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Intercultural Dialogue and Qur'anic Translation Paratexts: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: Qur'anic translations play a pivotal role in shaping global perceptions of Islam and advancing intercultural and interfaith dialogue. This study sets out to investigate how translators' paratexts, as expressed in prefaces, introductory sections, and methodology statements, contribute to fostering or impeding intercultural and interfaith dialogue within Qur'anic translations. By examining these elements across four selected translations, Robert Spencer (2022), Safi Kaskas (2015), Laleh Bakhtiar (2011), and Muhammad Abdel-Haleem (2005), the research evaluates how translators frame the text to enhance understanding and engagement across cultural and religious divides. The analysis is grounded in Norman Fairclough's (2013) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. Through this lens, the research seeks to highlight the translators' roles as intercultural mediators by shedding light on how their methodological choices might bridge cultural divides and contribute to a dialogic encounter between Islam and other worldviews.

Keywords: Qur'anic, intercultural, CDA, translators, paratext

1. Introduction

The Qur'an, as the foundational text of Muslims, serves as a spiritual and cultural cornerstone for nearly two billion people worldwide (Pew Research Center, n.d). Its translation into myriad languages, particularly English, extends its reach beyond the Arabic-speaking world, enabling engagement with different cultural and religious audiences. Paratextual materials, such as titles, prefaces, introductions, methodological sections, footnotes, and so forth, frame the translated Qur'an, significantly shaping how readers perceive and interpret its message. In an era marked by global interconnectedness and religious pluralism, the extent to which Qur'an translations foster intercultural dialogue (ICD) is a critical area of inquiry. Several Orientalist translators, driven by historical Christian-Muslim tensions and colonial agendas, produced translations of the Qur'an with the explicit or implicit intent to defame it. This includes translators such as Alexander Ross (1688), George Sale (1734), Richard Bell (1737), and so forth. The foregoing translators aimed to perpetuate a narrative of skepticism. One would not expect these polemical works to include dialogic content in their paratexts, knowing a priori that the translator is adopting a critical stance toward the Qur'an. This assumes that, without any engagement with the translation itself, one can easily understand, at least in part, the translator's ideology behind the translation.

This study examines how translators' paratexts, including prefaces, introductions, and methodological notes, contribute to promoting or hindering ICD in four selected English translations of the Qur'an: Robert Spencer (2022), Safi Kaskas (2015), Bakhtiar (2007), and Abdel Haleem (2005). Employing Fairclough's (2013) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, the research analyzes linguistic features (e.g., lexical choices, pronouns, and modality) in

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paratexts to uncover translators' intentions in bridging cultural and religious divides and facilitating cross-cultural understanding. By examining these elements, the study aims to shed light on the role of translators as mediators in fostering dialogic encounters between Muslims and non-Muslims.

While the term paratext includes a wide range of textual elements, such as titles, prefaces, introductions, illustrations, footnotes, and so on (Genette and Maclean, 1991), the current study limits its scope to introductory paratext, namely the preface, introduction, and methodology. This decision is justified on both practical and theoretical grounds. First, introductory paratexts constitute the most direct space in which translators articulate their aims, ideological positions, intended readership, and translation strategies, which makes them especially relevant to examining how translation engages with intercultural dialogue. As for the exclusion of footnotes, this decision rests on the premise that readers' understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an are primarily shaped by the paratext they encounter before engaging with the text itself. Since footnotes are accessed during or after the reading process, rather than prior to it, they were deemed less relevant to the present study's focus and thus excluded.

2. What Constitutes Intercultural Dialogue?

The question of what constitutes ICD is as old as the concept itself. Numerous attempts have been made to provide a universally agreed-upon account of the term. For example, the term has been described as a communication process that aims to build positive relationships in contemporary society by fostering mutual understanding and cooperation (UNICEF, 2019). In the same vein, RYCO (2019) defines ICD as a process of education whereby people get to know other people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to build peace and foster reconciliation. RYCO notes that ICD takes place when people question their pre-conceived notions about the other by discussing their attitudes and culture, helping to reduce or abolish any existing prejudices and stereotypes. Similarly, a more holistic definition is provided by Elias and Mansouri (2020), who define ICD as an active and ongoing process of engagement that aims to resolve cross-cultural conflicts. The above definitions emphasize the core aspects of ICD, which are mutual understanding, respect, diversity, conflict resolution, openness, cohesion, and so forth. These aspects are of paramount importance for this study, especially in identifying and analyzing translators' lexical choices.

