 2021).

This study attempts to provide potential answers for the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the translators of the Quranic verse (7:22) maintain the inceptive aspect of the Arabic verbal group (طَفَقًا) in their Qur'anic English translations?
2. How do variations in syntactic structure across translations of (Al-A'rāf 7:22) keep the semantic weight of the original Arabic inceptive verbal group?

3. What are the different syntactic strategies that impact the level of semantic and syntactic equivalence as proposed by Krzeszowski (1990)?

In his influential work */ma'aani al-Nahw/* (Meanings of Grammar), Al-Samarra'i (2007) deeply reflects upon the semantic content and syntactic complexity of Arabic verbs, particularly those classified as */af'aal al-Shuruu'/(inceptive verbs)*, which represent a special group of verbs that indicate the initiation of an action with often delicate pragmatic and aspectual weight. According to Arabic grammarians, these verbs include verbs like */akhadha, bada'a, shara'a, Tafiqqa, ja'ala, ansha'a, and habba/*. For the sake of brevity and the limits of this study, the analysis is limited to the analysis of just one of these verbs, which is */Tafiqqa/* and specifically as it occurs in the Qur'anic verse {وَطَفِقًا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ} (Al-A'rāf 7:22). The verbal group *تَطَفِقًا* in this Qur'anic verse is an inceptive verb that marks the beginning or sudden onset of an action. Al-Samarra'i (2007, p.259) points out that all these verbs reflect the pragmatic meaning of initiating an action. Not only do such verbs carry lexical meaning, but they also have an important aspectual-temporal function. This function marks the transition from a state of non-action to active engagement. Thus, translators are in a position to maintain this aspectual attribution of these verbs, as it impacts both the temporal flow and the thematic focus of the narrative context of any text in which these inceptive verbs occur.

2. Literature Review

Amberber, Baker, and Harvey's (2010) edited volume entitled *Complex Predicates: Cross-Linguistic Perspectives on Event Structure* offers a theoretically solid and empirically grounded discussion of complex predicate constructions across a typologically diverse set of languages. The volume merges contributions from leading scholars who examine the syntax, semantics, and morphology intersection in the representation of event structure through complex predicates, broadly interpreted to

include serial verb constructions, light verb constructions, and auxiliary sequences. This volume has been collected to elucidate how languages deploy multi-element verbal groups to represent complex event relations and argument structures. The data were collected from languages such as Persian, Korean, Tamil, and several Australian Aboriginal languages. Altogether, these contributions challenge simplistic distinctions between lexical and grammatical realization. Rather, they show that complex predicates often occupy a threshold space where grammaticalization processes interact with lexical compositionality (Amberber et al., 2010).

In her highly influential paper “On the Difference Between Auxiliaries, Serial Verbs and Light Verbs,” Melanie Seiss (2009) offers a carefully considered and empirically supported analysis of three types of grammatical constructions, arguing that they tend to be similar in forming complex verbal predicates. However, they are structurally and functionally divergent in significant ways.

As for Auxiliaries, Seiss (2009) maintains that they operate basically at the level of functional structure (f-structure), serving as indicators of tense, aspect, mood, or modality. Auxiliaries are typically grammaticalized, inflectionally constrained, and syntactically combined with a lexical verb. On the other hand, serial verbs evoke a syntactic strategy where multiple full lexical verbs combine in a monoclausal structure without clear references to subordination or coordination. On the semantic level, these complex predicates are compositional, but syntactically they are unclear, raising questions about the cohesion of the verbal groups and the limits of clause structure. Regarding light verbs, they are realized as core event structure without providing rich lexical semantics. In instances such as “give a sigh,” the light verb codifies argument structure, but the key lexical meaning lies in the noun or complement. In her conclusions, Seiss asserts that the distributional behavior of light verbs is often similar to that of auxiliaries, while their semantic properties intersect with serial verbs.

