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Disability and Inclusion in Four Translations of *Sūrat ‘Abasa*: A Contextualist Comparative Study

Abstract

Adopting a contextualist approach, this study explores whether four English translations of *Sūrat ‘Abasa* convey the Qur’ān’s ethical teachings on disability and inclusion. While the *Sūrah* addresses a pivotal encounter involving a blind man and prophet Mohammad, existing scholarship has largely overlooked its ethical implications in translation. This paper argues that recent translations are more likely to adopt inclusive strategies and reflect contemporary sensitivities toward disability, aligning more closely with the Qur’ān’s moral vision. It compares Qur’ān translations by Hilali and Khan, Haleem, Bakhtiar, and Khattab to examine how their lexical choices, historical framing, and theological orientation influence their renderings. The findings suggest a shift from textualist to macro-contextual translation approaches, underscoring the role of translators in mediating ethical meanings. The paper concludes that a contextualist approach to translation enhances accessibility and ethical resonance, allowing the Qur’ān’s message to engage meaningfully with contemporary concerns.

Key words: Contextualist approach, Disability, Qur’ān translation, *Sūrat ‘Abasa*, Inclusion

Introduction

The Qur’ān and *Sunnah* provide a comprehensive ethical framework that emphasizes human dignity, justice, and inclusion, extending these values to all individuals, including those with disabilities. Long before the rise of modern disability discourse, the Qur’ān condemned ableism—the discrimination against people with physical or mental impairments—and affirmed the inherent worth of every individual based on *taqwa* (piety) rather than physical ability or social status (Haleem, 2021; Abdul-Raof, 2012). Verses such as Q. 49:13 and Q. 48:17, along with prophetic teachings that prioritize moral intention over appearance, challenge social hierarchies and promote spiritual equality (Goje, 2023). Despite these inclusive foundations, negative cultural attitudes toward people with disabilities persist in some Muslim societies, where stigmatization and exclusion remain common (Hasnain et al., 2019; Al-Aoufi et al., 2012). This disconnect between the inclusive ethics of Islamic scripture and prevailing social attitudes underscores the need to examine how Qur’ānic teachings on disability are interpreted and communicated, especially in Qur’ān translation since it is a form of *tafsīr* (exegesis) (Aldeeb, 2023).

Sūrat ‘Abasa (Chapter 80) offers a particularly compelling lens for this inquiry. Centered around a pivotal moment in which Prophet Muhammad is admonished for disregarding a blind man seeking guidance, the *Sūrah* conveys strong messages about dignity, accessibility, and ethical conduct. Its thematic structure—ranging from the prophet’s moment of frowning to reflections on

divine revelation and the Day of Judgment—serves both theological and rhetorical functions. The *Sūrah*'s emphasis on humility, compassion, and the universal accessibility of divine guidance makes it an important site for exploring questions of disability and inclusion. However, existing scholarship on *Sūrat 'Abasa* has prioritized stylistic, rhetorical, or exegetical features over its ethical implications. Studies by Ullah et al. (2023), Irdiyanti et al. (2022), and Tounani (2025), for instance, focus on figures of speech, thematic cohesion, and rhetorical impact, while others, such as Suzani (2023), Mardiyah (2022) and Fatiha (2019), engage with explicitation in translation, speech act theory and translation techniques respectively. Ridho (2024) employs an interdisciplinary approach to contest the attribution of the frowning act to the Prophet Muhammad. While these contributions enrich linguistic and interpretive understandings of the *Sūrah*, they tend to marginalize its ethical engagement with disability.

Despite the Qur'ān's explicit commitment to dignity and inclusion, there remains a significant gap in scholarship concerning how Qur'ān translations—particularly of *Sūrat 'Abasa*—mediate, reinterpret, or obscure the ethical treatment of disability embedded in the text. While recent scholarship acknowledges the importance of ethics and context in Qur'ān translation (Saeed, 2017; Abdul-Raof, 2012), few studies have examined how this applies to disability representation specifically. For instance, Maghfiroh et al. (2022) explore inclusive education, and Haleem (2021) discusses respecting people with disabilities. Given the increased global awareness around inclusion, the present study aims to explore how contemporary English translations of *Sūrat 'Abasa* engage with this ethical concern. The hypothesis is that more recent translations are more likely to adopt inclusive strategies and reflect contemporary sensitivities toward disability, thereby aligning more closely with the Qur'ān's ethical vision (Peeters & Van Poucke, 2023).

To test this hypothesis, this study compares four English translations of *Sūrat 'Abasa* by Hilali and Khan (1977/2020), Haleem (2004/2016), Bakhtiar (2007/2012), and Khattab (2019), chosen for their theological, temporal, and geographical diversity. The analysis adopts a contextualist theoretical framework, which views translation as a product of historical (Saeed, 2021) ideological (Tymoczko, 2003), and cultural forces (Lefevere, 1992). Contextualism in translation, shaped by scholars such as Toury, Lefevere, Venuti, and Baker, emphasizes that meaning is not static but shaped by the interplay between text, context, and audience (Baker, 2011). Within Qur'ān translation studies, Abdul-Raof (2012) and Saeed (2017) argue that rendering the Qur'ān's ethical message requires sensitivity to both linguistic form and moral substance, especially when addressing modern issues such as inclusion and marginalization.

Guided by this framework, the study aims to evaluate how the selected translators render the first twelve verses of *Sūrat 'Abasa*, which directly relate to the theme of disability. The objective of this paper is to identify translation strategies that either foreground or obscure the ethical dimensions of the text, particularly in relation to inclusion. The analysis is informed by broader Qur'ānic and prophetic teachings on disability, which reinforce the message that spiritual value is measured by intention and moral character rather than physical capacity (Ali & Codina, 2024; Goje, 2023). By integrating these theological foundations, the study offers a more holistic reading of the translations under consideration.

The central research question guiding this investigation is: *What translation approach do the selected translators employ to convey the themes of disability and inclusion in their rendering of Sūrat 'Abasa?* Through comparative textual analysis, the study seeks to determine whether contemporary translations are engaging more deliberately with ethical values such as inclusion and social justice, and whether a contextualist approach enhances the relevance and moral clarity of the Qur'ān's message for modern readers. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of

scholarship that calls for translation to be not only a linguistic act but also an ethically informed interpretive practice. The following section will further define disability as a critical concept, review Qur'ānic verses opposing ableism, and explore prophetic traditions that promote inclusion and equity.

1. Disability and Inclusion in Islam: Conceptual Definitions, Qur'ānic Ethics, and Prophetic Teachings

1.1 Defining Disability: From Medical to Social Models

Relating the Qur'ān to the concerns and needs of modern society, particularly in addressing contemporary issues like disability and inclusion, presents a significant challenge. This requires an interpretation of all Qur'ānic verses that engage with these themes. It has been suggested that revelation should be interpreted alongside reason, as there is no inherent conflict between the two (Saeed, 2013). It is crucial, therefore, to define the term 'disability' both in everyday language and within the Qur'ān, and then to examine the meanings of the verses that address this theme. Only by connecting Qur'ānic interpretation to its historical message and today's needs can we provide a faithful and relevant representation of values like inclusion in modern Qur'ān translations.

