

**ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF  
QURANIC VERSES REGARDING WOMEN:  
AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF LOSS AND GAIN IN  
MEANING BASED ON BAKER'S TAXONOMY**

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by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>xv</b>
<b>ABSTRAK</b> .....	<b>xvi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>xix</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background of the Study.....	2
1.2.1 The Holy Quran.....	2
1.2.2 Islam and Women.....	4
1.2.3 Aspects of QT.....	9
1.3 Rationale of the Study .....	12
1.4 Statement of the Problem .....	16
1.5 Research Objectives .....	23
1.6 Research Questions .....	23
1.7 Significance of the Study .....	24
1.8 Scope of the Study.....	28
1.9 Organisation of the Study.....	28
1.10 Definition of Key Terms .....	29

<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	32
2.2 Religious Texts.....	32
2.2.1 The Holy Quran.....	34
2.2.2 Features of the Holy Quran .....	39
2.2.2(a) Linguistic Features .....	40
2.2.2(b) Stylistic Features .....	43
2.2.3 Literariness of the Holy Quran.....	45
2.2.4 Women in the Holy Quran .....	49
2.2.5 Themes .....	56
2.3 Quran Translation (QT).....	59
2.3.1 History of Quran Translation .....	64
2.3.2 Brief Account of English Translations of the Holy Quran.....	68
2.3.3 The Need for Quran Translation .....	76
2.3.4 Challenges in Quran Translation.....	83
2.4 Translation Matters .....	97
2.4.1 Culture in Translation.....	102
2.4.2 Translation Strategies .....	116
2.4.3 Translation Procedures .....	125
2.4.4 Loss and Gain in Translation .....	128
2.5 Previous Studies .....	134
2.6 Conceptual Framework .....	150
2.6.1 Baker’s (2018) Taxonomy .....	150
2.6.2 Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	158
2.7 Summary .....	160

<b>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>162</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	162
3.2 Research Philosophy .....	163
3.3 Research Design .....	164
3.4 Data of the Study .....	169
3.4.1 Corpus .....	169
3.4.2 Sampling .....	170
3.4.2(a) Data Identification and Collection .....	171
3.4.2(b) Population and Sample Size .....	173
3.5 Major Themes of the Quranic Verses Regarding Women .....	177
3.5.1 Matrimony .....	178
3.5.2 Rights .....	179
3.5.3 Duties .....	179
3.5.4 Chastity .....	180
3.5.5 Equity .....	181
3.6 Data Analysis .....	182
3.7 Translations and Exegeses .....	186
3.7.1 The Translators .....	187
3.7.1(a) Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall .....	188
3.7.1(b) Arthur John Arberry .....	189
3.7.1(c) Sheikh Muhammad Sarwar .....	190
3.7.1(d) Muhammad Abdel Haleem .....	192
3.7.2 The Exegeses .....	194
3.8 Pilot Study Report .....	195
3.9 Summary .....	198

<b>CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>199</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	199
4.2 Verses on the Theme of Matrimony .....	200
4.2.1 Excerpt One .....	200
4.2.1(a) Findings .....	200
4.2.1(b) Discussion .....	202
4.2.2 Excerpt Two .....	206
4.2.2(a) Findings .....	207
4.2.2(b) Discussion .....	208
4.2.3 Excerpt Three .....	210
4.2.3(a) Findings .....	211
4.2.3(b) Discussion .....	212
4.2.4 Excerpt Four .....	217
4.2.4(a) Findings .....	218
4.2.4(b) Discussion .....	220
4.2.5 Excerpt Five .....	224
4.2.5(a) Findings .....	225
4.2.5(b) Discussion .....	226
4.2.6 Summary .....	231
4.3 Verses on the Theme of Rights .....	231
4.3.1 Excerpt One .....	232
4.3.1(a) Findings .....	232
4.3.1(b) Discussion .....	234
4.3.2 Excerpt Two .....	239
4.3.2(a) Findings .....	239



