
A Comparative Analysis of Four English Translations of Imam Ali's (AS) Khutbat al-Gharra' ♦

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Abstract

This study examines four English translations of Imam Ali's Khutbat al-Gharra' from Nahjul Balaghah, analysing how each translator renders the sermon's syntactic, rhetorical, and semantic dimensions. Combining House's (1997) Translation Quality Assessment model with Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework, the research evaluates functional shifts, stylistic transformations, and the degree of fidelity to the sermon's original communicative purpose. A qualitative comparative approach was adopted to examine selected textual segments, with particular attention to rhetorical devices such as parallelism, repetition, Qur'anic intertextuality, and moral imagery characteristic of classical Arabic sermons. The findings revealed that none of the translations fully preserves the sermon's rhetorical richness; each reflects different priorities, literal fidelity, stylistic clarity, exegetical explanation, or lexical precision. The study concluded that translating Khutbat al-Gharra' requires balancing semantic accuracy with sensitivity to the text's theological and rhetorical depth. It recommended that translators integrate functional and stylistic awareness to better convey the sermon's spiritual resonance and linguistic artistry.

Keywords: Nahjul Balaghah, Translation quality, stylistic analysis, House TQA, rhetorical devices, classical Arabic, Comparative Analysis.

دراسة تحليلية مقارنة لأربع ترجمات إنكليزية للخطبة الغراء للإمام علي (عليه السلام) ♦

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المستخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أربع ترجمات إنجليزية لخطبة الغراء للإمام علي (عليه السلام) الواردة في نهج البلاغة، وذلك من خلال فحص كيفية تعامل المترجمين مع الأبعاد النحوية والبلاغية والدلالية للنص العربي الأصلي. وتعتمد الدراسة إطارين نظريين متكاملين هما: نموذج هاوس (١٩٩٧) لتقويم جودة الترجمة ذو المنظور الوظيفي-البراغماتي، وإطار ليتش وشورت (٢٠٠٧) الأسلوبي المعني بتحليل السمات اللغوية والإنشائية وتأثيرها في توليد المعنى. وبمنهج تحليلي مقارن، تتناول الدراسة نماذج مختارة من الخطبة، مع التركيز على أبرز سماتها البلاغية كالتماثل التركيبي، والتكرار، والتناسل القرآني، والصور الأخلاقية المكثفة التي تشكل بنية الخطاب الوعظي في العربية الكلاسيكية. وتبين نتائج التحليل أنّ أياً من الترجمات المدروسة لا ينجح في الحفاظ على البنية البلاغية للنص بكامل ثرائها، إذ تكشف كل ترجمة توجهاً مختلفاً في التعاطي مع النص، يتراوح بين الحرفية الشديدة، أو السلاسة الأسلوبية، أو التفسير الوعظي، أو الدقة المعجمية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنّ ترجمة خطبة الغراء تستلزم مقارنة متوازنة تراعي الدقة الدلالية من جهة، والعمق اللاهوتي والبلاغي للنص من جهة أخرى، بما يضمن بقاء الأثر الخطابي والروحاني حاضراً في اللغة الهدف. كما توصي بضرورة دمج الوعي الوظيفي بالتحليل الأسلوبي في أعمال الترجمة المستقبلية للنصوص الدينية الكلاسيكية، لتعزيز القدرة على نقل البنية الفنية والمقاصد الخطابية للنصوص الأصلية على حدّ سواء.

كلمات مفتاحية: نهج البلاغة، دراسات الترجمة، جودة الترجمة، التحليل الأسلوبي، نموذج هاوس،

البلاغة العربية، التحليل المقارن.

1. Introduction

Nahjul Balaghah (1009-1010 CE), the well-known collection of sermons, letters, and sayings attributed to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) and was compiled around 1009-1010 CE (400 AH) by the prominent Shi'i scholar Sharif al-Radi (also known as al-Sayyid al-Radi). Sharif al-Radi was the compiler (collector and editor) of the existing speeches and writings attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, which were already in circulation and preserved by scholars long before al-Radi's time. He selected the material primarily for its eloquent content and literary value, hence the title "Nahjul Balaghah," meaning "The Peak of Eloquence". NB is widely recognised for both its intellectual depth and its exceptional linguistic craftsmanship. Often described as second only to the Holy Qur'an in eloquence, NB illustrates the expressive power of classical Arabic through its intricate imagery, rhythmic phrasing, and precise syntactic structures (Al-Hufi, 2000; Al-Razi, 1985). Among its many texts, *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, commonly translated as *The Brilliant Sermon*, stands out for its thematic richness and stylistic complexity. In this sermon, Imam Ali (AS) reflects on human nature, divine justice, moral responsibility, and the dangers of worldly temptation, presenting these themes through carefully balanced sentences and vivid rhetorical devices that appeal to both intellect and emotion (Al-Hufi, 2000). Translating such a text into English poses significant challenges. Much of its force relies on the traditional disciplines of Arabic rhetoric: *ilm al-ma'ani*, which concerns syntactic variation and contextual suitability; *ilm al-bayan*, which incorporates metaphor, simile, and other figurative techniques; and *ilm al-badi'*, which includes embellishments such as antithesis and wordplay (Al-Sakkaki, 1987). These elements are deeply embedded in the sermon's structure and are not adequately reproduced in English, a language with different syntactic and rhetorical conventions. As a result, translators must balance faithfulness to the original form with the need to communicate meaning clearly to readers who may be unfamiliar with the cultural and linguistic background of the text (Abdul-

Raof, 2001).