Seiss’s (2009) analysis signifies the distinction between formal syntactic diagnostics and semantic contribution while classifying these

verbal groups. She opposes the merging of surface similarity with functional equivalence. This remark is obvious in cross-linguistic contexts where the boundaries between auxiliaries, serial verbs, and light verbs are misleading. Out of data from German, Yoruba, and other languages, she accentuates the necessity of a theory that accounts for gradient grammaticalization and functional overlap. Her study is significant to debates on complex predicates, predicate decomposition, and the syntax-semantics interface. She also suggests tools for honing lexical representations within constraint-based grammatical models (Seiss, 2009).

Translation of the Qur'an has long been a locus of linguistic, theological, and ideological negotiation. The Qur'anic Arabic is considered an inimitable language (*i'jāz*), so not only does its translation pose lexical and grammatical challenges, but also there are conceptual and doctrinal ones. Rendering the Qur'anic grammatical categories is a recurring issue. This is quite evident when we translate verbal aspects into structurally and semantically different target languages such as English. One key concept relevant to this study is the notion of equivalence posited by Krzeszowski (1990). In his (1990, p.161) *Contrasting Languages*, Krzeszowski refers to the fact that "equivalent sentences" as a term "is not synonymous with the term "translations" in the actual translation practice". For him, recognizing equivalent sentences is a component of one's competence, but "ability to translate is a part of translation performance" (p.161). That is, an actual translation of a sentence is not necessarily semanto-syntactically equivalent. However, optimal translation requires achieving both the propositional content and the grammatical structure of the original. His framework can be used for evaluating instances where form and function are tightly integrated, such as in Arabic's aspectual verb system. As for inceptive verbs, Arabic has an explicit grammaticalized aspect, but English often requires compensatory strategies, such as periphrasis (e.g., "began to + verb") to capture the intended nuance.



Some studies, such as Abdel Haleem (2005) and Khaleel Mohammed (2007), examined the challenge of translating Qur'anic verbs while preserving the intended semantic scope. They referred to the risk of interpretive shifts or loss of grammatical function. Functionally, Al-Samarra'i (2007) identifies the subtle characteristics of inceptive verbs such as the verbal group (طَفِقًا) in indicating a durative or progressive commencement of action, typically triggered by situational context. Al-Samarra'i (2007) highlights several syntactic patterns in Arabic that characterize simple lexical equivalence, including complex verbs that involve aspectual and copular constructions. This durative aspect is also referred to by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) as indicated above. Thus, translators need to consider this aspectual function to maintain the exegetical implications of the Qur'anic verse. Jabir (2021) further supports this point by examining Arabic semi-active participle adjectives in Qur'anic discourse, highlighting how these morphological structures encapsulate both descriptive and aspectual meanings. He elucidates that in many Qur'anic verses incorporating the active-participle (فاعل) in semi-active constructions, these participles contribute to the progressive or durative sense of an action. Not only do they function as adjectives but as essential markers of temporal and interpersonal meanings (for more information about the behavior of the Arabic verb, see Al-Mutalibi, 2024/1986).

In a similar vein, Van den Broeck (1981) and Nida and Taber (1969) distinguish between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, with the former highlighting structural fidelity and the latter highlighting functional clarity. However, there are cases that this dichotomy does not fully address instances where both form and function are equally central, as is often the case in Qur'anic Arabic. On the same vein, Ali (2014) addressed the English translation of phrasal and compound predicates in the Qur'an, highlighting that a translator should have mastery of collocational patterns and predicate decomposition. Comparing ten translations of Arabic compound verbs in various Qur'anic verses, Mahmoud (2015) argues that periphrastic renderings tend to maintain

propositional content but often weaken the textual cohesion. This scaffolds the findings of Newmark (1988), who suggests that syntactic manipulation is required when translating across structurally divergent languages.

Krzyszowski's (1990) model effectively integrates this dichotomy by proposing that the translator's task is to preserve "meaning potential" embedded in both the grammatical choices and propositional content of the original text. In recent years, there has been increased attention to the structure and translation of complex predicates across languages. According to him, while discussing the problem of aspect in English, there is a difference between translations and semanto-syntactic equivalents in that "some kind of translation of any given sentence into another language is always available, ..., equivalent sentences across languages are not always available due to the existence of semanto-syntactic gaps in various languages" (Krzyszowski, 1990, p. 165).