	4.3.2(b) Discussion .....	240
4.3.3	Excerpt Three .....	243
	4.3.3(a) Findings .....	243
	4.3.3(b) Discussion .....	245
4.3.4	Excerpt Four .....	247
	4.3.4(a) Findings .....	248
	4.3.4(b) Discussion .....	251
4.3.5	Excerpt Five .....	257
	4.3.5(a) Findings .....	257
	4.3.5(b) Discussion .....	259
4.3.6	Summary .....	262
4.4	Verses on the Theme of Duties .....	262
4.4.1	Excerpt One .....	262
	4.4.1(a) Findings .....	263
	4.4.1(b) Discussion .....	265
4.4.2	Excerpt Two .....	269
	4.4.2(a) Findings .....	270
	4.4.2(b) Discussion .....	272
4.4.3	Excerpt Three .....	277
	4.4.3(a) Findings .....	278
	4.4.3(b) Discussion .....	280
4.4.4	Excerpt Four .....	285
	4.4.4(a) Findings .....	285
	4.4.4(b) Discussion .....	286
4.4.5	Excerpt Five .....	287

	4.4.5(a) Findings .....	288
	4.4.5(b) Discussion .....	288
	4.4.6 Summary .....	292
4.5	Verses on the Theme of Chastity .....	292
	4.5.1 Excerpt One .....	293
	4.5.1(a) Findings .....	293
	4.5.1(b) Discussion .....	294
	4.5.2 Excerpt Two .....	297
	4.5.2(a) Findings .....	298
	4.5.2(b) Discussion .....	300
	4.5.3 Excerpt Three .....	308
	4.5.3(a) Findings .....	308
	4.5.3(b) Discussion .....	309
	4.5.4 Excerpt Four .....	312
	4.5.4(a) Findings .....	312
	4.5.4(b) Discussion .....	313
	4.5.5 Excerpt Five .....	317
	4.5.5(a) Findings .....	317
	4.5.5(b) Discussion .....	318
	4.5.6 Summary .....	322
4.6	Verses on the Theme of Equity .....	322
	4.6.1 Excerpt One .....	323
	4.6.1(a) Findings .....	323
	4.6.1(b) Discussion .....	324
	4.6.2 Excerpt Two .....	327

4.6.2(a) Findings .....	328
4.6.2(b) Discussion .....	329
4.6.3 Excerpt Three .....	334
4.6.3(a) Findings .....	334
4.6.3(b) Discussion .....	335
4.6.4 Excerpt Four .....	338
4.6.4(a) Findings .....	338
4.6.4(b) Discussion .....	339
4.6.5 Excerpt Five .....	342
4.6.5(a) Findings .....	342
4.6.5(b) Discussion .....	343
4.6.6 Summary .....	346
4.7 Findings .....	346
<b>CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>351</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	351
5.2 Summary of the Findings .....	352
5.3 Discussion of the Findings .....	353
5.4 Conclusion .....	368
5.5 Implications, Limitations and Recommendations .....	373
5.5.1 Implications .....	373
5.5.2 Limitations .....	375
5.5.3 Recommendations .....	376
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>381</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</b>	

## LIST OF TABLES

		<b>Page</b>
Table 4. 1	Verse 229 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	200
Table 4. 2	Verse 234 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	207
Table 4. 3	Verse 3 of Surah Al-Nisaa .....	211
Table 4. 4	Verse 25 of Surah Al-Nisaa .....	218
Table 4. 5	Verse 1 of Surah Al-Talaaq.....	225
Table 4. 6	Verse 231 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	232
Table 4. 7	Verse 236 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	239
Table 4. 8	Verse 240 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	243
Table 4. 9	Verse 11 of Surah Al-Nisaa .....	248
Table 4. 10	Verse 127 of Surah Al-Nisaa .....	257
Table 4. 11	Verse 222 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	263
Table 4. 12	Verse 233 of Surah Al-Baqarah .....	270
Table 4. 13	Verse 34 of Surah Al-Nisaa .....	278
Table 4. 14	Verse 34 of Surah Al-Ahzaab .....	285
Table 4. 15	Verse 35 of Surah Al-Ahzaab .....	288
Table 4. 16	Verse 5 of Surah Al-Maaidah .....	293
Table 4. 17	Verse 31 of Surah Al-Noor .....	298
Table 4. 18	Verse 60 of Surah Al-Noor .....	308
Table 4. 19	Verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzaab .....	312
Table 4. 20	Verse 59 of Surah Al-Ahzaab .....	317
Table 4. 21	Verse 195 of Surah Aal-‘Imraan .....	323
Table 4. 22	Verse 1 of Surah Al-Nisaa .....	328