3. Translation and Intercultural Dialogue

Translation studies, as a field of study, has witnessed tremendous shifts throughout its history. Traditionally, translation was viewed mainly as a linguistic task, converting words and grammar from one language to another (Catford, 1965). However, the cultural turn redefined translation as a broader, culturally influenced activity that goes beyond language (Lefevere & Bassnett, 1990). This shift recognizes that translation is shaped by cultural contexts, including historical, social, and ideological factors that are not strictly linguistic. Within this new perspective, translators are no longer seen as linguistic mediators but cultural ones whose main task is ensuring that the translation is not only linguistically sound but also culturally appropriate. This shift in translation has also redefined translation by framing it as an intercultural activity; thus, translators are seen as intercultural mediators. Translators in this sense are problem-solvers who are required to find solutions to cross-cultural problems by negotiating meanings and building shared understandings between diverse cultures (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Within the scope of this study, we hope to uncover whether Qur'an translators fulfill this role as intercultural mediators and if so, how it is manifested in their paratexts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research objectives

The holy Qur'an has been translated by a myriad of translators with diverse backgrounds and in different languages. Needless to say, translators' intent has never been the same. Some translators are evangelists whose intent is to spread the message of the Qur'an to as many people as possible, and

others aim to deform and defame the image of the Qur'an and Muslims by producing a distorted translation of the holy Qur'an. The aim of the current study is:

1. To investigate the extent to which Qur'an translators aim to foster intercultural dialogue. via paratextual materials, particularly prefaces, introductions, and methodologies.
2. To examine how Qur'an translators in English position the Qur'an for its target audience.
3. To examine how the translator's background affects their level of intercultural awareness present in the paratexts.

3.2. Data collection

Since the current study aims to examine the extent to which Qur'an translators foster intercultural dialogue from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, the data were collected from the translators' paratexts. That is, the focus was not to examine the translations *per se*, but rather to focus on the paratextual information that comes with the main text. This includes prefaces, introductions, and methodologies. It should be noted that paratextual information plays a significant role in understanding texts. The main rationale for the choice of paratext as the focus of analysis emanates from its being an inseparable part of texts and how they are perceived. As Genette (1997) notes, readers' understanding and interpretation of the text are greatly influenced by paratexts. In this sense, the way the reader understands and interacts with the text would be significantly different if this paratextual information had not been included or if it had been altered. In this context, understanding paratextual materials helps us delve into how translators frame readers' understanding of the Qur'an.

To achieve the research goal, four translations were selected. The selection was not random; rather, it was based on several criteria, including the translator's background and year of publication. The selected translations are:

1. *The Critical Qur'an: Explained from Key Islamic Commentaries and Contemporary Historical Research* by Robert Spencer published in 2022
2. *The Qur'an: A contemporary understanding* by Safi Kaskas published in 2018
3. *The Sublime Quran* by Laleh Bakhtiar published in 2011
4. The Qur'an: A new translation, M.A.S. Abdel-Haleem, published in 2004

3.3. Data analysis tools and procedures

The analysis of the paratexts was based on Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Model (2013). The study specifically employs the first dimension of the model, which involves textual analysis. This analysis will allow for an examination of the translators' linguistic choices in Qur'anic paratexts and what they reveal about level of ICD embedded within these paratexts. While the main focus is textual, references to other dimensions were inevitable.

It is worth noting that the textual analysis was carried out via Voyant Tools, a web-based text analysis platform widely used in digital humanities research. The tool allowed for a detailed identification of word frequencies within the paratextual materials. By visualizing and quantifying word frequencies and contexts, the tool allowed for a thorough identification of recurring terms and themes, namely those related to intercultural dialogue, interfaith engagement, and global inclusivity.

As previously noted, there is little consensus on a definitive understanding of what constitutes ICD. However, several core notions are commonly associated with it. According to Elias and Mansouri (2020), UNICEF (2019), and RYCO (2019), these include coexistence, cross-cultural conflict resolution, diversity, engagement, respect, and so forth. Accordingly, the selection and classification of words considered relevant to intercultural dialogue in this study were guided by the specific conceptual definitions and theoretical framework adopted herein.

4. Findings and analysis

This study focuses primarily on the first dimension of Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model: textual analysis. The analysis involves identifying, interpreting, and understanding the lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic choices made by translators in the paratextual materials, namely, the prefaces and introductions to their translations. By examining these linguistic features, the study aims to uncover recurring discursive patterns that may indicate whether the

translators have effectively contributed to the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, this level of analysis provides insight into how these paratexts may shape the reader's engagement with the Qur'anic text itself. In other words, it seeks to determine whether such paratextual framing influences how readers approach, interpret, and relate to the Qur'an.