Beeson (2013) explores the behavior of light verb constructions in Arabic-English translation, indicating the frequency of restructuring in the target language. Unlike English light verb constructions, six functions of the Arabic composite predicate in the Qur'an are addressed, including: *obviating ambiguity resulting from the use of a polysemous simple verb, expressing continuity and eternity of an action when a specific aspectual property is intended, compensating for the nonexistence of a corresponding simple verb, evoking certain psychological and mental effects, avoiding dysphemism, and expressing the perfection of performing some rituals.*

Haspelmath and Müller-Bardey (2004) offer accounts concerning the typology of serial verb constructions, which can be applied to Arabic periphrastic verb forms due to their rich morphological system. Their framework is useful in analyzing Qur'anic inceptive verbs, especially in distinguishing *causative, inchoative, and continuative* interpretations. The same ideas were confirmed by Dixon (2006). El-Zeini (2012) focuses on the use of compound and light verbs in Qur'anic Arabic and demonstrates how English translations often tend to adopt unmarked

forms, thus obscuring the stylistic or theological subtleties encoded in the original. Pragmatically, Holes (2004) addresses the aspectual shifts in Qur'anic Arabic and the obstacles of their functional rendering in English. Synchronously, Baker (1992) and Pym (2004) advocate the significance of translational shifts in handling idiomatic expressions, including complex predicates.

Considering ideological and cultural paradigms, and to prioritize fluency in the target culture, Venuti (1995) highlights that aspectual compound predicates, as stylistic features, are often omitted. As for Venuti, his translation practices in English-speaking cultures have sought "fluency", preferring an unforced narrative that disguises the translator's intervention and cultural difference. House (1997) also emphasizes giving priority to fluency in translation. Considering some corpus-based projects, Al-Azami (2019) and Zughoul (2021) make systematic comparisons of aspectual predicates across multiple Qur'anic translations. They conclude that the inceptive function (such as *طَفِقًا*) is erratically depicted, with implications for accurate exegesis and the reader's construction of meaning.

The current study conforms to the above theoretical and empirical perspectives, applying Krzeszowski's equivalence model, Halliday's functional views, and Al-Samarra'i (2007) to analyze how ten English translations of the verbal group *طَفِقًا* in (Al-A'rāf 7:22). The relation between literal fidelity and interpretive clarity is negotiated. It is significant for the growing body of research that examines Qur'anic translation through a linguistic perspective. This study addresses the insufficiently explored category of inceptive verbal constructions and complex predicates in Arabic.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative analysis rooted in Krzeszowski's (1990) framework of translation equivalence, which distinguishes between semantic equivalence (fidelity to meaning) and syntactic equivalence (fidelity to grammatical structure). Krzeszowski's



(1990) framework is integrated by accounts from Al-Samarra'i (2007) and Halliday (1973). The analysis focuses on one verse of the Qur'an, (Al-A'raf 7:22), and specifically the inceptive verb **طَفَّقَا**, which appears in the clause **فَطَفَّقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ** ("Then they began covering themselves with the leaves of Paradise"). Ten widely circulated English translations were selected based on their popularity, theological orientations, and representativeness of different translation styles. The data to be analyzed includes the following ten translations of the Qur'anic verse Q7:22: Here are ten different English translations along with the names of their translators:

1. Sahih International: "Their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the leaves of Paradise."
2. Abdullah Yusuf Ali: "When they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies."
3. Marmaduke Pickthall: "Their shame became manifest to them and they began to hide (by heaping) on themselves some of the leaves of the Garden."
4. Maulana Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik: "When they tasted of the tree, their nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise."
5. Muhammad Asad: "they became conscious of their nakedness, and they began to cover themselves with pieced-together leaves from the garden."
6. Al-Hilali & Khan: "That which was hidden from them of their shame (private parts) became manifest to them and they began to stick together the leaves of Paradise over themselves."
7. Dr. Mustafa Khattab (The Clear Quran): "So he brought about their fall through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise."