Table 4. 23	Verse 189 of Surah Al-A'raaf.....	334
Table 4. 24	Verse 71 of Surah Al-Tawbah .....	338
Table 4. 25	Verse 13 of Surah Al-Hujuraat .....	342
Table 4. 26	Strategies used with regard to each theme .....	347
Table 4. 27	Strategies, loss and gain frequency table .....	348

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 2.1 Baker's (2018) Taxonomy .....	157
Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	160
Figure 3.1 Research Design.....	168
Figure 3.2 Collection and Identification of Data.....	173
Figure 3.3 Analysis Procedures .....	186

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>SL</b>	Source Language
<b>TL</b>	Target Language
<b>SC</b>	Source Culture
<b>TC</b>	Target Culture
<b>SLT</b>	Source Language Text
<b>TLT</b>	Target Language Text
<b>LT</b>	Literal Translation
<b>QT</b>	Quran Translation
<b>PBUH</b>	Peace be upon him

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

- APPENDIX A Selected verses regarding women (according to their appearance in the Holy Quran)
- APPENDIX B Selected sample categorised into themes



**TERJEMAHAN AYAT AL-QURAN BERKAITAN WANITA KE DALAM**

**BAHASA INGGERIS:**

**SATU ANALISIS MENDALAM TENTANG KEHILANGAN DAN  
PENAMBAHAN MAKNA BERDASARKAN TAKSONOMI BAKER**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian-kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa tidak ada penterjemahan al-Quran yang bebas daripada kekurangan; tarikannya di sini bukanlah soal adanya atau tiada kelemahan dalam sesuatu terjemahan, tetapi setakat mana kelemahan yang berlaku, memandangkan penterjemahan al-Quran yang mulia ke bahasa asing dengan ketepatan sempurna merupakan satu tugas mustahil. Merujuk kepada beberapa ayat-ayat al-Quran, terdapat beberapa dakwaan bahawa Islam menindas dan menafikan hak kaum wanita. Persepsi umum bahawa kaum wanita dipandang rendah, didiskriminasi dan dihina berdasarkan ayat-ayat yang terkandung dalam al-Quran yang mulia sudah menjadi kebiasaan di negara Barat, yang bergantung pada terjemahan al-Quran yang mulia. Tesis ini merupakan satu analisis mendalam terhadap empat terjemahan ayat-ayat al-Quran berkaitan wanita ke dalam Bahasa Inggeris oleh Pickthall, Arberry, Sarwar dan Abdel Haleem. Ayat-ayat yang telah dipilih dianalisis bertujuan mengenal pasti strategi-strategi yang digunakan dan menentukan takat penyusutan atau peningkatan dalam maksud. Selain itu, kajian ini juga mengenal pasti strategi-strategi dominan dan paling kurang digunakan, dan menentukan tema-tema yang menunjukkan penyusutan atau peningkatan paling tinggi dari segi maksud. Bagi tujuan ini, ayat-ayat berkenaan kaum wanita telah dikenal pasti dan dikategorikan ke dalam lima tema utama berdasarkan

subjek, kemudiannya dianalisis berdasarkan taksonomi Baker. Tafsiran Ibn Kathir dan As-Sa'di telah digunakan untuk menentukan maksud ayat-ayat tersebut, manakala terjemahan berbalik ke asal berfungsi menjustifikasikan sebarang penyusutan atau peningkatan maksud. Kaedah kualitatif digunakan memandangkan ia bersesuaian dengan permasalahan dan soalan-soalan kajian. Daripada 17 strategi yang dicadangkan oleh Baker, sebanyak 14 telah digunakan dalam pelbagai tahap. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesemua tema mengalami penyusutan maksud, manakala peningkatan didapati dalam tiga tema sahaja. Secara keseluruhannya, dapatan kajian menampakkan bahawa *penggunaan perkataan-perkataan superordinat* merupakan strategi yang digunakan secara paling dominan, manakala *penggunaan perumpamaan dengan maksud yang sama tetapi dalam bentuk berbeza* adalah yang paling kurang digunakan. Secara spesifiknya bagi setiap tema, *voice change* telah menjadi yang paling dominan dalam tema perkahwinan, *penambahan* didapati dominan dalam tema hak dan kewajipan, *parafrasa* dominan dalam tema kehormatan diri, manakala dalam tema kesaksamaan, *penggunaan perkataan-perkataan superordinat* adalah dominan. Merujuk strategi-strategi yang paling kurang digunakan pula, *parafrasa penggunaan perkataan-perkataan yang tidak berkaitan* telah digunakan secara minima dalam tema perkahwinan, *pemampasan* dalam tema hak, *nominalisasi* dalam tema kewajipan. *Penggunaan perumpamaan dengan maksud yang sama tetapi dalam bentuk berbeza* paling kurang digunakan dalam tema kehormatan diri manakala dalam tema kesaksamaan, *extraposisi* dan *nominalisasi* telah digunakan dua kali setiap satunya. Selain itu, tema hak telah didapati mengalami paling banyak penyusutan maksud berbanding tema-tema lain, manakala tema perkahwinan menunjukkan peningkatan maksud paling tinggi. Dapatan kajian ini menyumbang kepada ilmu penterjemahan dan