This study examines four English translations of Khutbat al-Gharra' to explore how translators navigate the relationship between meaning and expression. By comparing their approaches to the sermon's syntactic, rhetorical, and semantic features, the research aims to shed light on the possibilities and limitations of translating classical Arabic religious discourse into English. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions in translation studies regarding the transmission of sacred, culturally significant texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the key rhetorical and stylistic features of Khutbat al-Gharra' in its original Arabic form?
2. How do the selected English translations of Khutbat al-Gharra' reflect or alter these rhetorical features?
3. What translation strategies are used by the translators to balance fidelity to the Arabic source text and readability in English?
4. How effective are these strategies in preserving the theological, cultural, and rhetorical significance of the original sermon?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Overview of Comparative Analyses of Translation

Comparative analysis has long been central to both linguistics and translation. Early comparative linguistics concentrated on mapping grammatical systems, phonology, and historical relationships between languages (Robins, 1997), but this structural focus later gave way to more functional and pragmatic concerns, particularly in translation studies, where the key question is how meaning is reshaped across languages and cultures. Within this discipline, comparison has moved beyond testing "equivalence" to examining how messages, intentions, and stylistic features are re-configured for new audiences. As Bassnett (2014) notes, translation is best understood as a negotiation between

texts and cultures rather than a simple act of word replacement.

Detailed, side-by-side analysis of source and target texts reveals the decisions and priorities embedded in a translation, exposing how linguistic constraints, cultural mediation, or ideological positioning influence the final product (Hatim & Mason, 1997). Such analysis can operate at a micro level, examining lexical items, syntax, and rhetorical devices, and at a macro level, assessing tone, genre, cultural allusion, and intended effect (Karimzadeh, Samani, Vaseghi, & Rezvani Kalajahi, 2015). Toury's (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies* further shifted attention from judging translations as "deficient copies" of an original to viewing them as cultural products shaped by target-culture norms. This perspective has proved especially useful for literary and religious texts, where strict literalism is often sacrificed to stylistic, poetic, or theological considerations.

Comparative analysis also plays a formative role for translators themselves. By examining existing translations, practitioners can identify effective strategies, recurring problems, and the range of choices available to them (Newmark, 1988). As the field has expanded, comparative work has intersected with functionalism, postcolonial theory, and corpus-based approaches, exploring issues such as Skopos-driven purpose (Nord, 1997; Vermeer, 1989), ideological positioning (Tymoczko, 1999; Venuti, 2012), and translation universals like simplification and explicitation (Baker, 1996). Overall, comparative translation analysis has evolved into an interdisciplinary methodology that interrogates not only how accurately a translation reflects its source but how the translator's interpretive role, cultural context, and strategic priorities shape the new text (Munday, 2016). This is particularly relevant for a text such as *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, where theological fidelity, rhetorical artistry, and cultural nuance must all be held in careful balance.

2.2 Translation of Religious Texts

The translation of religious texts constitutes a specialised branch of Translation Studies, where the task involves more than linguistic

transfer: it entails conveying sacred meaning, doctrinal authority, and deeply embedded belief systems across languages and cultures. Because such texts are often regarded as inspired or canonical, they are surrounded by constraints that do not typically apply to secular material (Naude, 2020). Nida's (1964) notion of dynamic equivalence, which sought to produce a comparable response in the target audience, marked a significant shift from rigid formal equivalence toward a more functional orientation, particularly in missionary and liturgical settings. Later work, such as Naudé (2010), further explored this move; while also noting the controversies it sparked in communities anxious to preserve textual stability (Metzger, 1993).

Religious translation is therefore closely tied to authority and ideology. Lefevere (1992) highlights the role of patronage systems, churches, seminaries, publishing houses that influence what is translated, how it is translated, and which versions are sanctioned. Translators operate within these structures as rewriters who shape the reception of the sacred text, whether they intend to or not. Functionalist approaches, especially Skopos theory, underscore that different purposes, scholarly exegesis, public worship, and evangelisation may require different translation strategies (Vermeer, 1989; Nord, 1997). At the same time, postcolonial scholars have shown how religious translation has sometimes served as an instrument of cultural dominance, embedding power relations within seemingly neutral linguistic choices (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002).

Another major difficulty is the tension between preserving sacred form and ensuring comprehensibility. Classical languages such as Qur'anic Arabic or Biblical Hebrew rely heavily on complex syntax, dense allusion, and rhythmic patterning; preserving these features may obscure meaning for modern readers, while simplifying them risks doctrinal or rhetorical loss (Beekman & Callow, 1974). As a result, the translator inevitably becomes an interpreter, negotiating between theological content, institutional expectations, and the needs of the target audience (Steiner, 1975; Kearns, 2008). In Islam, this tension is heightened by the view that the Qur'an in Arabic is inimitable and that any rendering into another language is, strictly speaking, an

interpretation rather than the Qur'an itself (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

These debates are directly relevant to the present study, which examines English translations of *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, a sermon whose authority, rhetorical texture, and theological density pose this form precisely meaning dilemma. The translators of *Nahjul Balaghah* must thus navigate institutional expectations, doctrinal sensitivities, and cross-cultural reception while striving to make Imam Ali's (AS) discourse intelligible and resonant for readers outside its original linguistic and religious context.

2.3 Rhetoric in *Nahjul Balaghah*

Nahjul Balaghah is widely recognised as a paradigmatic text of Arabic eloquence, where theological reflection and rhetorical artistry are profoundly interlinked. The sermons and letters attributed to Imam Ali (AS) draw extensively on the three classical disciplines of Arabic rhetoric: *ilm al-ma'ani*, which regulates syntactic variation, thematic ordering, and contextual appropriateness; *ilm al-bayan*, which governs figurative expression such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, and allegory; and *ilm al-badi'*, which encompasses embellishments including antithesis, *paronomasia*, and various forms of phonetic and lexical parallelism (Al-Hufi, 2000). In *Khutbat al-Gharra'* in particular, these disciplines converge in a highly patterned discourse marked by rhythmic prose, semantic parallelism, and tightly controlled sound patterns that reinforce key theological and moral themes.