8. Taqi Usmani: "Their parts of shame were exposed to them, and they started stitching on themselves some of the leaves of Paradise."
9. Edip-Layth (Quran: A Reformist Translation): "Their bodies became apparent to them, and they rushed to cover themselves with the leaves of the paradise."
10. Shabbir Ahmed (Quran As It Explains Itself): "Their bodies became apparent to them, and they began to rush to cover themselves with leaves from the Paradise..."

The analysis of each translation has been conducted in terms of the product being realized. This product is one of three constructions as equivalents for the Arabic Qur'anic verbal group (طَفَّقَا): a periphrastic construction (e.g., "began to + verb"), a nominal or causative construction (e.g., "started covering themselves"), and an interpretive elaboration (e.g., "they tried to cover themselves" or "took to stitching"). As for the process of evaluating the translations, there are two points:

1. On the semantic level: Does the translation maintain the inceptive aspect of the verb and articulate the intended meaning of the Qur'anic verbal group?
2. On the syntactic level: Does the structure of the English translation successfully recreate the verbal group and aspectual function of this Qur'anic verbal group?

By also integrating Al-Samarra's (2007) and Halliday's (1973) functional perspectives, the researcher has adopted the above criteria to classify each translation as high, moderate, or low equivalence. The data were presented descriptively, and patterns were identified to evaluate the link between syntactic strategy and overall translational fidelity. The findings were then interpreted in light of Krzeszowski's (1990) assertion that the best translation is entitled to maintain grammatical form and propositional content. This methodology leads to an in-depth analysis of a defined linguistic feature, the verbal group (طَفَّقَا), across multiple Qur'anic translations.

4. Analysis and Findings

A comparative analysis of ten English translations of the Qur'anic verb *طَفَّفَا* in (Al-A'rāf 7:22) will be conducted. These will be evaluated by adopting Krzeszowski's (1990) model of semantic and syntactic equivalence, consolidated by Al-Samarra'i (2007) and Halliday (1973). The verbal group *طَفَّفَا* is an inceptive construction in Arabic, which indicates the onset of an action. The situation in this Qur'anic verse starts with Adam and Eve covering themselves after eating from the forbidden tree. In this context, preserving the inceptive meaning of the verbal group and its syntactic realization ensures an optimal translation.

The translations were categorized according to three dominant syntactic strategies: *periphrastic construction*, *nominal/causative structure*, and *interpretive elaboration*. In the following four translations, the periphrastic construction ("began to + verb") is used:

1. Sahih International: "they began to fasten together upon themselves"
2. Abdullah Yusuf Ali: "They began to sew together, for their covering"
3. Muhammad Asad: "They began to cover themselves."
4. Al-Hilali & Khan: "They began to cover themselves."

The periphrastic structure, "began to + verb", recreates the sense of the inceptive function of *طَفَّفَا*. On the semantic level, it reflects the initiation of a physical act (covering, sewing, fastening). In Arabic, this evokes the sense of immediacy and reaction underlying. Structurally, the verbal group "began to" has the same effect as the auxiliary-plus-verb structure of Arabic inceptive forms. By doing so, translators can preserve a high degree of syntactic equivalence. These renderings can thus achieve Krzeszowski's (1990) ideal of accurate equivalence, maintaining both meaning and form.

Another group, consisting of two translations, adopts nominal or causative constructions: They are Farooq-i-Azam Malik, who used:

“They started covering themselves with leaves.”, and Dr. Mustafa Khattab, who used: “They began covering themselves with leaves.” Although the sense of the initiation of the action is still preserved, these two translations employ verbs like “started” or use gerund forms (e.g., “covering themselves”) without the “to + infinitive” structure. Consequently, the inceptive aspect is somewhat sacrificed; the inception process moves from the initiation of the act to the act itself. On the semantic level, these renderings maintain the general meaning; however, on the structural level, the Arabic versions are not realized as a dual-verb construction. They therefore demonstrate moderate semantic equivalence and lower syntactic faithfulness.