mempunyai kepentingan bagi para ilmuwan dalam bidang naskhah keagamaan, diskriminasi jantina dan pengajian Islam. Selain itu, beberapa dakwaan dan salah faham mengenai Islam mampu dijustifikasikan dan alasan di sebaliknya boleh diperincikan dengan kajian selanjutnya.

**ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF QURANIC VERSES REGARDING WOMEN:  
AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF LOSS AND GAIN IN MEANING BASED ON  
BAKER’S TAXONOMY**

**ABSTRACT**

Studies have demonstrated that no translation of the Holy Quran is devoid of shortcomings; the point of interest is not whether there are shortcomings, but lies instead in the extent of the shortcomings, since translating the Holy Quran into a foreign language with perfect accuracy is an impossible task. Referring to several Quranic verses, claims have been made that Islam oppresses women and deprives them of their rights. This general perception that women are looked down upon, discriminated and insulted based on verses of the Holy Quran is common in the West, where translations of the Holy Quran are relied on. This thesis comprises an in-depth analysis of four English renditions of Quranic verses regarding women from the renditions by Pickthall, Arberry, Sarwar and Abdel Haleem. The selected verses are analysed with the aim of identifying the strategies used and determining the extent of loss or gain in meaning. Also, identification of the most dominant and least used strategies, and determining the themes demonstrating the most loss or gain in meaning. To this end, the verses regarding women were identified and categorised into five major themes based on their subject matter, then analysed using Baker’s taxonomy. Ibn Kathir’s and As-Sa’di’s exegeses were utilised for the purpose of determining the meaning of the verses, while back translations served to justify any loss or gain in meaning. Based on the nature of the research problem and the research questions, the qualitative approach was used. Out of

the 17 strategies proposed by Baker, 14 were employed in varying degrees. The findings indicate that all themes suffered loss in meaning, whereas gain was observed in three themes only. Overall, the findings reveal that *using superordinate words* is the most dominant strategy used, while *using idiom of similar meaning but different form* is the least used. With specific regard to each theme, *voice change* was most dominant in the matrimony theme, *addition* dominated the theme of rights and duties, *paraphrasing* was most dominant in the chastity theme, while in the equity theme, application of *superordinate words* was dominant. Regarding the least used strategies, *paraphrasing using unrelated words* was applied minimally in the matrimony theme, *compensation* in the rights theme, *nominalisation* in the theme of duties. *Using idiom of similar meaning but different form* is least used in chastity theme while in the theme of equity, *extraposition* and *nominalisation* were used twice each. Furthermore, it was found that the theme of rights demonstrated the most loss in meaning compared to the other themes, whereas the theme of matrimony demonstrated the most gain in meaning. The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of translation studies, and are relevant to scholars working with religious texts, gender discrimination and Islamic studies. Besides, claims and misconceptions about Islam could be justified and the reasons behind them clarified with further research.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The current chapter generally establishes the focal point of the study and the overview, as well as the background in which the study is situated. It starts by presenting an overview of the background of the research, the study's rationale, problem statement, research objectives and questions. It then presents the significance of the study, the scope of the study, the organisation of the study and concluding with the key terms used in the study.