The term 'disability' means the inability to use one's body properly because of a disease or an injury (Crowther, 1995, p. 327). It is also defined as a physical or mental impairment that prevents an individual from living a normal life; however, integrating the disabled in their communities can enhance their social participation (World Health Organization, 2024). This integration emphasizes the significant effect of the societies of this group on their experience. Nora Groce (2018) argues that definitions of disability—both medical and social—form the basis for framing inclusion as a necessary societal responsibility, rather than an optional act of charity. Groce states:

According to [World Health Organization] WHO, 1 billion people—15% of the world's population—live with a physical, sensory (eg, deafness, blindness), intellectual, or mental health impairment significant enough to affect their daily lives. . . The long-standing assumption that rates of disability would decrease with improved medical care and public health initiatives has proved only partly correct.

This quote highlights the global scale of disability, emphasizing that improved healthcare alone has not significantly reduced its prevalence. It challenges common assumptions by showing that disability is not solely a medical issue but also shaped by social, environmental, and systemic factors.

Similarly, Alnaser (2024) states “The prevalence of people with any type of disability is estimated at 1.3 billion people worldwide, representing 16% of the world's population” (p. 2). These percentages “15% of the world's population” in 2018 and “16%” in 2024 show that the disabled represent a rather sizable part of the world's population, and the number is increasing. They include deaf and blind people, and their existence is a fact that the advance of medical care might not eliminate (Groce, 2018); therefore, this group needs social inclusion (Goodley, 2011). Groce and Kett (2013) argue that the gap between people with disability and their non-disabled counterparts increases due to the marginality and exclusion of this sect. The inclusion of these people needs taking measurements. Among the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 1 emphasizes the eradication of poverty, while Goal ten promotes the reduction of inequalities. These goals aim to ensure that the benefits of sustainable development are accessible

to all, particularly the most vulnerable populations (United Nations, 2015). Consequently, the inclusion of marginalized groups necessitates the establishment of societies that are inclusive of individuals with disabilities (Pfeiffer, 2003). The growing global attention to disability underscores the urgent need to implement Islamic teachings on inclusion and ensure that modern Qur'ān translations reflect this ethical principle.

1.2 Qur'ānic Opposition to Ableism

Long before these twenty-first-century measurements, the Qur'ān articulated ethical principles opposing the unjust treatment of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities. Its preaching against ableism, the discrimination and social prejudice against people with physical or mental disabilities,¹ emphasizes equality among all human beings. Despite these teachings, in some Muslim countries, the disabled are stereotyped and dealt as inferiors (Hasnain et al., 2019; Al-Aoufi et al., 2012). Syed-Sabir (2004) states that in South Asia, people with disability are given names based on their disabilities. For example, they are labeled as “the lame,” “the blind,” or “the dumb,” despite the Qur'ān's clear rejection of such discriminatory attitudes; Q. 49:13 emphasizes that the true measure of a person is their *taqwa* (piety), not their physical appearance or abilities (Bazna & Hatab, 2005).

Ali and Codina (2024) employ critical discourse analysis to examine the themes and sentence structures in *Sūrat Taha*, Q. 20 and *Sūrat 'Abasa*, Q. 80. In addressing the issue of ableism, Q. 20 explores the theme of stuttering, while Q. 80 addresses visual impairment. The scholars conclude that these two chapters advocate against ableism and promote principles of equality and inclusion. These verses illustrate that the Qur'ān challenges social hierarchies and encourages translators to foreground these ethical dimensions in their renditions.

Similarly, Goje (2023) examines texts from the Qur'ān that promote the protection of the rights of the disabled. To show that all people are equal in God's eye, Goje stresses that the Qur'ān preaches people to integrate the people with disability into society. He highlights the fact that this discourse is relevant to the current issue of marginality and inclusion; the scholar uses an example from *Sūrat Triumph*, Q. 48:17, to demonstrate God's mercy on the disabled:

There is no blame on the blind, or the disabled, or the sick 'for staying behind'. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will be admitted by Him into Gardens under which rivers flow. But whoever turns away will be subjected by Him to a painful punishment.

This verse shows that God exempts the disabled and sick from fighting in the war against the disbelievers, demonstrating the consideration to the physical status of the people with disability to create a friendly environment for them to live in; the verse also educates people how to interact with this group.

The Qur'ān firmly opposes all forms of inequality and marginalization, including ableism, by consistently advocating justice for all, regardless of physical or social status. As Ali and Codina (2024) highlight, pre-Islamic society in the Hijaz was marked by systemic injustice toward vulnerable groups such as women and orphans. In response, the Qur'ān commands believers to

¹ Simi Linton (1998) declares that ableism is a term that means discrimination against people with disabilities. It characterizes these people as inferior to non-disabled people. Therefore, the disabled are assigned or denied certain perceived abilities or skills. See Linton, S. (1998). *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. New York University Press.

“stand firmly for justice towards orphans” (Q. 4:127) and even equates mistreatment of orphans with a denial of faith itself: “Have you not seen the one who rejects faith? That is the one who repels the orphans” (Q. 107:1–2). These verses reflect the Qur’ān’s broader ethical framework, which denounces social hierarchies and discrimination—including those based on disability—and affirms dignity, justice, and inclusion for all.

Likewise, in *Sūrat An-Nur*, Q 24: 61, God said:

There is not upon the blind any guilt or upon the lame any guilt or upon the ill any guilt [for remaining behind]. And whoever obeys God and His Messenger - He will admit him to gardens beneath which rivers flow; but whoever turns away - He will punish him with a painful punishment. (E-Da`wah Committee, 2015)

The verse emphasizes that obeying God and His Messenger is the main basis for divine reward. It's not about health, strength, or engaging in physically tough activities (Ibn Kathīr, 2002). This shift from focusing on external conditions to internal devotion highlights the inclusive ethics of Islam, where accessibility, mercy, and fairness are key to spiritual responsibility. Additionally, the verse teaches the broader community that inclusion is not just a legal obligation but a theological concept. People with disabilities should not be pitied or ignored; they should be recognized as moral and spiritual equals (Goje, 2023; Hasnain et al., 2019). This message encourages Muslims to create communities that value individuals for their faith and efforts rather than their physical abilities. Modern translations of the Qur'an need to emphasize this ethic more clearly.

This section showcases the Qur’ān’s strong stance against ableism and social inequality. It stresses that true worth is found in piety, not in physical ability. The verses that discuss disability promote dignity, inclusion, and spiritual equality. These verses call upon contemporary interpreters to convey the Qur’ān’s ethical commitment to dignity, inclusion, and spiritual equality in ways that resonate with the challenges and values of the modern world.

1.3 Prophetic Traditions on Equality and Inclusion

In addition to Qur’ānic verses, authentic *aḥādīth*² (sayings by Prophet Muhammad) reflect the Prophet’s inclusive approach toward individuals with disabilities, highlighting his emphasis on moral intention and piety as the true measures of worth—rather than physical ability or outward appearance. To support the opposition of ableism in Islam, Goje (2023) gives examples from *Sunnah* using a *ḥadīth*, stating “Allah Almighty does not look at your figures, nor your attire, but He looks at your hearts and accomplishments.”³ This *ḥadīth* confirms that true worth comes from a person’s character and actions, not their looks or social status. It mirrors the Qur’ānic message of inclusion and challenges ableism by emphasizing that physical differences do not change a person's value before Allah. Goje states that *Shari‘a* (Islamic law) emphasizes the necessity of fair treatment to the vulnerable, “women, children, older people, deformed people, and people with disabilities and diseases” (p. 35). The scholar concludes that the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* set principles to create communities promoting brotherhood, equality, and inclusion.