Using interpretive or idiomatic renderings, the third group includes four translations: Marmaduke Pickthall uses: “*They began to stick on themselves some of the leaves.*”, Edip-Layth uses: “*They tried to cover themselves with the leaves of Paradise*”, Arthur Arberry uses: “*They took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the Garden*”. What characterizes these renderings is their introducing of interpretive elements not available in the source text. For instance, Edip-Layth adopts the primary verbal group “tried to”, which reveals the lack of a modality dimension in the original Arabic. Arthur Arberry, in his use of the verbal group “took to stitching”, shows the element of idiomaticity; however, he triggers the balance from the initiation process to the method of implementation. Because these translational attempts may enhance readability or cultural accessibility, they encapsulate semantic and structural deviations. Accordingly, these renderings reflect lower realizations of both semantic and syntactic equivalence. Both Lado (1957) and James (1980), in their views on applications of contrastive analysis, conform to Krzeszowski’s semanto-syntactic model, and they also emphasize the importance of textual and contextual factors. This also aligns with Catford’s (1965) ideas in his translation-oriented model of equivalence, which centers on the distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence. Catford’s (1965) model is

highly applicable to evaluating translations like those of Pickthall or Edip Layth, which may maintain meaning but sacrifice structural matching.

Moreover, Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics provides perspectives that can be utilized to analyze the discourse function of the verbal group **طَفِقًا**. As a material process, this verbal group triggers the meaning of the beginning of an action. It functions within the domain of the experiential metafunction in the sense that it entails a physical change initiated by the agents. Its thematized position and role also help compose the theme-rheme organization of the sentence, thus taking part in the textual metafunction. Replicating this thematic prominence can be achieved by maintaining that initial position, which is realized as (e.g., "they began to..."). On the contrary, those renderings that use postposition or paraphrasing the onset (e.g., "prompting them to...") shift the focus of the informational weight of the clause. As a result, those translators may trigger the balance of discourse coherence and pragmatic interpretation.

5. Results and Discussion

The results of this study provide significant perspectives into the balance between syntactic strategy and translation equivalence in Qur'anic English renderings, especially as indicated by the inceptive verbal group **طَفِقًا** in (Al-A'rāf 7:22). The most dominant syntactic strategy in the English translated version is the use of periphrastic constructions, such as "began to + verb." Not only do these translations maintain the key propositional content, i.e., Adam and Eve initiated an act of self-covering, but they also reflect the Arabic verbal group structure, which gives the inceptive aspect. This scaffolds Krzeszowski's (1990) view that the optimal translation preserves both meaning and form. Furthermore, these translations reflect a high level of linguistic transparency, making them accessible to the target readership while being parallel to the source syntax and aspectual significance. However, nominal or causative constructions, such as "they started covering themselves," have been used to provide a partial alignment with the original Arabic text. It is

important to indicate that capturing the general semantic intent was accompanied by sacrificing the aspectual function of the verbal group. This scaffolds the idea that translators are in a position to maintain a compromise between functional readability and grammatical precision. From a Krzeszowskian perspective, these translations can be considered as an intermediate position on the equivalence spectrum. That is to say, translators should keep the propositional content accessible to the target readership as well as being faithful to the structural aspect.

Translations that incorporate interpretive augmentation, deviations from semantic and syntactic equivalence are expected. For example, in phrases such as “*they tried to cover themselves*” or “*they took to stitching*,” there are modal or idiomatic elements functioning to reinterpret, i.e., not to translate the original inceptive verbal group. Although these renderings may scaffold clarity or theological subtlety for the target readership, they alter the two required levels: the lexical meaning and grammatical construction of the source text. In Krzeszowski’s terminology, these translations demonstrate a breakdown in dual equivalence; such translational attempts seek to consolidate reader interpretation with little consideration of formal and semantic accuracy.