For translators, this rhetorical density poses a complex problem. Many of the sermon's effects depend on features that are language-specific: patterned assonance, balanced cola, and subtle shifts in word order that classical Arabic audiences would recognise as cues of emphasis, irony, or warning. As Venuti (2012) and Tymoczko (1999) argue, such rhetorical structures are not easily reproduced in a target language without either "domesticating" them into familiar local conventions or "foreignizing" the text in ways that may appear opaque or overly ornate. In the case of *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, the translator must decide whether to prioritise semantic clarity at the cost of rhetorical

force, or to attempt partial compensation by creating new patterns of rhythm, parallelism, and imagery in English. Either choice inevitably involves interpretive intervention. The present study takes these rhetorical considerations as central, treating the sermon not only as a theological text but as a carefully crafted rhetorical performance whose features must be systematically traced across the four translations under examination.

2.4 Previous Studies

Several studies have addressed the linguistic and translational challenges of Nahjul Balaghah, though relatively few focus specifically on Khutbat al-Gharra'. Farajzadeh, Parvini, and Haji Khani (2019) provide one of the most detailed stylistic examinations of the sermon in their study *The Phonetic and Lexical Implications in Nahjul-Balagha: A Case Study of the Al-Gharra Sermon*. Using a form of statistical stylistics, they analyse the phonological texture of the Arabic text, such as the distribution of voiced and voiceless consonants, patterns of syllable structure, and recurrent sound sequences, and link these to shifts in tone and rhetorical emphasis. At the lexical level, they show how carefully selected vocabulary reinforces the sermon's formal register and spiritual themes. Although their work does not deal directly with translation, it underscores the extent to which sound and diction contribute to the sermon's persuasive force, underscoring the difficulty of preserving these features in another language.

Focusing more explicitly on translation, Tisgam and Al-Ghazalli (2021) examine Nahjul Balaghah through the lens of speech act theory in their study *Nahjul Balagha between Translation and Mediation: A Linguistic or a Cultural Encounter?* They argue that many utterances in Imam Ali's discourse are performative in nature, commands, exhortations, and declarations that aim to effect spiritual and behavioural change rather than simply convey information. Their analysis of Reza's (2003) English translation shows that an overly literal or semantically narrow rendering can weaken the illocutionary force of such speech acts, resulting in what they term "pragmatic dilution". By highlighting the gap between semantic transfer and performative equivalence, their study

draws attention to the need for translation strategies that consider the sermonic and hortatory character of the text, an insight directly relevant to *Khutbat al-Gharra'*.

Al-Taie's study, *Translating Key Arabic Rhetorical Devices into English: The NB as a Case Study*, examines the challenges of conveying the dense rhetorical and exegetical texture of *Nahj al-Balagha* (NB) into English. She highlights how the text's classical Arabic features, its figures of speech, metaphorical structures, and rhetorical embellishments, complicate efforts to achieve both linguistic fidelity and rhetorical equivalence. Using the traditional Arabic rhetorical branches of *ma'ani*, *bayan*, and *badi'*, Al-Taie conducts a comparative analysis of two major English translations: Jaafery (1965) and Al-Jibouri (2009). Her findings show that Jaafery tends toward interpretive, exegetical translation, while Al-Jibouri adopts a more literal approach that sometimes weakens rhetorical impact. Both translators, she argues, translate primarily with Muslim audiences in mind, limiting the text's intercultural accessibility. Al-Taie concludes that translating NB requires not only linguistic skill but a deep understanding of rhetoric as a cultural and performative act. She advocates for translation strategies that highlight NB's universal ethical and philosophical dimensions, making it accessible to broader interfaith and intercultural readerships.

Taken together, these studies illuminate important aspects of *Nahjul Balaghah*, its phonetic and lexical density, its performative speech acts, and the range of translation strategies applied to it, but they leave a notable gap. None of them offers a sustained comparative analysis of multiple English translations of *Khutbat al-Gharra'* itself, nor do they systematically integrate House's TQA model with Leech and Short's stylistic framework. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining four English translations of the sermon in terms of their syntactic, rhetorical, and semantic handling of the Arabic original, thereby contributing both to NB scholarship and to broader debates in the translation of classical Arabic religious discourse.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is designed to respond to the linguistic, rhetorical, and interpretive complexities inherent in translating Imam Ali's (AS) *Khutbat al-Gharra'*. Since translation is fundamentally an act of reading before it is an act of rewriting, the translator's interpretive decisions play a decisive role in shaping the target text. As Al-Ali (2007) demonstrated in his study of misreading and mistranslation, any misinterpretation at the reading stage, whether caused by cultural presuppositions, inattentive processing, or a failure to grasp rhetorical nuance, can lead to distortions that alter meaning and weaken communicative intent. His findings are especially relevant for a text like *Nahjul Balaghah*, where rhetorical devices, theological allusions, and syntactic precision are central to meaning and cannot be reduced to lexical correspondence. Guided by this understanding, the present research employs a combined analytical model drawing on House's (1997) Translation Quality Assessment and Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework, enabling a systematic examination of how functional meaning and rhetorical form are negotiated in four English translations. This methodological approach ensures that both the translators' interpretive acts and their stylistic choices are evaluated in relation to the sermon's original communicative purpose and literary design, thereby minimizing the risks of misreading that Al-Ali (2007) warns against and providing a more reliable basis for comparative analysis.

3.1 The Adopted Analytical Model

The present study adopted a dual analytical model combining Juliane House's Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) framework and Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model. This combination is chosen to reflect the dual nature of *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, which is simultaneously a piece of sacred discourse and a highly crafted rhetorical text. A single theoretical lens cannot adequately capture the sermon's communicative function, stylistic texture, and linguistic intricacy; thus, the two models are used in a complementary manner.