² *Aḥādīth* are sayings or statements of Prophet Muhammad. The majority of Islamic law is derived from *aḥādīth*, which are first-hand accounts of the words and actions of Prophet Muhammad, transmitted across generations. *Al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah* refer to those narrations deemed authentic by consensus among *ḥadīth* scholars, based on the reliability and continuity of their chain of transmission. (see Brown, L. A. C. (2009). *Hadith: Muhammad's legacy in the medieval and modern world*. One World Publications.)

³ Muslim, I. H. (n.d.). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Ḥadīth No. 2564). <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2564>

Furthermore, Azhari (2024) states that Prophet Muhammad provided clear and powerful guidance on supporting and protecting the rights of the marginalized groups. His teachings and actions showed a strong commitment to social justice, especially for those overlooked by society. Through his *aḥādīth*, Prophet Muhammad emphasized the importance of protecting the rights of vulnerable people, reflecting Islam’s focus on their dignity and well-being (Tayob, 2011). The prophet highlighted the values of brotherhood, equality, and compassion. For instance, he said “There are people you left behind in Madinah who did not fail to accompany you in every endeavor, whether you traveled, spent your resources, or crossed any valley”⁴ When Prophet Muhammad was asked how they could be with them when they were still in Madinah, he replied that they had been prevented by a valid excuse. These teachings confirm that inclusion in the divine economy is based not on ability, but on intention and effort—core values that must be communicated through inclusive translation. Additionally, in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Prophet Muhammad said, “Indeed, Allah does not consider your outward appearance or wealth, but instead, He looks at your hearts and actions.” This *ḥadīth* highlights that God judges people by their faith, character, and deeds, rather than their physical attributes or material possessions (Azhari, 2024). This *ḥadīth* further supports the argument that Islam promotes a spiritually egalitarian framework that should guide translators when dealing with disability-related verses.

The Prophetic teachings provide a strong foundation of resilience and dignity, especially for those facing difficulties like disability. Prophet Muhammad taught that every type of suffering, whether it is fatigue, illness, sorrow, or even the prick of a thorn, serves as a way for forgiving believers’ sins.⁵ This *ḥadīth* shows that trials are not signs of divine neglect; instead, they are opportunities for spiritual growth. It emphasizes that people facing hardships should not be pitied or pushed aside, but respected for their endurance.

Surveying these Qur’ānic verses and *aḥādīth* about disability, marginalization, justice, and inclusion stresses the importance of Qur’ān translations that reflect not only the linguistic meanings of verses, but also the ethical and compassionate values deeply rooted in the Qur’ān. This section revealed that interpreting the Qur’ān in its historical and social context is not a modern distortion, but a necessary step toward recovering its original ethical message—rooted in justice, inclusion, and compassion for all members of society. Attallah (2024) “agrees that the Qur’ān presents an inclusive position on physical differences” (p. 235). Taken together, these findings underscore that ethically grounded, context-sensitive Qur’ān translation is essential for faithfully conveying the Qur’ān’s inclusive vision of justice, dignity, and compassion.

In sum, the Qur’ān and Prophetic *ḥadīth* present a consistent and deeply rooted message against ableism, advocating for justice, compassion, and the full inclusion of marginalized individuals (Goje, 2023). The ethical framework established through these texts emphasizes that physical ability is never a measure of spiritual worth. Surveying these teachings highlights the responsibility of translators to move beyond mere linguistic fidelity and instead reflect the inclusive and moral essence of the Qur’ān (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Interpreting the Qur’ān within its historical and social context is not a modern distortion but a necessary step toward recovering its original ethical message—rooted in justice, inclusion, and compassion for all members of

⁴ This *ḥadīth* is in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Ḥadīth No. 4423) and in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Ḥadīth No. 1911). (see Al-Bukhārī, M. I. (n.d.). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Ḥadīth No. 4423). <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4423> ; Muslim, I. H. (n.d.). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Ḥadīth No. 1911). <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1911>

⁵ Al-Bukhārī, M. I. (n.d.). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Book 75, Ḥadīth 1). Retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5641>

society. Understanding this ethical imperative invites a closer look at how translation practices have evolved over time—shaped by historical contexts, interpretive frameworks, and shifting priorities—to either uphold or obscure the Qur’ān’s inclusive vision.

2. A Brief History of Qur’ān Translation

Qur’ān translation presents a significant challenge, since the Qur’ān is the Word of God, and any translation inherently involves human judgment and interpretation. Qur’ān inimitability is rooted in its distinctive language, often described as “neither poetry nor prose but [a combination] of both in such a splendid manner” (Ali, 1993, p. 7), a quality that complicates efforts to capture its full essence in another language. The task of Qur’ān translation began in the twelfth century when Peter the Venerable, a French priest, proposed translating the Qur’ān into Latin to foster a better understanding of Islam and promote reasoned dialogue with Muslims (Al-Jarf, 2014). It was not until 1649—five centuries later—that the first English translation of the Qur’ān appeared. Produced by Alexander Ross, this version was not translated directly from Arabic, but rather from a French rendition, and was shaped by Ross’s own interpretive biases. Titled *The Alcoran of Mahomet*, it reflected both linguistic distance and theological prejudice (Khan, 1997).

While Ross’s work marked a beginning, it was George Sale’s 1734 translation that significantly advanced the scholarly engagement with the Qur’ān in English. Sale (1697–1736) produced his version directly from Arabic, drawing extensively on Ludovico Marracci’s earlier Latin translation (Bevilacqua, 2013). Both Marracci’s and Sale’s translations are considered among the most scholarly yet polemical pre-modern renditions of the Islamic scripture (Aly, 2023), shaped by a distinctly apologetic Christian agenda aimed not merely at translating the Qur’ān, but at refuting Islam and upholding the Christian doctrine. Similar to Ross, Sale attributes the Qur’ān to Prophet Muhammad, rejecting its divine origin (Watt & Bell, 1970). Despite its bias against Islam, Sale’s translation became a leading reference in the West for almost two centuries. More than 160 editions were published, including 67 in the United States alone (Kidwai, 2020).

As Western interest in the Qur’ān expanded, the nineteenth century witnessed a shift in translation efforts from religious apologetics to more academic, yet still ideologically driven, Orientalist interpretations. Qur’ān translations by Orientalist scholars emerged as prominent examples of ideological manipulation. One such instance is John Medows Rodwell’s 1861 English translation, produced at the request of a German Orientalist and then-chair of Oriental Studies at Oxford University. Rodwell’s rendering was shaped by his personal biases, cultural assumptions, and colonial worldview, all of which colored his interpretation of the sacred text (Kidwai, 2008). Aldeeb (2023) situates Rodwell’s work within a broader trend of Orientalist translations—including those by Edward Henry Palmer (1880), Richard Bell (1937), and Arthur John Arberry (1955)—which exhibit theological bias and structural distortions of the original Qur’ānic message.