Drawing on Krzeszowski’s (1990) dual-axis model of equivalence, three main strategies of translation can be identified in the examined ten English renderings of the Qur’anic verb. The translations of Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, and Hilali & Khan use a periphrastic strategy, which can be valued as maintaining both semantic and syntactic equivalence. These translations align with the original Arabic structure as well as the aspectual nuances of the source verb. Khattab and Farooq-i-Azam Malik employ a nominal or causative approach. Though this strategy preserves the core semantic content to a moderate degree, it often affects the syntactic form, producing low syntactic equivalence. Lastly, an interpretive or idiomatic rendering is adopted by Pickthall, Edip-Layth, and Arberry; this strategy reflects a tendency to subjective interpretation and departs significantly from the



Arabic syntactic construction. Consequently, this approach generally exhibits low to moderate semantic equivalence and low syntactic fidelity (Krzyszowski, 1990). These findings emphasize that the syntactic strategy employed affects the level of translation equivalence. Only the periphrastic group consistently succeeds in reflecting both the semantic content and grammatical structure of the verbal group **طَفَّقَا**.

To sum up, the analysis suggests that syntactic strategy substantially influences the degree of translation equivalence. As for periphrastic constructions, they tend to exhibit fidelity to the linguistic and functional properties of the source text, while nominal and interpretive strategies emerge as a compromise for the dual fidelity that Krzyszowski recommends. This finding accentuates the significance of syntactic decision-making in reflecting both the source-text integrity and target-text accessibility in Qur'anic translation. Ultimately, the case of the verbal group **طَفَّقَا** shows how a simple verb choice unveils a larger network of grammatical, semantic, and theological considerations. The syntactic strategies adopted by translators are not neutral; they carry interpretive weight and shape how readers conceptualize the Qur'anic narrative. As such, this study provides guidelines for a principled and linguistically-oriented approach to Qur'anic translation. This approach highlights the structural and functional dimensions of the source language. The findings are useful in attempts in Qur'anic translation studies, particularly in aspectual verb rendering and the translator's role in balancing fidelity with accessibility.

6. Conclusion and implications for further research

The researcher has analyzed ten English translations of the Qur'anic inceptive verbal group (**طَفَّقَا**) in (Al-A'raf 7:22) in terms of Krzyszowski's (1990) model of translation equivalence, integrated with perspectives from Al-Samarra'i (2007) and Halliday (1973). It has been revealed that the syntactic strategy is crucial, and thus it plays a significant role in selecting the most appropriate equivalence.

Periphrastic constructions of some translational attempts, such as “began to + verb”, have been influential in preserving the inceptive aspect of the Arabic verbal group. This can be done by ensuring high levels of both semantic and syntactic fidelity. These translations ensured fidelity to the linguistic form and meaning of the source text, and thereby aligned closely with Krzeszowski’s (1990) notion of optimal equivalence. Nevertheless, those translations that render this Arabic verbal group as nominal clauses or interpretive elaborations often manipulate the grammatical structure or introduce an additional layer of meaning not available in the original Arabic. Accessibility or interpretive depth can be enhanced by adopting these strategies, but they frequently sacrifice structural accuracy and precise aspectual function.

Some translations achieve a direct equivalence to the inceptive function with a similar verb-phrase structure in English; therefore, they can preserve the original Arabic text's form and meaning. In general, a more literal rendering is opted for, which leads to a closer correspondence to the source text's linguistic features. However, the translations that depart from the periphrastic construction, i.e., those employing causative nominal clauses or interpretive elaborations, evoke the translator's predicament. Although these alternative translational attempts may offer subtle interpretations to convey a deeper comprehension of the Qur’anic verse's context, they often fail to achieve the required syntactic equivalence and also affect the semantic accuracy of the specific inceptive function of the verbal group. Causative nominal clauses and interpretive elaborations indicate a tendency towards maintaining a particular reading of the verse. Thus, this might potentially obscure direct correspondence to the Arabic text. This strategy might lend the text to a more ready understanding in terms of potential theological or culturally sensitive issues. Nevertheless, comprehension might be hindered in such rendering through imposing a particular interpretation on the text. Now, the researcher is in a position to provide potential answers to the research questions:



Research Question 1: To what extent does the use of periphrastic constructions (e.g., “began to + verb”) preserve the inceptive aspect of the verbal group **طَفَّقَا** in Qur’anic English translations?