4.1. Lexical analysis

An important aspect of Fairclough's textual analysis is scrutinizing the author's lexical choices. Fairclough (1995) notes that using ideologically contested words reveals much about the author's intentions. He also notes that the way language is used, including lexical choices, might lead to some effects, namely, framing the reader's understanding and interpretation of the text. He maintains that language should not be understood as operating mechanically, where the use of a word always leads to the same understanding; rather, the effect hinges upon the words used and the context in which they are used. He gives an example of nominalization. He argues that the choice to opt for a verb or a noun is ideologically loaded. The use of nominalization, passive voice, intransitive verbs, and metaphors seems to function similarly, as they all aim at hiding agency and human responsibility

As shown in Table 1, the analysis of the paratextual materials reveals notable differences in the frequency and type of lexical choices across the translators. The findings reveal the presence of dialogic and peace-oriented vocabulary, which is highly suggestive of differing levels of engagement with the themes of intercultural dialogue and inclusivity. For instance, the term *reconciliation* appears eight times in Kaskas's paratexts, while *peace* is used four times each by both Kaskas and Abdel-Haleem. The word *understanding* features prominently in Kaskas (26 times), moderately in Abdel-Haleem (6 times), and to a lesser extent in Bakhtiar (4 times). These lexical choices mirror the extent to which each translator emphasizes a vision of the Qur'an as a tool for promoting coexistence, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding. The variation in word usage indicates differing degrees of intent among the translators to foreground the Qur'an's message as one of peace and dialogue.

Inclusive language, as seen in Table 1, is frequently used by Kaskas, where he focuses on communicating to the target readers that his translation is accessible across cultural divides. His frequent use of words such as 'reconciliation', 'understanding', 'people', 'community', 'global/ universal', etc., is clear evidence that his translation positions him as someone aiming to foster mutual understanding. The frequent use of these words also reveals the translator's effort to frame the Qur'an as a universal message intended for all human beings. While these elements have also been present in the paratextual materials of Abdel-Haleem and Bakhtiar, they are very limited. Other apparent words found within the paratexts are those associated with Abrahamic religions. These words include Christianity, Judaism, Bible, Torah, etc. Their inclusion in the Qur'anic paratext is not random. These words, frequently employed by Kaskas, show that the translation presents itself as both inclusive and relevant to interfaith discourse. It could be argued that the recurrent use of these terms aims to soften the perceived boundaries between Islam and other religions, especially Christianity and Judaism.

However, it may also be argued that the inclusion of references to other religions, rather than serving solely as a rhetorical strategy to emphasize the Qur'an's continuity with previous Abrahamic traditions, might reflect an intent to delineate theological boundaries. In such cases, the translator's primary objective may not be to build bridges, but rather to assert Islam's distinctiveness and doctrinal authority. This raises an important question: even when the framing highlights contrasts rather than commonalities, can the strategic inclusion of such references still be seen as contributing to interreligious dialogue? While the tone and context are crucial, one could argue that the mere act of engaging with the religious other, whether in agreement or critique, still opens a space for cross-faith reflection and discourse.

It is crucial to highlight that the inclusion of these Abrahamic terms is as important as their exclusion. While Table 1 shows that Kaskas and Abdel-Haleem included such terms in their

paratexts, it also indicates that Spencer nearly excluded them, except for Torah. From a Faircoughian CDA perspective, the exclusion of these terms represents a discursive choice that aims to construct the Qur'an as a self-contained book that should not be subject to comparison with other religions. This exclusion could also be explained in terms of framing the Qur'an as a book that forecloses the opportunity of interreligious recognition, empathy, and shared understanding. We can then argue that the absence of these terms from Spencer's paratext represents both a linguistic and an ideological positioning. However, the context in which the word 'Torah' appears in the paratext reveals that its use is more about how the Qur'an compares to Judaism and Christianity, not in the sense that its message is superior, but to show how the Qur'an contradicts itself and has been subject to many modifications.

Another translational choice that is worth mentioning concerns the use of 'God instead of 'Allah'. Table 1 shows that most translators opted for 'God' except Spencer. The translator who used 'God' more frequently is Kaskas (54 times), followed by Abdel-Haleem (48 times), and Bakhtiar (11 times). Translators such as Bakhtair (2011) straightforwardly mention that the rationale behind their opting for 'God' rather than 'Allah' stems from the aim of universality and inclusivity. That is, according to these translators, opting for 'Allah' creates a barrier between Muslim and non-Muslim readers, as it seems suggestive of polytheism. In other words, when a non-Muslim reader encounters the term 'Allah', they may get the impression that the God that they worship is different from the one in the Qur'an. Bakhtiar (2011, p. xvi) explains:

> Following the Prophet's example, in addition to the translation being unbounded by time, in several sensitive cases, the word chosen to translate an Arabic word is also of a universal rather than a particular nature. This then broadens the perspective and scope of the Quran so that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive to one particular group of people.