Several renditions of the Holy Quran exist which have been undertaken by numerous translators from diverse cultural, religious, and scholarly backgrounds, and due to this, these translation products differ in a way or another. Al-Halawani (2016) argues that some of these translations failed in recognising the Holy text's linguistic and cultural dimensions. Besides, they also failed not only in comprehending the Quranic terms and/or the concepts' real essence, but also the dimensions pertinent to the sacred text's predominant spirit i.e., the elements related to main essence of the Holy Quran. Furthermore, Nassimi (2008) views that a continuous challenge for improving the quality of the Holy Quran's renditions exists because of the fact that the several renditions available cannot be deemed entirely accurate. Generally, inaccuracy in meaning transference may adversely affect the perception of the Holy text.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

### **1.2.1 The Holy Quran**

The Holy Quran is considered as the sacred scripture for millions of Muslims around the globe. Abdel Haleem (2005) asserts that in Islam, the Holy Quran is considered the highest authority, which serves as the major and the dominant source of not only the doctrine, but also the moral values, rites, as well as the regulations of the Islamic religion. Murata and Chittick (1994) believe that Allah's revelation of the Holy Quran is an event of an overwhelming importance according to the Islamic view. And since the Quranic text is Allah's absolute Word, it is hence sensitive, and no one can or has the right to change even a letter of this sacred text (Al-Jabari, 2008).

Al-Azami (2003) declares that the speakers of the Arabic language have long held the Holy Quran as a book of unique beauty, and even the idol-worshippers of Makkah at the time of its revelation were mesmerized by its lyricism and could not produce anything akin to it. According to him, this book is guidance, comfort and beauty for Muslims who deem it to be the heartbeat of faith, a remembrance in moments of bliss and grief, a source of precise scientific reality and the most exquisite lyricism, in addition to be a treasury of wisdom and supplications. The Quranic text has been preserved intact and each of its word has come down to us as free from interference and interpolation as when it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad 1400 years ago (Ahmad, 2016).

As for Quran translation (henceforth QT), Abdul-Raof (2001) asserts that the translation of this sacred text is considered as a "major human contribution in cross-cultural interfertilization; it is a unique charity to humanity" (p. 1). Nevertheless,

Nassimi (2008) observes that since the Holy Quran is Allah's perfect words, its rendition to different other languages remains confined to the human translators' comprehension of its meaning. While Watson (2007) deems that the Holy Quran is understood to be the inimitable literary miracle for all mankind from God, which will last till the day of judgment, with no one having the ability to equal it. And it is due to this inimitability that it is widely agreed that it is not fully transferable. Nonetheless, several attempts have been done to present the meaning of the sacred text. Barnes (2012) maintains that in spite of the Muslim belief that the Holy Quran is inimitable, numerous translations of the text into other languages have been produced for a variety of purposes. For instance, necessity to understand Islam and Muslims' true identity (Sadiq, 2010), presenting accurate and communicatively effective renditions of the major literary works, thought, and primarily, the Islamic religion as manifested in it (Almisned, 2001) etc. Thus, the titles of these renditions avoid the term translation but rather use different terms like 'the meaning', 'the interpretation' etc. For instance, Pickthall's (1930) work is entitled "*The Meaning of the Glorious Quran: An Explanatory Translation*".

Jaber (2010) argues that translators of the Quranic text are involved with transferring its meaning yet meaning (content) is encapsulated in the form which is distinctly rhetorical in the Holy Quran. Moreover, she deems that most of the inadequacies found in the renditions of the Quranic text could most probably be attributed to the fact that the translators seem to have failed to take up the big challenge of approaching such an inimitable, matchless text. According to her, translators might have failed to realise the content-form balance in their renditions, mainly due to the unique genre of its text.



### **1.2.2 Islam and Women**

Syed (2004) declares that the most controversial and most complicated of all social problems is concerned with women's rights and obligations. According to him, historical studies of the existence of differences between men and women in several societies result in the inference that these differences imply different values as well. Owing to the values and culture of male dominance and of discrimination against women, the position of women in the West was not better than their position in Asia and Africa. In a similar vein, Abdul-Kareem (2001) asserts that women's affairs are one of the most significant issues of social dispute between Islam and other civilisations. Several misconceptions about women and their rights in Islam have been widely propagated, reiterated by those whose intentions are defaming Islam and Muslims in a malicious manner (Al-Sheha, 2000).

Akhmetova (2015) highlights on the real situations of women in modern Muslim societies compared to their rights in Islam. According to her, women suffer from domestic abuse, insecurity, low access to education and medical care in the Middle Eastern and North African regions as well as other conflict-ridden regions, despite being given trust, confidence, in addition to high liabilities in the realms of educational guidance, leadership, and management at Islam's early age. Further, El-gousi (2010) is of the opinion that apart from patriarchal and cultural factors, different interpretations of rights of women in Islam on the one hand, along with the rights that they are actually allowed in reality instead, is a factor that creates confusion among Muslim women, and presents the impression and discrimination among them. According to her, women are divided between radical and non-radical Islamic religious scholars who, because of their philosophies, maintain a patriarchal society and support their stance by interpreting

some of the Holy Quran's teachings in a way that favours men and provides them with more control over women.