In the translational attempts below, high fidelity to inceptive meaning is achieved by using periphrastic constructions. These include Sahih International, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, and Al-Hilali and Khan. This construction, namely, *began to + verb*, directly mirrors the Arabic verbal group in question. This strategy reflects the inceptive or durative function, which shows the initiation of a continuous action, maintains both the lexical content and the aspectual function of the original text, and ensures high degrees of both semantic and syntactic equivalence. Achieving both axes is called signification, according to Pym (2010, p.9), which refers to the actual use of the word. According to Newmark (1988a, p. 30), this translation procedure matches one-to-one translation. These translations conform to Krzeszowski’s (1990) framework by maintaining the intended propositional content and the structural form of that text. What is important is conveying the sense of the initiation of the intended action in the Arabic verbal group. This aligns with the notion that translators, following structuralist grammar, consider “grammar as a transmitter of meaning” (Newmark, 1988b, p.125).

Research Question 2: How do variations in syntactic structure across translations of (Al-A‘rāf 7:22) influence the semantic fidelity to the original Arabic inceptive verbal group?

Dr. Mustafa Khattab and Farooq-i-Azam Malik used nominal or causative constructions. In these translational attempts, the inceptive aspect is somewhat preserved. The verbal groups include "started", which is more vague than "began to". As for syntax, it does not directly reflect the dual number system of the subject and the continuous verbal action of **طَفَّقَا**. According to Khattab, for instance, he tries to ensure fluidity by simplifying the expression. On the semantic level, the product (they began covering) is preserved; however, the translation starts distancing

itself from the stylistic and grammatical complexity of the Arabic verbal group.

Marmaduke Pickthall, Edip-Layth and Arthur Arberry reflect interpretive renderings. They adopt the following strategies: avoiding literal renderings by using a more inferred rendering, using verbal groups, such as “tried to,” that does not recreate the inceptive reference precisely, and they lavish conceptual or theological overtones. In Krzeszowski’s terms, these translational attempts manipulate lower syntactic equivalence, partial fulfillment of Semantic equivalence, and the interpretive role of the translator is more visible, echoing Venuti’s paradigm.

Research Question 3: In what ways do different syntactic strategies (e.g., periphrasis, nominal clauses, interpretive elaboration) affect the level of semantic and syntactic equivalence as conceptualized by Krzeszowski (1990)?

Krzeszowski’s (1990) framework recognizes the dual importance of propositional content and structural correspondence. This hypothesis has been confirmed by the provided translations of (Al-A‘rāf 7:22). That is, the selection of syntactic construction plays a pivotal role in ensuring both the semantic content and grammatical structure. In addition, seeking clarity to make the text more accessible to readers is also a target achieved by using interpretive renderings, such as “they tried to cover themselves” or “they took to stitching”. Thus, one can notice that such translations have additional interpretive layers that are not lexically or grammatically available in the Arabic text. Thus, readers can expect what the translated text should be like, to use Chesterman’s norms (Munday, 2001, p. 118). However, such renderings sacrifice the inceptive function of the Arabic verbal group (طَفَّقًا). Such translational attempts reduce the semantic precision as well as the structural alignment.

Considering English-speaking audiences, further research can explore the notion of reader response concerning Arabic inceptive verbs, and the role of strategies in facilitating or obstructing the understanding

of the Qur'anic content. The need for further research into the reception of these varying translations is paramount. This raises a critical question about the translator's role: Should the primary goal be to replicate the form and function of the original text as closely as possible, or to prioritize accessibility and interpretive clarity for the target audience? In addition, the same topic can be reconsidered with a special focus on systemic functional linguistics to analyze such verbal groups in terms of the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

- 1- Data Availability Statement: (The manuscript includes all the data used in the study.)**
- 2- Conflict of Interest Statement: (The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could affect the content of this research.)**
- 3- Funding Statement: This research was fully funded by the authors without any financial support from other entities.**