The quote above shows the translator's intent to present the Qur'an as a universal Book, using a pluralistic instead of a particularistic phrasing. This deliberate linguistic strategy serves, as mentioned by the author, to broaden the scope and understanding of the Qur'an as well as to appeal to a broader audience rather than to a particular group or race. Another lexical choice made by Bakhtiar concerns her decision to use the widely employed term 'disbeliever' used in the Qur'an to refer to anyone who believes in a religion other than Islam. The author believes that such a word is " more exclusive and viable" (p. xvi) and chooses to replace it with the word 'ungrateful'. Upon focusing on the concept of 'ingratitude,' Bakhtiar aims to shift the reader's focus from a fixed religious identity to a universal human failing, thereby supporting her overarching goal of presenting the Qur'an as a message relevant to a wider, non-denominational readership, in contrast to translations employing the more common term, such as those by Kaskas and Abdel-Haleem. Hence, these lexical choices seem consistent with Bakhtiar's view that the Qur'an is a universal Book aimed at all humanity and that a translation has to be such that people from other religious and cultural backgrounds can easily understand and identify with.

Thus, the lexical analysis reveals that the majority of translators, namely Kaskas, Abdel-Haleem, and Bakhtiar, aim to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue through a relatable and accessible translation. This conclusion is substantiated by an examination of the translators' lexical choices and frequency patterns. By opting for terms that foster inclusivity and mutual understanding, these translators situate their works within a broader discourse of cross-cultural engagement.

Table *1.* ICD-related words frequency

Word	Kaskas	Abdel-Haleem	Laleh Bakhtiar	Robert Spencer
Reconciliation	8	0	0	0

Peace	4	4	1	0
Dialogue	1	1	1	0
People	33	27	7	0
Commonalities	2	0	0	0
Understanding	26	6	4	0
Community	9	9	0	0
Global / world / universal	24	16	8	0
Bias	10	0	1	0
Human/Humanity	35	0	2	0
God	54	48	26	0
Abraham	6	3	0	0
Christian(s)	6	3	1	0
Jewish/Jew	2	5	1	0
Bible/Torah	8	1 (Bible)	3 (Testaments)	2 (Torah, Gospel)
Reader	22	26	9	7

4.2. The choice of pronouns

Fairclough, in his book *Language and Power* (2013), argues that certain grammatical features in the English language have some relational values. This includes modality and pronouns. He argues that these pronouns shape social relationships and push certain ideologies. Liu (2022) also notes that pronoun usage, as a discursive tool, can strongly impact how people think and act. The author argues that while these linguistic features look superficially insignificant, the fact that they are most of the time used instinctively and unconsciously makes them a viable tool that can help us visualize how an author conceptualizes relationships, distributes agency, and positions themselves in relation to the other. As far as the translators adopted in this study are concerned, a thorough examination of their pronoun use allows us to get deeper into how opting for a particular pronoun can shape the reader's understanding and perception of the Qur'an. We will examine whether there are any pronoun patterns

within the paratextual materials of the translators and whether these patterns emphasize any elements of ICD, such as encouraging open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of pronoun distribution across the four translations by specifically examining frequencies of first-person singular 'I/me/my', first-person plural 'We/us/our', and third-person plural 'They/their/them' pronouns. Table 2 shows that Kaskas employs pronouns most frequently, with 39 instances of 'I/me/my,' 82 of 'We/us/our,' and 35 of 'They/their/them, In contrast, Abdel-Haleem adopts a notably restrained approach, omitting 'I/me/my' entirely while using 'We/us/our' 17 times and 'They/their/them' 33 times. Bakhtiar translation has a moderate use of such pronouns, with 11 occurrences of 'I/me/my,' 10 of 'We/us/our,' and 17 of 'They/their/them. ' Finally, Spencer's translation exhibits minimal pronoun use, with no first-person singular forms, only one instance of 'We/us/our,' and three of 'They/their/them.'

Kaskas is the translator with the most instances of 'I' use, followed by Bakhtiar. The overuse of the first-person pronoun shows that Kaskas is foregrounding his personal role as well as his understanding as a translator. There is a clear authorial presence compared to translators like Abdel-Haleem and Spencer. Another revealing aspect of the exhaustive use of such a pronoun pertains to the translator's decision to make his ownship and responsibility visible to the readers, who can somewhat induce his centrality in the translation, as being an active and self-aware agent. This overuse can also be understood as a dialogic strategy aimed at reader engagement. That is, rather than positioning himself as a distant translator, Kaskas is directly addressing to readers.