These Orientalist translations were often motivated by the desire to reinterpret the Qur’ān through a Western lens—whether to align it with European ideals or to undermine Islamic teachings (Al-Bundāq, 1980). As a result, they contributed to misrepresentations of Islam and reinforced colonial narratives that positioned the Qur’ān in opposition to European values. Shaped by the ideologies of their translators, institutional backing, and prevailing political contexts, these works have been widely criticized for distorting the Qur’ānic message and influencing how Islam was perceived in the West (Aldeeb, 2022, p. 549). For centuries, particularly from the twelfth to the early twentieth century, Qur’ān translation was dominated by non-Muslim—primarily Orientalist—scholars (Al-Bundāq, 1980). The religious and sociopolitical biases embedded in

their efforts eventually led to growing concern within the Muslim world about the authenticity and implications of such translations.

In response to these concerns, Islamic legal authorities began to engage more actively with the issue of translation. Recognizing the need for accurate and sensitive interpretations, prominent scholars issued a *fatwa* (a formal decision on a matter of Islamic practice delivered by a Muslim legal expert) that permitted the interpretation of the meanings of the Qur'ān—distinguishing such efforts from the Qur'ān itself, which remains in Arabic. This shift marked the beginning of a broader acceptance of translation as a legitimate interpretive act. In 1936, Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut, former Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, addressed the challenges of translation, acknowledging that while no translation could replicate the Qur'ān's rhetorical and linguistic uniqueness, it could still effectively convey its meanings and spiritual essence. He affirmed that translations should be treated as interpretations rather than substitutes for the Qur'ān. Following Al-Azhar's official fatwa permitting such interpretations (Gibb & Kramers, 1974), the twentieth century witnessed a major transformation in Qur'ān translation, with Muslim scholars increasingly taking the lead (Lawrence, 2017). This development paved the way for informed translations that engage more directly with contemporary social and ethical issues.

From this point forward, Qur'ān translations by Muslims have evolved beyond mere linguistic conversions to become complex interpretive acts. These translations, which can vary significantly depending on the translator's methodology and socio-historical context, are forms of *tafāsīr* (exegeses) and may incorporate *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* (traditional interpretations), *tafsīr bi-r-ra'y* (rational interpretations), linguistic approaches, or hybrid models (Raof, 2012; Raof, 2010). Each approach influences how the Qur'ān is represented and understood. Given a broad range of topics, from faith to social guidance, moral teachings to human rights, the Qur'ān remains relevant to the evolving needs of Muslims in contemporary society, just as it has been throughout history (Saeed, 2013, p. 179). Qur'ān interpreters in the twentieth century often viewed recontextualizing their faith and engaging in scholarly reasoning as too risky, which led them to emphasize the importance of returning to the original context of traditional teachings (Bone, 2016). In contrast, contemporary translators prioritize reason and embrace a rational methodology (Raof, 2012). According to Othman (2023), the translation of the Qur'ān can be enhanced by giving greater consideration to the diverse global contexts, histories, and practices of Qur'ānic translation and by engaging with the sacred text more confidently on its own terms. Thus, this change shows the importance of a contextual view in evaluating whether Qur'ān translations address contemporary ethical, social, and cultural realities.

The following section builds on this foundation by comparing four selected English translations of *Sūrat 'Abasa*. It identifies the meaning of the *Sūrah* at the time of its revelation, connects it to other Qur'ānic verses related to disability and inclusion, and situates it within the twenty-first-century context to demonstrate the continuity of these ethical concerns across time. While both the seventh and twenty-first centuries reflect a need to address marginalization, the “philologically oriented pre-modern approach” to Qur'ān interpretation remains “largely restricted to observable features of language” (Duderija, 2012, p. 184), often overlooking the broader ethical implications. As Saeed and Akbar (2021) argue, such approaches emphasize literalism and textualism at the expense of contextual meaning. Against this backdrop, the comparison undertaken in this section seeks to determine whether contemporary translations effectively engage with the Qur'ān's message of justice and inclusion, particularly as it pertains to disability.

3. A Contextualist Comparison of Four Translations of *Sūrat 'Abasa*

The interpretation of the opening verses of *Sūrat ‘Abasa* has long been debated among classical and contemporary scholars, revealing how theological perspectives and exegetical methods shape understandings of prophetic conduct, moral accountability, and the Qur’ān’s inclusive message. Ibn Kathīr (2002) maintains that the frown mentioned in the first verse of the *Sūrah* refers to Prophet Muhammad, who turned away from Abdullah ibn Umm-Maktūm, a blind man seeking guidance. The Prophet, at the time, was engaged in a critical conversation with leading Meccan pagans, hoping to guide them toward monotheism. According to this interpretation, the rebuke serves as a gentle reminder of the Prophet’s mission to prioritize those sincerely seeking the truth. Al-Sha’rāwī (1997) supports this view, portraying the rebuke not as a severe reprimand but as a mild correction underscoring the Prophet’s broader responsibility to deliver the message, regardless of the audience’s status.

In contrast, some modern scholars challenge the attribution of the frown to the Prophet. Al-Ridwānī (2022) argues that the pronoun in the opening verse refers not to the Prophet but to a disbeliever, namely al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, whose arrogant behavior reflected class-based disdain. He supports this interpretation by referencing the prophet’s *‘isma* (infallibility). Similarly, Sayed Ammar Nakshawani (2022) explains that in *Shi‘a* Islam, the incident is attributed to ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, suggesting that such behavior contradicts the Prophet’s exemplary character. Despite their theological differences, scholars from both *Sunnī* and *Shi‘ī* traditions affirm the *Sūrah*’s core message, which is valuing sincere believers, such as the blind man, and advocating for their inclusion (Haleem, 2021).

Despite differences in attribution and theological nuance, the exegetical focus on inclusion and the treatment of marginalized individuals, such as the blind man, remains central across interpretations. Building on this foundation, the next step is to examine how these themes are carried into English translations of the *Sūrah*. A contextualist comparison entails examining how each translation reflects both the historical, social, and cultural context of the Qur’ān’s revelation (Abdul-Raof, 2012). This approach aims to uncover how various translators interpret the meaning of *Sūrat ‘Abasa*—particularly its relevance to contemporary themes such as disability and inclusion—given that the Qur’ān is widely regarded as a timeless text whose message transcends historical confines (Saeed, 2021; Haleem, 2016). An essential aspect of this comparison is whether translators provide historical background for the *Sūrah*, as such context helps modern readers engage with the religious message in a way that resonates with their lived experiences (Saeed, 2021; Soroush, 2009). Accordingly, the analysis explores the translators’ lexical and grammatical choices, sentence structures, and paratextual elements—such as introductions, *asbāb an-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), footnotes, and parenthetical explanations. These features are critically assessed to determine how effectively the translations convey the themes of disability and inclusion with coherence and sensitivity. Table 1 below presents the four translations of Q. 80:1–4:

Table 1

The translations of Q. 80:1-4

Q. 80	Hilali & Khan (1977/2020)	Haleem (2004/2016)	Bakhtiar (2007/2012)	Khatab (2019)
1	عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى (The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)	He frowned and turned away	He frowned and turned away	He frowned and turned ‘his attention’ away,

		frowned and turned away.			
2	أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى	Because there came to him the blind man (i.e. ‘Abdullāh ibn Umm-Maktūm, رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ who came to the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ while he was preaching to one or some of the Quraish chiefs).	when the blind man came to him—	that the blind man drew near him—	‘simply’ because the blind man came to him ‘interrupting’.
3	وَمَا يُذْرِيكَ أَلَعَلَّهُ يُرَكِّي	And how can you know that he might become pure (from sins)?	for all you know, ^a he might have grown in spirit,	And what will cause you to recognize so that perhaps he will purify himself	You never know ‘O Prophet’, perhaps he may be purified,
4	أَوْ يَذْكُرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى	Or he might receive admonition, and the admonition might profit him?	or taken note of something useful to him.	or yet recollect and a reminder profit him?	Or he may be mindful, benefitting from the reminder.