References

- Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (2005). *The Qur'an: A new translation*. Oxford University Press.
- Al-Mutalibi, M. (2024). *Tense forms in the Arabic language* (J. K. Jabir, Trans.). Dar Al-Yousif for printing. (Original work published 1986).
- Amberber, M., Baker, B., & Harvey, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Complex predicates: Cross-linguistic perspectives on event structure*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Azami, A. (2019). Corpus-based analysis of verb tense in Qur'anic translations. *Translation Studies Quarterly*, 12(2), 24–42.
- Ali, H. S. (2014). Translating Arabic complex predicates into English: A study of the Qur'anic text. *Journal of Islamic Linguistics*, 2(1), 33–51.
- Al-Samarra'i, F. (2008). *Ma'ānī al-Nahw* [Meanings of grammar]. Maktabat al-Ma'ārif.
- Baker, M. (1992). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. Routledge.
- Beeson, J. (2013). Arabic light verb constructions and their translation into English. *Babel*, 59(3), 345–361.
- Butt, M. (1995). *The Structure of Complex Predicates in Urdu*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Butt, M., & Lahiri, A. (2011). Complex predicates in Urdu. In M. Butt & T. H. King (Eds.), *Proceedings of the LFG Conference* (pp. 67–83). CSLI Publications.
- Catford, J. C. (1965). *A linguistic theory of translation: An essay in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Dickins, J., Hervey, S., & Higgins, I. (2002). *Thinking Arabic translation: A course in translation method: Arabic to English*. Routledge.
- Dixon, R. M. W. (2006). 'Serial verb constructions: conspectus and coda', pp. 338-50 of *Serial verb constructions: a cross-linguistic*

typology, ed. by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

El-Zeini, H. (2012). Complex verbal structures in the Qur'an: Challenges of translating meaning and function. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 14(2), 45–66.

Farghal, M., & Shunnaq, A. (1999). *Translation with reference to English and Arabic: A practical guide*. Dar Al-Hilal.

Halliday, M.A.K.(1973). *Explorations in the functions of language*. Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K.(1994). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. & Mathiessen, C. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd edition). Edward Arnold.

Haspelmath, M., & Müller-Bardey, T. (2004). Valency change. In G. Booij, C. Lehmann, & J. Mugdan (Eds.), *Morphology: An international handbook on inflection and word-formation* (Vol. 2, pp. 1130–1145). Mouton de Gruyter.

Holes, C. (2004). *Modern Arabic: Structures, functions, and varieties*. Georgetown University Press.

House, J. (1997). *Translation quality assessment: A model revisited*. Gunter Narr.

Jabir, J. K. (2020). The interpersonal component in Qur'anic paratactic projections: Critique of translation into English. *Journal of the Faculty of Basic Education*, 22(4), 55–72.

Jabir, J. K. (2021). The role of morphology in translation: Arabic semi-active participle adjectives as an example. *Journal of Adab Al-Basrah*, (95/2), 1–18.

James, C. (1980). *Contrastive analysis*. Longman.

Krzeszowski, T. P. (1990). The axiological parameter in translation. In K. Marcin (Ed.), *Translation and meaning* (Vol. 1, pp. 307–313). Euroterm.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. University of Michigan Press.

- Mahmoud, A. (2015). Strategies in translating compound verbs in the Qur'an. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, Special Issue 3, 88–107.
- Mohammed, K. (2007). Assessing English translations of the Qur'an. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 9(1), 69–89.
- Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing translation studies*. Routledge.
- Newmark, P. (1988a). *Approaches to translation*. Prentice Hall.
- Newmark, P. (1988b). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.
- Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The theory and practice of translation*. E. J. Brill.
- Pym, A. (2004). *The moving text: Localization, translation, and distribution*. John Benjamins.
- Pym, A. (2010). *Exploring translation theories*. Routledge.
- Seiss, M. (2009). On the difference between auxiliaries, serial verbs and light verbs. In M. Butt & T. H. King (Eds.), *Proceedings of the LFG09 Conference* (pp. 501–521). CSLI Publications.
- Van den Broeck, R. (1981). The concept of equivalence in translation theory: Some critical reflections. In J. Holmes, J. Lambert, & R. van den Broeck (Eds.), *Literature and translation* (pp. 29–47). Acco.
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.
- Zughoul, M. R. (2021). Aspect and Aktionsart in Qur'anic Arabic and their translation. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 21(1), 55–73.