*In 1968, **I** moved to the United States. In the States, a journey started, where **I** had wide exposure to the religious pluralism that exists there. **I** visited Baptist, Methodists, Unitarian and Catholics churches, among others. However, after 9/11 **I** found **myself** engaged with a national group of Evangelicals and a journey toward reconciliation began.*

The above quote by Kaskas demonstrates some instances of first-person pronoun usage. The quote indicates that one reason behind opting for 'I' emanates from the translator's decision to personalize his translation by insisting on his presence as a translator. The author draws on his personal experience and how it informed some of the translation choices made in his translation. In one instance, the translator heavily criticizes other Qur'an translators, namely Hilali and Khan (1996), for causing more harm to Islam than non-Muslims. In light of this, Kaskas mentions in his paratext that his translation is not based on a "traditional historic understanding" (p. ix) but on his interpretation of the Qur'anic text. Kaskas justifies this personal stance by arguing that his translation will allow Muslims to be perceived as peace-loving rather than fanatical and violent**.** Hence, it can be argued that the overuse of the first-person pronoun can be accounted for by the translator's attempt to bring to readers, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, a reconciliatory and interreligious translation that aims to promote peace and understanding among all religions, notably Abrahamic ones.

Concerning Bakhtiar's use of the first-person pronoun, while moderate, it is also meaningful and impactful. For instance, in a paratextual passage, the translator (p. xix) uses 'I' and 'my' as follows:

*Finally, **I** invite readers to **my** website, www.sublimequran.org, to participate in the translation so that the translation becomes part of a democratic, ongoing process. They are asked to give suggestions of where the translation might be improved or where another meaning may be present. In this way **I** hope to further dialogue on the issue of the interpretation of Chapter 4 verse 34 as described earlier.*

The use of the first-person pronoun 'I' and the possessive adjective 'my' positions the translator as an active facilitator of ICD and reader engagement alike. Rather than presenting her translation as a finished and authoritative product, Bakhtiar frames it as a "democratic, ongoing process" (p. xix) to which readers are warmly invited to contribute. This rhetorical strategy is suggestive of an inclusive

and dialogic discourse that empowers and encourages readers to take part in the meaning-making process of the translation. The use of 'I' is also apparent when the translator introduced her intellectual background, translation choices, and methods such as 'I relied upon,' 'I became,' 'I transliterated,' 'I found,' and so forth.. Her use of the first-person pronoun in the foregoing cases may stem from the translator's choice to sound more transparent, allowing readers to make sense of the different translation choices she made.

It should be noted that the decision to include a first-person pronoun is as significant as the decision to omit it. Table 2 shows that Abdel-Haleem and Spencer have no single case of 'I'. While it has been made clear above that the (over)use of 'I' situates the translator as someone who is engaging and transparent, it can be contended that a total absence might situate the translator as distant. One might also argue that such a decision to do without first-person pronouns is more related to introducing an objective and institutionally grounded translation. In such a case, the absence of first-person pronouns represents a discursive strategy that aims at asserting the authority of the text itself.

However, while Abdel-Haleem did not use 'I', he used 'we' (17 times). Since it has been contended that the use of 'I' constructs a discursive stance that is individual, one can claim that using 'we' is a collective one in that it suggests a deliberate effort to de-emphasize the individual effort of the translator in favor of a collective one. In other words, it may be the case that such use derives from the translator's choice to present his translation as a collective effort. Opting for 'we' might also be explained in terms of politeness. This is emphasized by Brown and Levinson (1987), who posit that we may generally perceive someone addressing themselves using 'we' as being polite. This politeness can be closely related to the distance the translator allows between himself/herself and the reader. Kamio (2001) notes that there is a noticeable gradation of closeness permitted by the author, where it varies between being very close in the case of 'we' and "psychologically very distant" (p.1120) in the case of 'you' and 'they'. This can be observed in instances such as:

We *also see here discussion of the 'People of the Book' with particular reference to Jewish and Christian communities, both those contemporary with the Prophet and those in the past*

The foregoing lines, taken from Abdel-Haleem's paratext, where he discusses the differences between Meccan and Medinan *surahs (*verses*),* show that the use of 'we' signals the politeness of the translator. Since 'we' refers to both the translator and the reader, it functions metadiscoursally. In this sense, 'we' serves to make the discourse more accessible and reader-friendly. While the pronoun 'we' was used 17 times, only 6 instances are self-mentions; other cases are used in the context of explaining some linguistic and stylistic features of Qur'anic language, namely, grammatical shifts about how God addresses Himself using different pronouns, including 'He' and 'We'. The conclusions drawn from Abdel-Haleem's and Bakhtiar's use of 'we' can also be applied to Kaskas', whose paratext includes numerous instances. Kaskas' use of 'we' serves many functions, including maintaining a close relationship with the reader and reinforcing transparency.