House's TQA model provides the functional-pragmatic basis of the analysis. It evaluates translation quality through a systematic comparison of the source text (ST) and target text (TT) across the register variables

of field, tenor, and mode, along with the broader dimension of genre (House, 1997). The model distinguishes between overt translations, where the text's original cultural identity is maintained visibly, and covert translations, which aim to read as if originally written in the target language. Given that *Khutbat al-Gharra'* is a religious-historical discourse whose authority and rhetorical power are inseparable from its original context, it is treated in this study as a text that requires overt translation. Accordingly, functional shifts, either overtly erroneous (such as mistranslation or omission) or covertly erroneous (such as changes in register or tone), are identified and analyzed in terms of how they affect the sermon's communicative intent.

Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework complements the functional analysis by providing tools for examining how rhetorical and linguistic features contribute to meaning. Their model highlights how stylistic choices, lexical selection, grammatical patterning, figurative language, foregrounding, and parallelism shape a text's communicative and aesthetic impact. In the context of *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, the close interplay of syntax, imagery, repetition, and rhythmic balance forms a major part of the sermon's persuasive force. By using Leech and Short's categories to map these stylistic features in the Arabic text and trace how they are preserved, modified, or neutralized in the English translations, the study can assess stylistic fidelity as a dimension of translation quality.

The integration of House's functional model and Leech and Short's stylistic framework enable a comprehensive evaluation of the translations. While TQA identifies functional shifts in register, interpersonal stance, and communicative purpose, stylistic analysis reveals how each translator handles the rhetorical features that constitute the sermon's literary and spiritual character. This dual-model approach thus ensures that both meaning and stylistic effect are considered essential components of translation quality, offering a more holistic assessment of how the four translations render the syntactic, rhetorical, and semantic richness of *Khutbat al-Gharra'*.

3.2 Data Collection

The corpus of the study consisted of the Arabic text of Khutbat al-Gharra' from Nahjul Balaghah and four English translations selected for detailed comparative analysis. The Arabic source text was taken from an authenticated edition of Nahjul Balaghah widely used in scholarly and religious contexts, in which Khutbat al-Gharra' is presented as one of the major sermons attributed to Imam Ali (AS).

The four English translations are as follows:

1. Sayyid Ali Reza's Nahjul Balagha: Peak of Eloquence (2002).
2. Sayyid Muhammad Askari Ja'fari's Nahjul Balagha: Sermons, Letters, and Sayings of Hazrat Ali (as) (1981).
3. Yasin T. al-Jibouri's Path of Eloquence (2013).
4. Tahera Qutbuddin's Translation of Nahjul Balagha (2024).

In practical terms, the data collection involved identifying the full text of Khutbat al-Gharra' in Arabic and locating the corresponding sermon in each of the four English translations. The Arabic text was then segmented into manageable units, typically clauses or sentences that form coherent rhetorical or thematic units, and each segment was matched with its four English counterparts. This parallel corpus served as the primary dataset for the subsequent functional and stylistic analyses. No attempt was made to survey all existing English translations of Nahjul Balaghah; instead, the focus on these four widely cited and stylistically diverse renderings was deemed sufficient to illuminate the range of strategies and shifts that arise when translating this sermon into English.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presented the main analytical component of the study, demonstrating how the selected Arabic passages from Khutbat al-Gharra' were examined in relation to their four English translations. The analysis adopts a layered approach, beginning with a close reading of the chosen sentences and identifying their prominent stylistic, rhetorical, and syntactic features in the source text. These features included foregrounding, parallelism, figurative language, and structural

compactness, all of which contribute to the sermon's persuasive tone and theological density. Using House's TQA (1997) model, the analysis evaluates functional shifts in field, tenor, mode, and genre, while Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework is employed to trace how stylistic devices, such as lexical choice, syntactic patterning, and rhetorical emphasis, are preserved or altered in the translations. Attention was given to cohesive devices, Qur'anic intertextuality, grammatical structure, and repetition, as these are central to Imam Ali's rhetorical method.

4.1 Analysis of Selected Sentences and Stylistic Phenomena

This section offers a detailed examination of the selected Arabic sentences from *Khutbat al-Gharra'* in comparison with their four English renderings. Each example is analysed using House's TQA (1997) model together with Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework to identify how the sermon's syntactic, rhetorical, and semantic features are conveyed, reshaped, or reduced in the translation process.

Sample 1: "وَأَثَرَكُمْ بِالنِّعَمِ السَّوَابِغِ وَالرِّفْدِ الرَّوَافِعِ"

(1) Application of House's Model (Semantic–Pragmatic Analysis)

This statement accentuates God's boundless generosity and continuous beneficence, reflecting one of the sermon's central theological motifs divine graces as both comprehensive and unceasing.

السَّوَابِغِ denotes complete, all-encompassing, and overflowing blessings that embrace spiritual and material well-being alike.

الرِّفْدِ الرَّوَافِعِ conveys the image of abundant and ever-flowing provision, divine aid that sustains every aspect of human life.

The author Imam Ali (AS) reminds his audience that all blessings, material, intellectual, and spiritual, derive solely from God's mercy and kindness. The statement, therefore, carries not only a descriptive but an ethical dimension, urging gratitude and humility in response to divine bounty. Translators, consequently, must strive to preserve both the semantic depth and the moral exhortation embedded in the original

Arabic.

Table 4.1.