Table 1 demonstrates that Hilali and Khan adopt an explicitly contextualist strategy by incorporating historical detail directly into the translated text. They replace the third-person pronoun “he” with “(The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ),” identify the blind man by name, and recount the circumstances of revelation. They render verse 2 as: “Because there came to him the blind man (i.e. ‘Abdullāh ibn Umm-Maktūm, رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ who came to the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ while he was preaching to one or some of the Quraish chiefs).” Such historical contextualization can facilitate readers’ understanding of the revelatory moment and its social dynamics, thereby deepening access to the intended meanings of the verses (Saeed, 2021; Abdul-Raof, 2012; 2010). However, replacing the pronoun with an explicit reference to the Prophet intensifies the tone of reproach by clearly identifying its addressee, while simultaneously narrowing the *Sūrah*’s universal moral address by anchoring the ethical lesson to a single historical figure rather than presenting it as a broader admonition applicable to all believers. By foregrounding the blind man’s identity and the social hierarchy governing the interaction, this translation nevertheless renders the *Sūrah*’s ethical critique—condemning social exclusion and the privileging of status over moral worth—more visible.

In contrast, Khattab and Haleem preserve the Qur’ānic text’s linguistic concision while supplying historical context through paratextual devices such as footnotes and introductions. Khattab, for instance, cites a *ḥadīth* reported by al-Tirmidhī to contextualize the encounter with ‘Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm. Interpreting the Qur’ān in light of the *Sunnah* enhances contextual clarity and reinforces intended meanings without embedding historical detail directly into the verse

itself (Goje, 2023). As Genette (1997) argues, paratextual tools signal interpretive orientation; here, they guide readers toward understanding the socio-religious dynamics of revelation while preserving the *Sūrah*'s broader ethical scope. This approach frames the narrative not as a rebuke of the blind man, but as a moral lesson in humility, attentiveness, and ethical conduct.

Bakhtiar's translation, by contrast, largely omits both textual and paratextual historical framing. According to Aldeeb (2023), her limited engagement with classical *tafāsīr* (exegeses) results in a translation that lacks the interpretive depth and historical nuance developed through centuries of Qur'ānic scholarship. This absence risks flattening the narrative, potentially portraying the Prophet's frown as a neutral or incidental gesture rather than a moment of moral tension and correction, and thereby diminishing the *Sūrah*'s emphasis on inclusion.

Grammatical and lexical choices across translations further shape interpretive outcomes. All translators render عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى ("he frowned and turned away"), yet subtle differences emerge: Haleem and Bakhtiar retain the neutral phrasing "turned away," while Khattab renders it as "turned his attention away," shifting focus from physical reaction to social interaction. Such additions function as interpretive bridges that clarify meaning for target-language readers (Alrumayh, 2021) and weaken readings rooted in ableist assumptions. Similarly, translators diverge in rendering the particle أَنْ: Hilali and Khan and Khattab translate it as "because," following traditional exegesis, whereas Haleem's "when" better reflects the situational context, emphasizing timing rather than causality. These choices significantly shape perceptions of agency and responsibility within the encounter.

Additionally, table 1 demonstrates that the third verse, وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكَّى, *Wa mā yudrīka la'allahu yazzakkā*, demonstrates varied renditions by different translators. Hilali and Khan, as well as Haleem, retain the rhetorical question, thereby reinforcing the *Sūrah*'s universal message that those engaged in preaching should neither underestimate the sincerity of marginalized seekers nor overvalue elite audiences. While Hilali and Khan's use of "might become pure" introduces a cultural dimension tied to their social context, Haleem's utilization of "might have grown" and Khattab's "You never know" align more closely with a contemporary, inclusive perspective, focusing on the potential for transformation (Haleem, 2021). These translations reveal the value of spiritual potential over physical or social status, reinforcing the ethical imperative of humility and inclusion. Nonetheless, Bakhtiar's choice of "will purify" emphasizes certainty and the future, which contrasts with the more nuanced readings of the other translators, potentially narrowing the interpretive scope.

The differences in translating the fourth verse, أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى, *Aw yazzakkaru fatanfa'ahuz zikrā*, further illustrate the varied approaches to inclusivity. Bakhtiar and Khattab render the term as "a reminder," while Hilali and Khan translate it as "admonition." This contrast highlights differing sensitivities to the situation of the blind man, with some translators appearing more attuned to the context of a marginalized figure. The choice between "reminder" and "admonition" significantly shapes the tone and perceived intent of the verse—either as a gentle prompt or a stern warning—ultimately influencing how the values of inclusion and dignity are conveyed. As Abdul-Raof (2010) notes, lexical choices in Qur'ān translation are not neutral; they often reflect the translator's interpretive stance and can either soften or intensify the perceived tone of divine discourse.

Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that translators' treatment of contextualization—whether incorporated into the text, deferred to paratext, or omitted—significantly shapes how the *Sūrah*'s ethical message is understood. While contextualist strategies can illuminate themes of inclusion and social critique, excessive specification risks narrowing the Qur'ān's universal moral address.

The comparative translations of Q. 80:1–4 reveal how lexical and grammatical choices influence interpretations of disability and inclusion: whereas Hilali and Khan prioritize formal fidelity to the source language and religious convention, Haleem and Khattab employ contextualist approaches that foreground ethical values and contemporary relevance. Such approaches enable more nuanced and accessible translations, allowing the Qur’ānic message to engage modern readers while responding to pressing social concerns (Saeed, 2021; Abdul-Raof, 2012; 2010). Table 2 below presents the translations of the verb يَذْكُرُ *yazzakkar* across the selected Qur’ānic verses:

Table 2

Translations of Verb يَذْكُرُ , *yazzakkar* in Different Verses from the Qur’ān

Q.		Hilali & Khan (1977/2020)	Haleem (2004/2016)	Bakhtiar (2007/2012)	Khattab (2019)
1	Q. 2:269 يَذْكُرُ	receive admonition	taken note	recollect	be mindful
2	Q. 2:269 يَذْكُرُ	remember (will receive admonition)	bear this in mind	recollects	be mindful
3	Q. 3:7 يَذْكُرُ (<i>Tafsīr Aṭ-Ṭabarī</i>)	receive admonition	take heed	recollects	be mindful
4	Q. 25:62 يَذْكُرُ	remember	be mindful	recollect	be mindful
5	Q. 6:126 يَذْكُرُونَ	take heed	take heed	recollect	are mindful
6	Q. 7:26 يَذْكُرُونَ	remember (i.e. leave falsehood and follow truth ⁽¹⁾).	take heed	recollect	be mindful