Table *2.* Pronoun distribution

Pronouns	Safi Kaskas	Abdel-Haleem	Laleh Bakhtiar	Robert Spencer
I / me / my	39	0	11	0
We / us / our	82	17	10	1
They / their / them	35	33	17	3

4.3. The choice of tense

Table 3 indicates that the present simple tense is the most dominant tense for all four translators, with Kaskas employing it most frequently (242 instances), followed by Abdel-Haleem (192 instances), Bakhtiar (98 instances), and Spencer (78 instances). The second most frequently used tense is the past simple across all translations, which is used more frequently by Kaskas than by other translators. The third most used tense concerns the present perfect, while the least used tense is the past perfect.

We have discussed above that a certain lexical choice is not random. The same can be said about tenses. Fairclough (2013) points out that the choice of a given verb tense in discourse shapes how events are temporally framed. This framing, in turn, influences and shapes how the reader interacts with the text and how they perceive it. This includes influencing how readers understand and interpret the relevance and urgency of events.

Going back to our translations, Kaskas, as Table 3 demonstrates, uses the present simple the most, accounting for 58.7 % of tense use. The use of the present simple in Kaskas' translation serves many functions. First, it is used to report factual information about the Qur'an, such as '*Each chapter **has** a name that usually refers to a key word within it,*' and '*The Qur'an **is** composed of 114 parts or chapters of unequal length.*' Second, the translator employs this tense to clarify his purpose behind translation. This is evident in sentences like *'The second purpose of this translation **is** to convey a modern understanding of the Qur'an rather than a traditional historic understanding.*' Third, the present simple is also used as a way to emphasize the reconciliatory nature of the translation and to lay claim to the fact that previous translations fall short in fostering reconciliation. This is also evident in cases like '*I **intend** for this new translation to be a tool of reconciliation between Muslims and the followers of other Abrahamic religions*.'Finally, the translator relies on a mixture of the present simple and past simple to describe and justify his translation methodology by pointing out some of his translation strategies, such as '*The Qur'anic Arabic **does** not have synonyms. Every word used **has** a specific meaning. So while we **attempted** to render the exact contextual meaning of the original.*'

Most of the previously mentioned functions can be observed in other translations, namely those of Abdel-Haleem and Bakhtiar. Abdel-Haleem also employs ample instances of the present simple to report factual information about the Qur'an, including its linguistic and stylistic features, and to draw readers' attention to some prevalent issues pertaining to Qur'an interpretation. This is partially true for Bakhtiar's translation, which uses this tense for detailing her methodological choices and drawing on some differences between her translation and previous ones, particularly how previous translations dealt with feminine pronoun usage, polygamy, women, and so forth. Finally, Spencer, who has the least frequency of the present simple, uses it to report facts about the Qur'an and question its authenticity and authority.

Based on the above tense frequency, one question that should be asked is: What does the predominant use of a certain tense reveal about the translator's effort to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue? There is a shared attempt among the translators to depict the Qur'an as a text of enduring relevance rather than a closed historical document. The emphasis on the Qur'an as a relevant Book means that it is more inviting for readers since it helps them engage more meaningfully. Another point worth mentioning concerns how the strategic use of the present simple helps bridge any historical gap because readers understand that the Qur'an is speaking to them now. Furthermore, the extensive use of the present simple helps reduce common misconceptions of the Qur'an, such as its unapproachability. This discursive strategy is crucial in promoting understanding, empathy, and shared human values across religious and cultural boundaries, values which the translators often make explicit in their paratexts.

Contrarily, while Spencer uses the present simple to present some factual information about the Qur'an, he does so critically. He presents these facts in a way that invites skepticism, often ironically. In talking about the purpose of his work, he mentions that he will bring readers' attention

to some problems with the Qur'an, issues that, according to Islamic scholars, 'do not exist'. Another instance involves Spencer's description of the Qur'an's centrality and unchangeable nature right before he starts outlining some of its inconsistencies, including transmission gaps and historical doubts. Hence, Spencer uses the present simple to invite readers to see the gap between what Islamic scholars purport to be facts about the Qur'an and his empirical historical evidence that shows otherwise. Upon close inspection of Spencer's tense use, one can also notice that the present simple and past simple are employed alternately. This can be accounted for by the critical historical nature of his translation since the author makes use of the past simple tense to provide what are considered historically factual, and shifts to the present simple to challenge these facts.