Barlas (2001) states that despite of the Muslim cultures and societies' diversity, women in numerous societies undergo several kinds of discrimination and sexual inequality. These range from cultural values and psychological attitudes where bigotry or violence towards women is tolerated, to refusal of women's recognition as legal and moral agents equal to men by the laws, to the deprivation or restriction of economic or political rights and resources to them compared with men. Moreover, through recourse to knowledge that is claimed to derive from the Islamic religion including the Holy Quran, oppression and discrimination are often justified.

However, respect towards all mankind, irrespective of their gender and social status, is the primary rule in Islam (Akhmetova, 2015). El-gousi (2010) argues that women in Islam are treated as human beings with free souls, owning fully-fledged individual status. Yet in some parts of the Muslim-majority countries, Muslim women are deprived of these rights, where radical interpretation of the teachings of the Holy Quran has been exploited as a tool to suppress women under the name of Islam. In line with this, Adnan (2004) explains that most societies, including Muslim societies, the notion of gender (a product of a social construct) has a tendency to accord women low statuses and often situates them in a non-advantageous position, despite the fact that no Quranic verse promotes or supports gender discrimination.

Adnan (*ibid.*) argues that promoting gender equality through a reconstruction of gender relationships justly is fundamentally needed. His argument is that the position of women has been made weaker and more advantageous due to the exaggerated regards for the translation and interpretation of the holy scriptures' meaning as the source of a

final and legitimate verdicts. He deems that some people believe that women discrimination and oppression are permissible, and such attitudes are allowable because of gender bias in the interpretation of some religious scriptures, including the Holy Quran. As for El-gousi (2010), many verses in the Holy Quran prove that men-women equality is called for in the Islamic religion, but wonders what the problem seems to be, and why women in both Arab and Muslim societies are being denied their basic rights granted by their own religion.

From a female perspective, Wadud (1999) declares that in most Muslim majority or minority communities, women are considered less important than men, and as a result, Muslim women do not possess an equal status as men. Moreover, she argues that men and women differ, yet the differences are not of their essential natures, and contends the values attributed to the differences such as description of women as being inferior, essentially evil, weak, incompetent in terms of intelligence, and spiritually lacking. As a result, claims such as unsuitability of women in accomplishing specific tasks, or functioning in some ways in their societies emerged. Wadud's (*ibid.*) argument is that if what defines Islam is determined by what Muslims do or how they behave, then women and men are not equal.

Adnan (2004) asserts that the Holy Quran despite acknowledging the differences between males and females anatomically, does not make one gender better or more valuable than the other, in fact, it reforms and is characterised by gender equality. He presents several examples of how gender equality is portrayed in the Holy Quran such as equalisation of the position of men and women as Allah's slaves, created from the same substance. Also, high position will be awarded to both men and women if they are pious, and both are given the same opportunity to partake Allah's blessing, mercy and

approval. One and all are responsible for their own sins as the Holy Quran does not acknowledge inherited or original sin. Although, it may be argued that some verses provide more privileges to men like the verses regarding polygamy, inheritance, testimony, etc., their revelations serve as answers to specific issues of particular backgrounds (Adnan, 2004).

Furthermore, El-gousi (2010) maintains that Arab and Muslim women's status has become a matter that provokes controversies because Islam is seen as a religion that encourages discrimination against women and looks down upon them. As a result, drawing significant research interest among researchers in various fields like social development, sociology, theology and feminist studies; this interest serves to clarify and shed light on the controversies. Even in fairly peaceful Muslim societies, women's status is discouraging, where cases of gender discrimination are inflicted due to the widespread evils such as nepotism, corruption, injustice and sexism (Akhmetova, 2015).