English Translations of “وَأَتْرَكُكُمْ بِالنِّعَمِ السَّوَاعِجِ وَالرِّفْدِ الرَّوَافِعِ” and Functional Evaluation

Translator	English Rendering	Evaluation (House's Framework)
Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (2013)	“He has ordained rewards. He has bestowed on you vast bounties and extensive gifts.”	Expands slightly beyond the Arabic by adding “He has ordained rewards,” yet remains faithful to the sermonic tone. Phrases such as “vast bounties” and “extensive gifts” effectively express divine generosity and spiritual awareness, well-suited to the religious register.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	“...graced you with perfect favors and marvelous gifts...”	Stylistically elegant and literary. “Perfect favors” captures السَّوَاعِجِ, though “marvelous gifts” introduces an ornamental tone more poetic than theological. The translation is concise but underplays the moral weight of gratitude inherent in the original.
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	“He has bestowed upon you vast bounties and extensive gifts.”	Closely mirrors the Arabic phrasing and preserves the devotional register. Doctrinally faithful and clear, though stylistically plain. Effectively communicates the idea of divine generosity within a formal religious style.

Sayyid Muhammad Askari (1981)	“He has conferred upon you extensive favors and best blessings.”	Faithful and spiritually reflective. The phrase “best blessings” suggests divine excellence but omits the connotation of overflowing abundance in السوايح. The tone remains exegetical, aligning with the sermonic function of <i>Nahj al-Balāgha</i> .
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Table 4.2.

Functional Equivalence Summary (House 1997)

Translator	Accuracy	Register	Explanation Level	Assessment
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	High	Religious/Formal	Medium	Strong sermonic clarity; mild interpretive expansion adds didactic strength.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Literary	Academic/Formal	Low	Graceful but insufficiently theological; lacks the spiritual exhortation of the Arabic.

Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	High	Religious/Formal	Medium	Doctrinally accurate and reverent; preserves the sermon's spiritual dignity.
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	High	Religious/Exegetical	Medium–High	Spiritually instructive and clear; slightly simplified imagery of abundance.

(2) Application of Leech & Short's Model (Stylistic Analysis)

The Arabic structure exemplifies balanced intensification and rhythmic harmony, central to the sermon's moral and aesthetic appeal.

Table 4.3. Stylistic Evaluation of Translations (Leech & Short 2007)

Translator	Stylistic Evaluation
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	Communicates divine generosity with clarity; slight addition enhances sermonic instruction and emotional resonance.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Most poetic yet least doctrinally explicit; privileges literary elegance over spiritual urgency.
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	Balanced and reverent; stylistically plain but suited to religious discourse and rhythmic simplicity.
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Spiritually rich and explanatory; didactic tone strengthens moral guidance though it softens the original's compact imagery.

Through parallel phrasing and rhythmic abundance, he reminds

humanity of its utter dependence on divine mercy. Al-Jibouri effectively integrates clarity and sermonic weight, achieving functional fidelity and moral resonance. Ali Reza maintains doctrinal accuracy with stylistic simplicity befitting a devotional setting. Askari enriches the text through exegetical elaboration, transforming it into a moral lesson. Qutbuddin, though eloquent, shifts toward an academic and literary interpretation, reducing the moral immediacy of Imam Ali's rhetoric. Accordingly, the translations of Al-Jibouri, Ali Reza, and Askari most successfully embody both House's functional equivalence and Leech & Short's stylistic fidelity, preserving the sermon's dual mission of theological reflection and ethical exhortation.

Sample 2: “فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا رَنِقٌ مَشْرَبُهَا، رَدِغٌ مَشْرَعُهَا، يُونِقُ مَنظَرُهَا وَيُوبِقُ مَخْبَرُهَا”

(1) Application of House's Model (Semantic–Pragmatic Analysis)

This line employs powerful moral allegory and metaphor to depict the world's deceptive beauty and inner corruption. Imam Ali (AS) likens worldly life to a polluted watering place, one that appears inviting but leads to spiritual destruction. The rhetorical structure combines ethical instruction with imagery of contamination, creating a vivid contrast between appearance and reality. The line functions as a moral warning against attachment to transient pleasures and highlights the spiritual peril of indulgence in worldly desires. Understanding these metaphors requires awareness of Islamic ascetic teachings and moral theology. Translators must therefore balance literal fidelity with interpretive explanation to maintain both meaning and doctrinal resonance.

Table 4.4. English Translations of “فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا رَنِقٌ مَشْرَبُهَا، رَدِغٌ مَشْرَعُهَا، يُونِقُ مَنظَرُهَا وَيُوبِقُ مَخْبَرُهَا” and Functional Evaluation

Translator	English Rendering	Evaluation (House's Framework)

Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (2013)	“Certainly, this world is a dirty watering place and a muddy source of drinking. Its appearance is attractive, and its inside is destructive.”	Faithful to the literal image while retaining clarity. The moral contrast between attraction and destruction is well communicated. The translation is concise and spiritually clear without excessive expansion.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	“The world’s water is murky... Her beauty dazzles but her reality kills.”	More poetic and expressive, but less literal. While stylistically appealing, it omits the structured symmetry of the Arabic and offers less doctrinal clarity. The metaphor “her reality kills” dramatizes meaning but weakens spiritual guidance.
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	“Certainly this world is a dirty watering place and a muddy source of drinking. Its appearance is attractive but its inside is destructive.”	Very close to Al-Jibouri’s version. Faithful, formal, and clear, it preserves the balance between outward beauty and inner corruption. Reflects solid understanding of ascetic tone.
Sayyid Muhammad Askari (1981)	“O people! You are being tested... The streams of this world are dirty... its show is beautiful but destructive.”	Expands into moral instruction, framing the line within a broader spiritual context. His exegetical approach transforms translation into a sermon-like commentary, enhancing doctrinal awareness but losing brevity.

Table 4.5. Functional Equivalence Summary (House 1997)

Translator	Accuracy	Register	Explanation Level	Assessment
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	High	Religious/Formal	Medium	Balanced literal clarity
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Moderate (more poetic)	Literary/Academic	Low	Elegant but lacks moral clarity
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	High	Religious/Formal	Medium	Strong doctrinal fidelity
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Very High	Exegetical/Didactic	High	Most explicit and spiritually instructive

(2) Application of Leech & Short's Model (Stylistic Analysis)

The Arabic text showcases rhetorical symmetry, imagery, and phonetic rhythm that reinforce the theme of deception.