Table 2 The translators’ renderings of يَذْكُرُ , *yazzakkar* reveal distinct interpretive approaches shaped by their theological and exegetical priorities. Hilali and Khan often opt for traditional phrasing like “receive admonition” and supplement the verse with explanatory parentheses and explicit references to classical exegesis (e.g., *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*), underscoring their commitment to a *Salafī*-influenced, *ḥadīth*-based interpretation. They also include detailed cultural-historical footnotes, such as in Q. 7:26, reflecting their intent to anchor Qur’ānic meaning in early Islamic practices and orthodoxy. In contrast, Haleem’s choice of “take heed” reflects a modern, literary style that emphasizes ethical reflection. This rendering carries a tone of gentle admonition, inviting readers to internalize moral lessons rather than merely receiving external instruction. His minimal use of commentary also supports a reader-friendly and inclusive tone. Meanwhile, Bakhtiar’s consistent use of “recollect” aligns with her word-for-word-translation philosophy, aiming for linguistic transparency without theological expansion (Bakhtiar, 20012). Khattab prefers “be mindful”, a term drawn from contemporary ethical discourse that reinforces a theme of active spiritual consciousness—consistent with his pedagogical and reformist aims. Together, these choices highlight varying strategies: doctrinal elaboration (Hilali and Khan), moral persuasion (Haleem), linguistic literalism (Bakhtiar), and contextual relevance (Khattab). Table 3 below presents the four translations of Q. 80:5–7, focusing on the universality of the need for guidance among all humans:

Table 3

The translations of Q. 80:5-7

Q. 80	Hilali & Khan (1977/2020)	Haleem (2004/2016)	Bakhtiar (2007/2012)	Khattab (2019)	
5	أَمَّا مَنْ أَسْتَعْنَىٰ	As for him who thinks himself self-sufficient,	For the self- satisfied one	But as for he who was self- complacent,	As for the one who was indifferent,
6	فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّىٰ	To him you attend;	you go out of your way—	then, you attend to him	You gave him your ‘undivided’ attention,
7	وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَرْحَىٰ	What does it matter to you, if he will not become pure (from disbelief: you are only a Messenger, your duty is to convey the Message of Allāh).	though it is not your responsibility if he does not attain purity—	and not upon you <i>is any blame</i> if he purifies not himself.	Even though you are not to blame if he would not be purified.

Table 3 demonstrates the addition by Hilali and Khan in their rendition of verse seven, saying, “he will not become pure (from disbelief: you are only a Messenger, your duty is to convey the Message of Allāh),” which highlights their over translation and traditional interpretation along with their focus on preaching rather than on the theme of inclusion. This parenthetical addition, which is not presented in the source text (ST), aids as an exegesis embedded within the translation, reflecting their doctrinal stance (Kidwai, 2008; 2020). Their addition underscores the messenger’s duty “to convey the Message of Allāh,” while also reflecting the translators’ prioritization of doctrinal authority over engagement with contemporary concerns such as inclusion. This strategy demonstrates an authoritative voice that pursues to instruct the reader within a specific theological framework (Aldeeb, 2023; Haleem, 2021; Saeed, 2006), potentially narrowing the scope for alternative interpretations centred on ethical engagement with the marginalized.

The table also shows that Bakhtiar adds the conjunction “but” for *أَمَّا*, *amma*, a conditional and detailing letter of emphasizing (Al-Mu‘jam Al-Wasīṭ, 2004, p. 25) and uses the subjective pronoun “he” after the preposition “for,” which reflects her inaccurate grammar. This grammatical imprecision not only interrupts the syntactic flow of the verse but also implies a lack of precision in conveying the logical relationship between clauses, thereby fading the rhetorical impact of the original Arabic (Saeed, 2006). In the same verse, “who” is a relative pronoun used as a subject and forms a relative clause with the verb *أَسْتَعْنَىٰ*, *istaghna*, which is rendered as “self-sufficient” by Hilali and Khan, “self-satisfied” by Haleem, “self-complacent” by Bakhtiar, and “indifferent” by Khattab. While all these choices are acceptable, Khattab’s selection of “indifferent” is the most appropriate as it avoids theological connotations and emphasizes emotional disconnection. It effectively captures the Meccan chief’s disinterest in learning about Islam, in contrast to the blind

man’s eagerness for knowledge. This lexical choice reinforces a reading that centres the ethical critique of apathy over the glorification of power or privilege.

Furthermore, table 3 illustrates that in Khattab’s translation of verse 6: فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى, *Fa-anta lahu taṣaddā*, he employs nominalization by changing the verb تَصَدَّى, *taṣaddā* into the noun “attention”. According to Hatim and Mason (1997), such a linguistic strategy reflects the translator’s underlying ideologies. In this case, Khattab’s choice emphasizes that the Prophet is “not to blame if [the Meccan chief] would not be purified,” for وَمَا عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا يَرْكَبُ, *wama ‘alaika alla yazzakā*, drawing attention to the Prophet’s role in conveying the message, while distancing him from the responsibility for the outcome by using passive and modelization. Since translation is an ideological act and the ideology of a translation is that of the translator, the patron, and/ or the ruling power (Lefevere, 1992; Tymoczko, 2003), this subtle lexical shift underscores Khattab’s focus on personal accountability and the limits of the Prophet’s influence. It also indicates a more humanized portrayal of prophetic responsibility, which conforms to contemporary inclusive frameworks that spotlight mutual respect and self-determination.

In contrast, Bakhtiar’s translation renders وَمَا عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا يَرْكَبُ, *wama ‘alaika alla yazzakā*, as “and not upon you is *any blame* if he purifies not himself.” This formal, almost archaic tone, emphasizes the Prophet’s role in relation to the individual’s actions. Using archaic tone hinders the flow of the translation (Haleem, 2016; Kidwai, 2008). Nevertheless, the firmness of this formulation may isolate modern readers and conceal the verse’s broader ethical message. This tone can be seen as a reflection of the socio-cultural context in which the translator was operating. Her stylistic choices tend to preserve a sense of sacred distance rather than foster a relatable, inclusive voice.