El-gousi (2010) argues that a general perception in the West towards women living in the Arab and Muslim communities is that they are looked down upon and discriminated as far as having equal rights with men is concerned. As an example, Arlandson (2005) believes that women are oppressed and insulted based on verses of the Holy Quran. In fact, this general profile about Islam is reinforced in certain Muslim communities, enhancing the widespread misinterpretation of religious teachings. Muslim women are often deemed to be backward in a male-dominated world by the West (Saifee, Baloach, Sultan & Khalid, 2012). Similarly, Roald (2001) argues that the issue about gender has been a sensitive one in the debate about the Islamic religion among non-Muslims and in the debate amongst Muslims. She claims that non-Muslims constantly accuse Islam as a religion that carries hostility towards women, while

alternatively, Muslims express that the issue regarding gender never existed in Islam until the interference of the West in Muslim matters. According to her, Muslims believe in the existence of an idyllic gender pattern in Islam, and which is present in the Muslim society.

Offenhauer (2005) observes that Islamic writings have been interpreted in manners that favour patriarchal social relations, this is also the case with other Abrahamic faiths (Christianity and Judaism). According to her, up to the past 20 years, Islam has been represented as uniquely patriarchal and incompatible with women's equality by observers from the West. The Islamic religion is now viewed as no more inherently misogynist by many scholars than the other major monotheistic traditions. In the same vein, Arora and Mishra (2016) argue that a key role has been played by religious doctrines and the interpretation of religious texts in establishing and advocating for a gender-based dichotomy where a drastic distinction between men's role and the women's exists. They assert that Quranic verses have granted both men and women equal status, but due to different interpretations as well as the influence of other cultures, Muslim women are caused to experience several disparities and ill-treatment such as domestic violence, honour killings, subjugation etc., in the name of religion. Ibnouf (2015) is of the opinion that women are not treated in accordance with their Islam-given rights in numerous Muslim communities, who possess customs, cultures, and belief systems of their own. Thus, it is observed that Muslim women have been exposed to patriarchal features and cultural matters of their particular societies, as well as political repression, resulting in discrimination and oppression.

### **1.2.3 Aspects of QT**

For centuries, the Holy Quran continues to be translated into different languages like English, German, Italian, Swahili, Turkish, Persian etc. This tendency tends to rise interests among researchers of why different translations of the same book are presented over time. Nassimi (2008) states that the extensive experience with the different renditions of the Holy Quran is what triggered him to question the nature of the disparities among those different renderings and to review the English versions of the Holy Quran more seriously and systematically. Similarly, several studies of the various criticisms (translation quality, loss in meaning, incomprehensibility etc.) of the different translations (Ahmed 2017; Albarakati & Saleem 2019; Al-Jabari, 2008; Jassim 2014; Siddiek, 2018a) sparked the current researcher's curiosity of these renditions and evoked inquiries of what strategies were used by the translators so as to be deemed either inaccurate or producing linguistic errors and even semantic losses.

In addition, there are studies that have been done regarding various aspects of the Holy Quran's renditions. For example, studies regarding the quality of translation (Ahmed, 2014; Khoshnoudi, 2019), some regarding its untranslatability (Watson, 2007), studies pertinent to specific surahs (Sadiq, 2010) and particular verses (Al-Maliki, 2001), loss of meaning (Abdelaal & Rashid 2015; Aslam, 2018), pragmatic loss (Abdullah, 2017) etc. Since it is unmanageable to research the totality of the Holy Quran, and the presentation of women's image in translations, which may depart from the original images in the ST (Aly, 2018) and the fact that most translations of the Holy Quran are stained with mistranslations impacting on many aspects of meaning, especially the representation of women (Al-Tarawneh, 2022), choosing one aspect (specific verses regarding women in this case) seems rational. As for the present study, it

centres on the translation of an intriguing yet controversial issue, namely *verses regarding women*, because of the claims and misconceptions that women in Islam are oppressed and their rights are abused (El-gousi, 2010). Since the Holy Quran is the highest authority serving as the major and the dominant source of the doctrine, moral values, rites, as well as the regulations of Islam (Abdel Haleem, 2005); because it is an immutable foundation of faith, the Islamic law Sharia's source, and due to the fact that it remains Allah's divine message revealed to the Prophet, not lending itself to any amendment in the legislation according to the Muslims' perspective (El-gousi, 2010), looking into the verses might clarify some of the misconceptions.