Table 3. *Tenses distribution*

Tense	Safi Kaskas	Abdel-Haleem	Laleh Bakhtiar	Robert Spencer
Present simple	242	192	98	78
Past simple	134	102	44	42
Present perfect	24	18	12	10
Past perfect	12	10	4	6

4.4. Modality

Instrumental to translators' linguistic choices is modality. This is because it is central in shaping how speakers and writers express attitudes, judgments, and degrees of certainty or obligation in language. Simpson (1993) defines modality as the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding the truth of an utterance, while Halliday (2014) frames it as the speaker's judgment of probabilities or obligations in what is being said. As we have established above, ICD involves mutual understanding, respect, and exchange between cultural groups. In paratextual materials, modality contributes to this dialogue by shaping tone, authority, and inclusivity. To explain how modality relates to the translator's intent to foster ICD, we need to understand whether the translator leans toward epistemic or deontic modality (Palmer, 2001). An epistemic modality, which expresses the speaker's or writer's judgment about the truth, possibility, likelihood, or certainty of a statement (Palmer, 2001), might suggest that the translation is interpretive and dialogic, as it encourages readers to be reflective about what they are reading. On the other hand, the deontic modality relating more to permission and obligation might be aimed at guidance and instruction. We, therefore, contend that a high epistemic modality reveals the translator's effort to present an engaging and interpretive translation rather than a forced and authoritative one.

Table 4 shows that Safi Kaskas and Abdel-Haleem have high epistemic modality, followed by Spencer and Bakhtiar. While deontic modality is also prevalent across all translations, it is limited. An example of this epistemic modality can be seen in Abdel-Haleem's excerpt:

The Quran may present, in the same sura, material about the unity and grace of God, regulations and laws, stories of earlier prophets and nations and the lessons that ***can*** *be drawn from these, and descriptions of rewards and punishments on the Day of Judgement.*

As seen above, 'can' is not used deontically, as it neither signals obligation nor ability, but rather possibility. The context tells us that the same *surah* is thematically diverse. The use of 'can' by Abdel-Haleem implies that the Qur'anic stories and content are meant to be reflected upon, and that readers are able to extract lessons if they engage with the material thoughtfully.

The foregoing example, along with many others across the translations, testifies to the inviting nature of certain renderings that, rather than enforcing a rigid interpretation of the Qur'an, allow space for reader agency and interpretation. Notably, such translations are often marked by a high frequency of epistemic modality, as demonstrated above. While it has been noted that more use of deontic modality may signal that a translation is less inviting and dialogic, some instances show

otherwise. For example, Kaskas makes use of 'must', a rather deontic modality, to explain how readers and he must work together for a better understanding to minimize the tensions between Islam and other Abrahamic religions, often reinforced in previous translations. Another reason why Kaskas opts for deontic modality has to do with asserting and emphasizing the oral nature of the Qur'an. This also also true for Bakhtiar, who uses deontic modality to reinforce the universality and inclusivity of the Qur'anic message. Her use of this type of modality serves another purpose, which is imposing a certain expectation of the Qur'an on readers. This is done via the use of 'should', which compels the reader to approach the Qur'an without any preconceptions from previous translations. From a CDA perspective, this imposition implies that Bakhtiar should be seen as an authority who sets norms on how a 'good' translation of the Qur'an must be. This is evident in many other cases in which the translator uses deontic modality to urge readers to adopt her non-traditional rendering of the Qur'an and de-familiarize themselves with other renditions.

As for Spencer, since he adopts a critical stance to translation, his use of deontic modality is often linked to inviting readers to critically analyze the Qur'an's consistency. For instance, Spencer invites readers to challenge the long-standing Islamic orthodoxy that maintains that Allah is the sole speaker in the Qur'an by drawing their attention to *surah* Al-Fatiha, which he asserts contradicts the above claim

Table 4. Modality

Modal verb	Safi Kaskas	Abdel-Haleem	Laleh Bakhtiar	Robert Spencer
Can	14	9	4	10
Should	6	9	1	4
Must	6	0	3	3
May	4	7	8	2

4.5. Voice

While we have maintained that the translator's linguistic choices, such as lexical, pronoun, and tense uses, can reveal much about the writer's intent to promote a dialogic and inviting translation, one cannot overlook the syntactic elements and their impact on the paratextual discourse. These elements include the use of active and passive voice in the paratext. It is important to understand the functions they serve in the translation as well as their rhetorical and ideological implications. Fowler et al. (1991) maintain that the use of passive voice serves to obscure agency and reinforce institutional power. This is also supported by Fairclough (2001), who argues that passive voice serves as a grammatical choice, often used to elide agency.

Most of the translators, as seen in Table 5, have used the active voice extensively throughout the paratext, with Kasas having the most instances. A deep analysis of the paratexts reveals that the passive voice was mostly used to report historical facts about the Qur'an. This is usually done, as seen in Table 5, by foregrounding agency, especially that of the Prophet and early Caliphs. In discussing their methodological choice in translation, we also notice that translators do it differently. For instance, while both Kaskas and Bakhtiar use mostly active voice to highlight these choices, Kaskas does so via the use of personal constructions (e.i, using first person pronoun). On the other side. Bakhtiar uses impersonal constructions such as 'this translation presents,' or opts for the passive voice, such in the case 'it is translated'. We could argue that these active voice constructions, particularly that by Kaskas, reinforce the idea that such translations aim to bridge any cultural divide between the Qur'an and non-Muslim readers. It should also be noted that the translators presented themselves as active participants in this process of culture bridging. This makes their interfaith mission more relatable and authentic.