The theme of inclusion continues to be explored in verse 8, as shown in Table 4, further emphasizing the differing interpretive approaches across the translations:

Table 4
Translations of Q. 80:8

Q. 80	Hilali & Khan (1977/2020)	Haleem (2004/2016)	Bakhtiar (2007/2012)	Khattab (2019)
8	وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْتَعِي But as to him who came to you running,	but from the one who has come to you full of eagerness	Yet as for him who drew near to you, coming eagerly for knowledge	But as for the one who came to you, eager ‘to learn’,

Table 4 illustrates the diverse translation choices for the verse وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْتَعِي, *Wa’amā man jā’ yas ‘ā*. The verb يَسْتَعِي, *yas ‘ā*, is in the present tense; it means “chase,” “walk,” “run,” or “work hard” (*Al-Mu’jam Al-Wasīṭ*, 2004, p. 431). In this context, the verb يَسْتَعِي has a figurative meaning since the contextual meaning is to be eager to know more about Islam. The emphasis is on the blind man’s internal motivation rather than his physical movement. Hilali and Khan render the verb يَسْتَعِي, *yas ‘ā*, literally as the present participle “running,” reflecting their adherence to traditional exegesis, *tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*, and a strictly literal translation strategy (Abdul-Raof, 2012; Kidwai, 2008). This choice aligns with Maulana Maududi Ali’s (1973) use of “running” and Ali Quil Quarai’s (2005) rendering of the term as “hurrying.” This textual approach results in a less impactful translation (Haleem, 2016). The term “running” fails to convey the broader thematic context—particularly the notion of inclusion—since it is physically implausible for a blind man to

run. Moreover, this choice overlooks the metaphorical and emotional significance of the original verb, limiting the reader’s ability to grasp its deeper, contextually relevant meaning. This literal rendering may unintentionally weaken the portrayal of the blind man’s sincerity and eagerness by introducing a physically implausible image. On the contrary, Haleem uses the adjective phrase "full of eagerness," while Bakhtiar employs “coming eagerly for knowledge.” The translation that best aligns with the theme of inclusion is Khattab’s, which uses the phrase “eager to learn.” To demonstrate how translators handle the verb يَسْعَى, *yas‘ā* beyond *Sūrat ‘Abasa*, Table 5 compares its renderings across different Qur’ānic contexts:

Table 5

Translations of Verb يَسْعَى, *yas‘ā* and Its Derivatives in Different Verses from the Qur’ān

Q.	Hilali & Khan (1977/2020)	Haleem (2004/2016)	Bakhtiar (2007/2012)	Khattab (2019)
1 Q. 80:8 يَسْعَى	running	full of eagerness	coming eagerly for knowledge	eager ‘to learn’,
2 Q. 28:20 يَسْعَى	running	running	coming eagerly	rushing
3 Q. 53:39 سَعَى	does (good or bad) ⁽¹⁾	worked	endeavored	endeavours
4 Q. 17:19 سَعَى	strives	strives	endeavored	strives
5 Q. 62:9 فَاسْعَوْا	come	hurry	hasten	proceed ‘diligently’
6 Q. 20:66 تَسْعَى	moved fast	moving	sliding	slithering

Table 5 shows that Hilali and Khan apply literal translation; for example, they use “running” in Q. 80:8 and Q. 28:20, aligning with their overall tendency toward a conservative and *Salafi*-influenced exegesis. Their choices reflect a concern with preserving the original Arabic meaning, occasionally supplemented by parenthetical insertions to ensure doctrinal clarity. In a footnote to Q. 53:39, Hilali and Khan cite a *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, showing their reliance on prophetic traditions to interpret ongoing reward through charity, knowledge, and righteous offspring. Haleem adopts a more reader-friendly, context-sensitive approach (Haleem, 2016). His renderings, such as “full of eagerness” (Q. 80:8) and “worked” (Q. 53:39), suggest interpretive latitude aimed at capturing the thematic and moral tone of the verses. Haleem’s background in both Islamic theology and modern hermeneutics supports his commitment to accessibility and ethical resonance over literalism.

Table 5 illustrates that Bakhtiar, reflecting her rationalist and concordant translation philosophy, often chooses abstract and somewhat formal equivalents like “endeavored” or “coming eagerly for knowledge.” Her renderings prioritize consistency in root meaning and gender neutrality (Bakhtiar, 2012), which ties into her broader theological interest in emphasizing universal moral principles and intellectual engagement. Khattab, who explicitly adopts a contextual and educational translation style, frequently adds interpretive qualifiers in parentheses. For instance, he uses “eager ‘to learn’” and “proceed ‘diligently’”. These additions demonstrate a

commitment to bridging Qur’ānic meanings with contemporary readers’ values, particularly in areas like ethics and inclusion (Khattab, 2019). His work reflects a pedagogical and reformist inclination. Overall, these renderings demonstrate how translation is not merely linguistic transfer but a site of theological interpretation, where choices reflect varying emphases on literalism, accessibility, ethical contextualization, and doctrinal clarity. Table 6 shows the translations of Q. 80:9-12:

Table 6
The translations of Q. 80:9-12

Q. 80	Hilali & Khan (1977/2020)	Haleem (2004/2016)	Bakhtiar (2007/2012)	Khattab (2019)	
9	وَهُوَ يَخْشَى	And is afraid (of Allāh and His punishment).	and awe	and he dreads God,	being in awe ‘of Allah’,
10	فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى	Of him you are neglectful and divert your attention to another (p. 1058)	you are distracted. (p. 409)	then, you pay no heed to him? (p. 577)	You were inattentive to him. (p. 638)
11	كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ	Nay, (do not do like this); indeed it (this Qur’ān) is an admonition.	Never again! This is a reminder	No indeed! Truly, this is an admonition.	But no! This ‘revelation’ is truly a reminder.
12	فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ	So, whoever wills, let him pay attention to it. (p. 1058)	whoever wishes will remember it. (p. 409)	So let whoever willed, remember it. (p. 577)	So let whoever wills be mindful of it. (p. 638)

Table 6 confirms Khattab’s contextual approach. In verse 9, he renders وَهُوَ يَخْشَى, *wahwa yakhsha*, as “being in awe of Allah”. Khattab’s lexical choices emphasize the blind man’s intellectual and spiritual agency, which aligns with the ethical core of the *Sūrah*. By attending to the broader narrative context of the blind man’s story, Khattab maintains thematic coherence with the Qur’ān’s message of disability and inclusion. His use of a contextual translation approach—one that considers both the historical setting and contemporary relevance—helps render the Qur’ānic message more meaningful in today’s world (Saeed, 2006; 2017; 2021). This strategy enables a more inclusive and ethically grounded interpretation of the verse. Nonetheless, Hilali and Khan add “And is afraid (of Allāh and His punishment);” they are consistent to preach and remind the reader of people’s sins and God’s punishment. This addition reflects their interpretive tendency to insert fear-based doctrinal messaging, overshadowing the inclusive and compassionate tone of the original narrative. Hence, Khattab renders the intended meaning and considers the theme of inclusion. Additionally, the translators interpret the verb تَلَهَّى, *talahhā* as “neglectful,” “distracted,” “pay no heed to,” and “inattentive”. These choices range from single-word adjectives to verbs; they all effectively convey the intended meaning of the original text, yet Khattab’s translation is adherent to the ST structure, content and theme. His rendering avoids dramatization and stays

faithful to the subtle ethical critique directed at the Prophet's momentary lapse in prioritizing the seeker of guidance.

Although verses eleven and twelve highlight the theme of the Qur'ān as a reminder to people, their translations help reveal the translators' power relations behind their choices. Hilali and Khan as well as Khattab affirm that the reference in كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ, *kallā innaha tadhkira*, pertains to the Qur'ān. Hilali and Khan add the phrase "(this Qur'ān)"; Khattab inserts "This 'revelation'". However, Khattab employs a softer language unlike that by Hilali and Khan, who use the archaic term "Nay" for كَلَّا *kallā*, a word for negation. In 1930, Pickthall used "Nay" for كَلَّا *kallā*, yet Hilali and Khan added the imperative sentence "(do not do like this)" which is not in the source text (Abdul-Raof, 2012). This rendition aligns with Sale's (1734): "*shouldst thou act thus*" (p. 437). This technique reflects what Lefevere (1992) calls *refracted translation*, where the translator intervenes ideologically.⁶ Hilali and Khan's parenthetical interventions reflect an interpretive strategy that asserts authority over neutrality, thereby enhancing the translator's visibility (Venuti, 2008). This approach tends to restrict the reader's interpretive space (Lefevere, 1992; Hatim & Mason, 1997) by prescribing meaning rather than allowing the ambiguity of the original text to remain open for personal reflection.