Table 4.6. Stylistic Evaluation of Translations (Leech & Short 2007)

Translator	Stylistic Fidelity	Notes
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	Strong	Retains structural balance and rhythm; tone matches the moral seriousness of the original.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Moderate	More poetic but less symmetrical; loses the rhetorical precision of the Arabic.

Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	Strong	Faithful reproduction of structure and tone; stylistically close to the original rhythm.
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Low (by design)	Replaces concision with moral elaboration; prioritizes spiritual teaching over rhetorical form.

Askari interprets expansively, emphasizing moral guidance over rhetorical balance. Al-Jibouri and Ali Reza offer semantically faithful renderings that preserve the sermon’s spiritual gravity. Qutbuddin, though elegant, reduces moral resonance through poetic compression. The translations of Al-Jibouri, Ali Reza, and Askari are thus the most functionally and stylistically effective, preserving both moral instruction and theological depth, essential to the sermonic context of *Khutbat al-Gharra’*.

Sample 3: “حَتَّى إِذَا أَنَسَ نَافِرُهَا وَأَطْمَأَنَّ نَاكِرُهَا”

(1) Application of House’s Model (Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis)

This line extends Imam Ali’s (AS) critique of worldly deception (*ghurur al-dunya*), describing how those who once shunned the world (*nafiruha*) gradually become familiar with it, and those who denied its appeal (*nakiruha*) grow content within it. The construction reflects a moral paradox that repeated exposure transforms aversion into attachment, symbolizing the spiritual numbing of the human heart through habit. Theologically, it evokes Qur’anic concepts such as *زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ* (Q 3:14), illustrating how worldly charm seduces believers over time. Translators must thus render both the psychological insight and moral gravity, not merely the literal meaning, to preserve the ascetic function of the sermon.

Table 4.7. English Translations of “حَتَّى إِذَا أَنَسَ نَافِرُهَا وَأَطْمَأَنَّ نَاكِرُهَا” and Functional Evaluation

Translator	English Rendering	Evaluation (House’s Framework)
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Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (2013)	“When one who despises it begins to like it, and he who is not acquainted with it begins to feel satisfied with it...”	Retains the ethical cause-and-effect logic of the Arabic. Conveys spiritual danger through a balanced, didactic tone. The rendering is faithful, clear, and doctrinally aware.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	“When the man who shies away from her becomes familiar, when he who is wary relaxes...”	Smooth and literary. The feminine pronoun <i>her</i> personifies <i>dunyā</i> gracefully, but the ethical intensity is softened. The translation remains literal but lacks explicit spiritual caution.
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	“When its despiser begins to like it and he who is not acquainted with it feels satisfied with it...”	Mirrors Al-Jibouri closely. Maintains parallelism and moral progression while keeping a formal, religious tone. Clear and faithful to the sermonic context.
Sayyid Muhammad Askari (1981)	“It is so deceptive that it waits till those who abhor it start taking interest in it, and those who do not know its deception are attracted by it and are satisfied with it.”	Expands interpretively, inserting the theme of <i>deception</i> to underline moral collapse. The exegetical style enhances theological guidance but loses rhetorical brevity.

Table 4.8. Functional Equivalence Summary (House 1997)

Translator	Accuracy	Register	Explanation Level	Assessment
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	High	Religious/Sermonic	Medium	Clear moral meaning with balanced doctrinal tone
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Moderate	Literary/Academic	Low	Elegant but lacks ascetic seriousness
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	High	Religious/Sermonic	Medium	Faithful, spiritually coherent
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Very High (theological fidelity)	Exegetical/Didactic	High	Maximal ethical explanation and clarity

(2) Application of Leech & Short's Model (Stylistic Analysis)

The Arabic achieves expressive power through structural symmetry and sound repetition.

Table 4.9. Stylistic Evaluation of Translations (Leech & Short 2007)

Translator	Stylistic Fidelity	Notes

Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	Strong	Preserves balance and cadence; the moral transition remains clear.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Moderate	More poetic and personalized; rhythm preserved but warning softened.
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	Strong	Faithfully mirrors Arabic parallelism and sermonic rhythm.
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Low (deliberate)	Expands interpretively; prioritizes moral guidance over stylistic economy.

This verse depicts the subtle seduction of worldly attachment. Imam Ali's use of parallel verbs and sound echoes dramatizes the psychological shift from rejection to satisfaction. Al-Jibouri and Ali Reza capture both literal and moral clarity with sermonic precision. Askari re-frames the image through exegetical commentary, emphasizing the theological root of deception. Qutbuddin prioritizes linguistic grace but underplays the sermon's moral urgency. Overall, Al-Jibouri, Ali Reza, and Askari offer translations most faithful to the didactic, ascetic, and reformative purpose of *Khutbat al-Gharra'*, preserving its moral psychology and spiritual intensity.

Sample 4: “وَأَعْلَقَتِ الْمَرْءَ أَوْهَاقَ الْمَنِيَّةِ”

(1) Application of House's Model (Semantic–Pragmatic Analysis)

This expression marks a transition in *Khutbat al-Gharra'* from worldly deception to inevitable death. The term “أَوْهَاقَ” (bonds, shackles, or nooses) vividly symbolizes captivity and inevitability, showing that once a person succumbs to the illusions of the world, death seizes him without escape. The phrase portrays death as a binding force, inescapable, constricting, and divinely ordained. The line's theological message connects worldly attachment with ultimate accountability. Imam Ali (AS) uses concise yet forceful diction to evoke both moral realization and eschatological awareness. Translators must therefore preserve the dual sense of bondage and awakening, expressing death not only as an

end, but as a divine reckoning and unveiling of truth.