As for Spencer, Table 5 shows that there is a moderate use of passive voice. We have established before that Spencer approaches the Qur'an critically, as evidenced in his title, *The Critical Qur'an.* His critical stance can be seen in his passive voice constructions. This can be explained in several ways. By presenting a critique of the Qur'an in the passive voice, Spencer gives readers the impression that it is not his critique but rather an inherent property of the Qur'anic text. To illustrate this, we can take a look at Spencer's critique of the Qur'an transmission and how he casts doubt on its reliability. Throughout the paratext, one can see that Spencer presents his skepticism and criticism of the Qur'an without attributing it to himself. This, again, can be understood as Spencer's effort to make this criticism appear as a factual limitation, rather than his own interpretation. And even when the translator makes use of the active voice, he does so by obscuring agency, such in the case of challenging the existence of the Prophet by claiming that historians conclude that no verifiable historical documents point to his existence. But, instead of naming these historians to lend credence to his criticism, the author fosters mistrust and perpetuates stereotypes about the Qur'an.

Table 5. *Active voice & passive voice distribution*

Modal verb	Safi Kaskas	Abdel-Haleem	Laleh Bakhtiar	Robert Spencer
Active voice	284	212	109	94
Passive voice	128	110	48	56

5. Discussion

The current study aims to examine the extent to which four translators, Kaskas, Bakhtiar, Spencer, and Abdel-Haleem, seek to promote ICD through an analysis of their paratexts, including prefaces, introductions, and methodological notes. The analysis specifically focused on linguistic choices such as lexical selection, pronoun usage, verb tense, and the preference for active or passive voice, and how these choices mirror each translator's approach to fostering ICD. The findings suggest that Kaskas' translation is the most dialogic and inclusive since it is marked by a conciliatory tone and language that encourages engagement across faiths. Bakhtiar's and Abdel-Haleem's translations also demonstrate dialogic potential, though to a lesser extent. Conversely, Spencer's translation is the least dialogic, as it is characterized by a rigid and polemical stance that limits opportunities for cross-cultural and interfaith understanding.

It should be noted that Kaskas and Bakhtiar make explicit the aim to foster ICD as opposed to Abdel-Haleem. Both translators, through the use of various linguistic features such as first-person pronoun usage and active voice, plainly communicate their intent to readers to bridge cultural divides between Muslims and non-Muslims by presenting the Qur'an as a universal and accessible Book meant for all humanity. Spencer, on the other hand, presents a critique-based translation that, rather than depicting the Qur'an as reader-friendly and engaging, reinforces the existing dialogic gaps. He uses the same above-mentioned linguistic resources to cast doubt on the universal and peaceful nature of the Qur'an and to undermine its authenticity. While footnotes, as an indispensable part of the paratext, were excluded from analysis, they also substantiate the claim that readers, upon engaging with the paratext, will be heavily influenced by how the translator understands and interprets the Qur'an. Hence, it could be argued that a reader engaging with Kaskas' or Abdel-Haleem's translation might develop a positive rapport with the Qur'an, whereas reading Spencer's translation could potentially foster misunderstanding or even animosity.

6. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the critical role of paratextual materials in shaping intercultural dialogue through an analysis of four English translations of the Qur'an, those by Safi Kaskas, Laleh Bakhtiar,

Robert Spencer, and Muhammad Abdel-Haleem, using the first dimension of Norman Fairclough's Three Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytical framework. The investigation of lexical choices, pronoun usage, tense, and voice has revealed a range of rhetorical strategies that either foster or hinder intercultural understanding.

The findings reveal that paratext can significantly shape how a reader understands and interprets the translation. This is mainly due to the linguistic resources the translator has at their disposal, including lexical choices, pronoun usage, voice (active vs passive), and tense. These elements collectively construct a particular image about the Qur'an, either as a book of guidance intended for all humanity or as a book whose meanings are ambiguously and confusingly intertwined. In this regard, some translators have successfully fulfilled the role of intercultural mediators who aim to enable readers from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and beliefs to connect meaningfully by presenting the Qur'an as approachable and inclusive. The same linguistic resources have been used in a way that reflects a distancing narrative that reinforces skepticism. In this respect, one can hardly deny the centrality of paratexts in Qur'an translation as ideological tools that can shape readers' perceptions of the Qur'an, without even engaging directly with it.

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