Similarly, Haleem translates it as "Never again!" The word "again" is an addition, not in the ST; the power behind these choices is preaching and highlighting the criticism for not attending to the blind man (Haleem, 2016). Such emphatic renderings may heighten the rebuke but risk diminishing the universal applicability of the reminder, which is a central theme of the sūrah. Rendering فَمَنْ شَاءَ, *faman shā'a*, the translators utilize "will" for شَاءَ, *shā'*, yet Bakhtiar alters the verb to the past tense saying "willed", and Haleem renders it as "wishes," which conveys a more passive desire or hope for something to happen. Of these choices, Khattab's preserve the meaning and form. His version retains the modal openness embedded in the original Arabic, which respects the notion of human volition without prescribing belief. Overall, Khattab's translation balances semantic precision, stylistic clarity, and theological neutrality, making it more consistent with the *Sūrah's* inclusive ethos.

Conclusion

This paper compares four translations of *Sūrat 'Abasa* to examine how the translators represent the theme of inclusion. In this *Sūrah*, God admonishes Prophet Muhammad for

⁶ In his translation, Sale (1734) adds his comment in the target text and a footnote that gives *asbāb an-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). Some of these additions align with those in Hilali and Khan's translation. Sale renders Q. 80:1-12 as: "THE Prophet frowned, and turned aside, because the blind man came unto him:ⁿ and how dost thou know whether he shall peradventure be cleansed from his sins; or whether he shall be admonished, and the admonition shall profit him? The man who is wealthy thou receivest respectfully; whereas it is not to be charged on thee, that he is not cleansed: but him who cometh unto thee earnestly seeking his salvation, and who feareth God, dost thou neglect. By no means *shouldst thou act thus*. Verily the Korān is an admonition (and he who is willing retaineth the same)" (p. 437).

In a footnote he adds "ⁿThis passage was revealed on the following occasion: A certain blind man, named Abdallah Ebn Omm Mactūm, came and interrupted Mohammed while he was engaged in earnest discourse with some of the principal Koreish, whose conversion he had hopes of; but the prophet taking no notice of him, the blind man, not knowing he was otherwise busied, raised his voice, and said, O apostle of God, teach me some part of what God hath taught thee; but Mohammed vexed at this interruption, frowned and turned away from him; for which he is here reprehended. After this, whenever the prophet saw Ebn Omm Mactūm, he showed him great respect, saying, The man is welcome, on whose account my LORD hath reprimanded me; and he made him twice governor of Medina."

neglecting Abdullah ibn Umm-Maktum, a blind man who sought knowledge about Islam (Ibn Kathīr, 2002). At that time, the Prophet was engaged in a conversation with prominent Meccan pagans, attempting to persuade them to abandon idol worship and embrace monotheism. Verses 1–10 convey both a historical correction of the Prophet’s *ijtihād* and a universal, egalitarian message: all seekers, regardless of status or ability, merit attention, reflecting the Qur’ānic principle that prophets are sent as guides to all humanity without distinction. Verses 11 and 12 emphasize that the Qur’ān is a universal admonition of guidance, accessible to all, while affirming human agency—people must choose to heed its message, and the Prophet’s duty is simply to convey it impartially to everyone.

The study employs a contextualist approach to analyze the translators’ use of lexis, grammar, and connecting markers, with the goal of assessing their sensitivity to the theme of inclusion. This method facilitates a deeper understanding of how the translation choices align with or diverge from the original context of the Qur’ān (Saeed, 2006; 2017; 2021; (Abdul-Raof, 2012). The primary finding of this study is that Qur’ān translation requires translators to be well-versed in both the historical and contextual backgrounds of the *Sūrah*s. One notable example is the earliest translation by Hilali and Khan, first published in 1977 and republished annually with minor revisions. This translation is heavily focused on preaching (Aldeeb 2023), adheres strictly to traditional exegeses, and emphasizes the literal meanings of the verses (Kidwai, 2008), but fails to engage with the contemporary issue including the theme of inclusion. Haleem’s translation, by contrast, integrates both classical and contemporary exegeses, yet approaches the Qur’ān textually, without explicitly engaging with the social issue of marginalization.

Notably lacking any accompanying exegesis (Aldeeb 2023), Bakhtiar’s translation (2012) does not engage with the theme of inclusion in a meaningful way. This approach results in a significant gap in addressing crucial contemporary issues. However, Khattab’s translation, the most recent (published in 2019), demonstrates a clear sensitivity to the contemporary matters of disability and inclusion. His translation thus exemplifies the evolving nature of Qur’ān translation, aligning with Berman’s retranslation hypothesis (1990), which argues that retranslations tend to be more refined and accurate than earlier versions as they address shortcomings in previous translations and consider contemporary issues.

Khattab’s translation addresses contemporary perspectives through employing paratextual devices such as an introduction and footnotes to provide crucial historical context, allowing readers to engage with the text more knowledgeably. His translation aligns with Chouit’s (2017) views on retranslation and the importance of considering the translator’s context (Saeed, 2021). Chouit supports Berman’s (1990) argument that while source texts retain their enduring relevance, translations inevitably become outdated and must be revised over time. Saeed (2021) calls for understanding the circumstances surrounding the revelation of a verse to clarify the intended meanings and avoid misinterpretations divorced from context.

Thus, Khattab’s translation proves that recent translations that consider the context are accurate and faithful in rendering the source text (ST); they incorporate modern perspectives. By applying a contextualist approach to interpreting the Qur’ān, Khattab addresses contemporary issues while remaining true to the original message of the text. This method resonates with Brownlie’s (2006) argument that the linguistic and stylistic choices of new translations must be shaped by their socio-cultural context, ensuring the translation is both relevant and faithful. In his contextual translation, Khattab integrates historical background, paratextual material, references to the Sunnah, and lexical choices that collectively reinforce the theme of inclusion.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes the importance of translations that not only preserve the Qur'ān's core message but also respond to the evolving needs of diverse communities, ensuring its teachings continue to resonate with modern concerns (Saeed, 2021; Haleem, 2016; Abdul-Raof, 2012). By engaging with contemporary issues such as inclusion, Khattab's translation demonstrates how translations can be a vital bridge between the sacred text and modern readers.

However, the limitations of this study is the analysis of only four translations, which are representative of the ideological and cultural perspectives of their translators. This limited scope may restrict the generalizability of the findings, particularly in terms of inclusivity. While the study highlights the significance of historical and cultural contexts, it does not fully address the diverse interpretations that emerge from the varied cultural backgrounds of translators. Future research could offer a more nuanced understanding of translation practices and their implications for the theme of inclusivity in sacred texts, considering a broader range of translations and exploring the complex interplay between translator identity, cultural context, and textual representation.

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