Table 4.10. English Translations of “وَأَعْلَقَتِ الْمَرْءَ أَوْهَاقَ الْمَنِيَّةِ” and Functional Evaluation

Translator	English Rendering	Evaluation (House's Framework)
Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (2013)	“...taking him to a narrow grave and a fearful abode in order to show him his place of stay and the recompense of his deeds.”	Expands beyond the literal image to a full theological reflection. Transforms the metaphor of death's noose into grave imagery and divine judgment. This interpretive expansion reflects deep doctrinal understanding and aligns well with the sermon's didactic nature.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	“...entangles him in the noose of death.”	Concise, powerful, and literal. The metaphor is vivid but stands alone as poetic expression, without explanatory moral context. Her rendering is elegant but minimalist, suited to literary rather than sermonic function.

Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	“...puts round his neck the rope of death...”	Faithful to literal meaning and rhythm. Retains metaphorical imagery and solemn tone, expressing death’s inevitability with devotional clarity. Balanced between literalness and sermon-like tone.
Sayyid Muhammad Askari (1981)	“tying the rope of death round their necks drags them to their graves.”	Expands the metaphor to include moral consequence and eschatological realism. “Drags them to their graves” evokes judgment and accountability. Exegetical, didactic, and fully aligned with the sermonic intent of moral awakening.

Table 4.11. Functional Equivalence Summary (House 1997)

Translator	Accuracy	Register	Explanation Level	Commentary Style	Assessment
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	High	Religious / Exegetical	High	Moral–eschatological	Strong doctrinal expansion
Tahera Qutbudin (2024)	Literal accuracy	Literary / Academic	Low	Poetic	Elegant but lacks sermon depth
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	High	Devotional	Medium	Balanced	Faithful, dignified, and concise

Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Very high theological fidelity	Sermonic / Explanatory	High	Tafsīr-style	Most explicit and spiritually instructive
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(2) Application of Leech & Short's Model (Stylistic Analysis)

The Arabic sentence condenses profound moral force into rhythmic brevity.

Table 4.12. Stylistic Evaluation of Translations (Leech & Short 2007)

Translator	Stylistic Faithfulness	Notes
Yasin al-Jibouri (2013)	Medium (interpretive)	Expands metaphor into didactic commentary; reduces stylistic compactness but enhances moral gravity.
Tahera Qutbuddin (2024)	Strong	Retains metaphor's poetic impact; concise and rhythmically powerful.
Sayed Ali Reza (2002)	Strong	Preserves the metaphor and solemn diction; highly faithful stylistically.
Sayyid M. Askari (1981)	Medium	Trades compact imagery for explanatory fullness; most explicit in moral message.

The verse “وَأَعْلَقَتِ الْمَرْءَ أَوْهَاقَ الْمَنِيِّ” captures the inevitability of death following worldly deception. Imam Ali (AS) fuses vivid metaphor with theological precision: death is not an abstract end but a divine arrest of the human soul. Yasin Al-Jibouri expands interpretively, providing the fullest theological explanation. Ali Reza preserves both metaphor and gravity, offering a devotional, balanced rendering. Askari transforms the metaphor into clear eschatological imagery, reflecting his exegetical

focus. Qutbuddin remains stylistically strong but morally understated. Hence, the translations by Ali Reza, Yasin, and Askari achieve the best functional equivalence and stylistic alignment with the sermon's didactic, ascetic nature.

4.2 Semantic Cohesion and Qur'anic Intertextuality

4.2.1 The Arabic Source and the Role of Intertextuality

One of the most prominent sources of semantic cohesion in Khutbat al-Gharra' is its deliberate and sustained intertextual connection with the Qur'an. Imam Ali (AS) weaves the sermon into the linguistic and thematic fabric of revelation by drawing upon recognisable Qur'anic expressions such as "فَأَتَى تَوْفِكُونَ", "هَلْ مِنْ مَنَاصٍ", and "أُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ". These allusions function as more than stylistic ornamentation; they serve as semantic anchors that link the sermon's moral admonitions to authoritative scriptural discourse. By echoing Qur'anic diction, rhythm, and conceptual patterns, the sermon activates the spiritual resonance associated with revelation and strengthens its persuasive impact. This intertextual alignment not only enhances coherence within the sermon itself but also situates its message within a broader theological continuum, thereby reinforcing its legitimacy and rhetorical force.

4.3 Repetition and Grammatical Cohesion

This section explores the role of repetition and grammatical cohesion in shaping the structure and rhetorical effect of Khutbat al-Gharra'. It examines repetition as a central cohesive and persuasive device, compares how the four English translators handle these patterned structures, and analyses the use of conjunctions as mechanisms for maintaining logical progression and thematic unity in both the Arabic source and its translations.

4.3.1 Repetition as Structural Cohesion

The sermon makes extensive use of repetitive syntactic formulas that build rhythm, foreground moral action, and guide the listener through a cumulative sequence of spiritual responses. A prominent

example appears in the passage:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ تَقِيَّةً مَنْ سَمِعَ فَخَشَعَ، وَاقْتَرَفَ فَاَعْتَرَفَ، وَوَجَلَ فَعَمِلَ، وَحَادَرَ فَبَادَرَ، وَأَيَقَنَ فَأَحْسَنَ، وَعُيِّرَ فَاَعْتَبَرَ، وَحُدِّرَ فَاَزْدَجَرَ، وَأَجَابَ فَأَنَابَ، وَرَاجَعَ فَتَابَ، وَافْتَدَى فَاَحْتَدَى، وَأُرِيَ فَرَأَى.

Such patterned parallelism does not merely list actions; it constructs a continuous chain of spiritual responses, implying progression, immediacy, and moral urgency. In Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981) terms, this constitutes procedural cohesion, where the text guides the reader or listener through a logically and emotionally connected process rather than presenting isolated events. The repeated *ف* serves as both a grammatical link and a rhythmic marker, reinforcing the sermon's exhortative tone and lending it a distinctly oral, almost liturgical cadence.

4.3.3 Grammatical Cohesion through Conjunction

Cohesion in the Arabic text is also achieved through connectors (و), (ف), and (ثم), each marking different logical or temporal relations.

Table 4.13 Comparative Use of Conjunctions in Arabic and Translations

Arabic connective	Function in the source	Yasin T. Al-Jibouri	Tahera Qutbuddin	Sayed Ali Reza	Sayyid M. Askari Ja'fari	Commentary

و	Coordination / thematic continuity	Preserved literally (“and”) throughout; keeps rhythmic parallelism.	Often omitted or replaced by commas; smooth but less rhythmic.	Faithfully repeated; maintains parallel flow.	Occasionally replaced with “and then”; introduces interpretive sequencing.	The omission of و in Qutbuiddin weakens rhythmic cohesion; Al-Jibouri and Ali Reza maintain structural parity.
ف	Immediate succession / causality	Translated as “and then” or “so”; retains logical link.	Frequently simplified; causal nuance reduced.	Rendered consistently as “so,” reflecting immediacy.	Expanded into moral explanation (therefore he was moved to act).	Only Ali Reza reproduces fa’s dual semantic of cause and rapidity.
تم	Sequential order/ temporal delay	Translated as “then”; used accurately in funeral-scene passage.	Also “then,” but occasionally omitted for concision.	Accurate and consistent.	Expanded to include interpretive commentary (after that, when his life had ended...).	All convey chronological cohesion, yet Askari’s elaboration introduces theological reflection.

4.3.4 Comparative Observations

Among the four translators, al-Jibouri preserves the greatest degree of grammatical cohesion by retaining conjunctions and repeated

structures, allowing his English rendering to echo the rhythmic cadence of the Arabic sermon. Qutbuddin prioritises stylistic refinement and smoother syntax, but her reduction of repeated connectors often diminishes the cohesion and rhetorical force of the original. Ali Reza offers a balanced approach, maintaining much of the repetitive patterning while ensuring clarity and devotional tone. In contrast, Askari reshapes cohesive structures into explanatory prose, favouring interpretive expansion over structural fidelity and turning repetition into explicit moral commentary.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter synthesised the main findings of the study, addressed the research questions, outlined the study's limitations, and presented recommendations for future research and translation practice.

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how four English translators rendered the rhetorical, stylistic, and cohesive features of *Khutbat al-Gharra'* from *Nahj al-Balāghah*, using House's (1997) Translation Quality Assessment model and Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework. Based on the analysis conducted, the following conclusions were drawn.

First, *Khutbat al-Gharra'* posed substantial translation challenges due to its dense rhetorical devices, marked parallelism, syntactic compression, and deep theological and intertextual layers. These features resisted straightforward linguistic transfer and required sustained interpretive engagement from the translators.

Second, the findings demonstrated that each translator adopted a distinct translational orientation. Al-Jibouri most consistently preserved grammatical cohesion and repetitive structures, allowing his translation to echo the rhythmic cadence of the Arabic sermon. Ali Reza adopted a balanced approach that maintained much of the sermon's repetitive patterning while ensuring clarity and a devotional tone. Askari frequently reshaped cohesive structures into explanatory prose, prioritising interpretation and moral commentary over formal fidelity.

Qutbuddin favoured stylistic refinement and lexical precision; however, this approach often reduced rhetorical force by minimising repetition and connective density.

Third, the analysis confirmed that no single translation fully preserved the sermon's rhetorical richness, particularly its rhythm, parallelism, and Qur'anic intertextuality. Instead, each translation compensated for inevitable losses through different strategies, such as clarification, expansion, or syntactic smoothing. This finding directly answered the study's central research question by demonstrating that rhetorical equivalence in sacred discourse remained partial and negotiated rather than absolute.

Fourth, the application of House's TQA (1997) model proved effective in identifying functional shifts across the translations, especially in terms of register, interpersonal stance, and textual organisation. Complementarily, Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic framework revealed systematic stylistic transformations, including simplification, restructuring, and reduced foregrounding, which significantly affected the sermon's persuasive and aesthetic impact.

Finally, the study confirmed that the translation of sacred texts was inherently interpretive and ideologically informed. Translators' linguistic choices were shaped by cultural background, theological orientation, and methodological priorities, underscoring the impossibility of complete neutrality in rendering religious discourse.

Despite these contributions, the study was limited by its focus on a single sermon and four English translations. Consequently, the findings could not be generalised to all translations of Nahj al-Balāghah or to sacred Arabic texts more broadly. Nevertheless, the study provided a focused and methodologically grounded insight into the stylistic and functional dynamics of translating Islamic sermon discourse.

5.2 Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Balanced Translational Practice

Translators of sacred texts should strive for a balance between semantic clarity and rhetorical preservation, avoiding excessive simplification that erases stylistic features such as repetition, parallelism, and rhythmic cohesion.

2. Contextual and Rhetorical Awareness

Greater engagement with the theological, cultural, and rhetorical traditions of classical Arabic discourse is essential to ensure interpretive accuracy and to minimise loss of meaning and function.

3. Expanded Comparative Research

Future studies should extend the scope of analysis to include additional sermons, a wider range of translators, and translations into languages other than English, allowing for broader cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison.

4. Methodological Integration

Combining stylistic and functional models with approaches such as corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, or reception studies may yield deeper insights into translation strategies and reader response.

5. Collaborative Translation Models

Collaborative efforts involving translators, linguists, and scholars of Islamic studies are strongly recommended for texts with high rhetorical and doctrinal complexity, as such cooperation can enhance both linguistic accuracy and interpretive depth.

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