The Holy Quran's translations have played a substantial role in the widespread of the Islamic religion. The necessity of translating the Holy Quran in order to deliver Islam's message to Muslims around the world is paramount (Mohammad, 2005). Yet, such endeavour poses great challenges to translators at different levels; whether finding equivalents, retaining the exact meaning, producing similar effect, filling lexical or cultural gaps etc. For instance, the Islamic term التيمم (*al-tayyammum*), which means to perform ablution using clean dust as a substitute of water when it is unavailable, has no equivalent in the English language, hence attempting to render it may lead to loss in meaning. In addition, issues like deviations and under-translations are challenges that can impede translation and produce inaccurate renditions because of not referring to the interpretations of the sacred text, incompetence in Arabic linguistics, as well as failure to decipher and communicate the nuances of the many polysemous words in Arabic (Abdelaal & Rashid, 2015). Also, adopting certain strategies may lead to different outcomes. For instance, Baker (2018) declares that loss in meaning is inevitable when employing the omission strategy.

Studies on QT have been widely conducted. There are those that focused on the translation of selected surahs, those on particular translators, those on specific verses etc. However, attempting an in-depth analysis of a combination of different translators from different backgrounds and different times, and translation of only verses regarding women thematically categorised has not yet been profoundly pursued. Hence, such endeavour can be seen as novel. Though Quranic verses on women have been the focus of much research, little attention in this regard has been paid to their translations, and how these translations present images of women, which may depart from the original images in the original text (Aly, 2018).

In brief, this study aspires to answer the questions to be posed shortly. Since it is qualitative in nature, no hypotheses will be employed. On the one hand, it is common in translation that literal translation (henceforth LT) is widely adopted even in rendering sacred texts. As put by Pickthall (1930), “*The book is here rendered almost literally...*” (p. vii). Nevertheless, whether such practice conveys the exact meaning of the Divine text is still debatable. On the other hand, it is often recommended that the Holy Quran should not be translated literally since LT often results into alienation in the TL, while the best means of translation regarding the Holy Quran is the interpretive mode, besides following a scheme intended to assist translators in producing accurate and precise renditions of the Divine text (Al-Halawani, 2016). Yet again, Khan (2012) argues that there is no indication of studies that discuss whether a particular rendition of the Holy Quran has aimed at replicating the original or whether it conforms to what the targeted readership needs and/or expects and how this is manifested in the actual TT.

Finally, worth noting is that in this thesis, despite the use of the terms ‘Islam’, ‘Muslim world’, ‘West’, ‘Western’, it is not intended to provide a dichotomy between



Islam and the West. Rather, the use of the terms serves in designating the geographical locations and indicating the differences pertaining to the cultural norms and social values between the Muslim majority countries where two of the translators come from and Western countries where the other two translators come from. In issues regarding women, there are differences between some of the norms and values that are common to many Muslim societies and those that are predominant in various countries in the West. These include norms relating to dress codes, education, mobility, role, gender equality and opposite sex relationships.

### **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

The message of Allah is originally revealed in Arabic, and for a prolonged period, the Holy Quran has been rendered into different languages. According to DeSilver and Masci (2013), the estimation of Muslims as of 2010 is 1.6 billion, while as of the year 2020, this population increased to reach 1.7 billion Muslims making 24% of the world population (Cuesta-Valino, Bolifa & Nunez-Barriopedro, 2020). However, 80% of this large Muslim population are non-native speakers of Arabic and to this end, their understanding of the holy scripture is through translation. Thus, it is through translation that the word of Allah is spread all over the world.

Abdelaal (2017) states two reasons why it is necessary for the Holy Quran to be translated. First, a large population of the entire Muslim population are not speakers of the Arabic language. Second, lack of proofed rendition of the Holy Quran makes it easier for the enemies of Islam to attack the religion by presenting inaccurate translations intentionally, hence debunking Islam. He mentions some examples like those of Alexander Ross in 1649 and George Sale in 1734. Likewise, Mohammed (2005)

is of the view that the significant motivation of translating the Holy Quran lies in the large population of non-speakers of Arabic Muslims who depend on the Holy Quran's translations so that the message of this Holy book can be communicated to all Muslims universally. Therefore, it is necessary that accurate and reliable translations of the Holy Quran need to be attempted. Shuttleworth and Cowie (1996) maintain that accuracy, along with readability and acceptability, are the criteria for determining the translation quality. In an article titled *How to Judge Translation Quality* (2019), the author highlights on the characteristics of high-quality translations, where accuracy in conveying the intended meaning is essential, besides conveying the tone as well as the intent of the ST and considering the regional and cultural differences.

Al-Jabari (2008) maintains that the Holy Quran is among the books that is most rendered into different languages by different scholars with the aim of having the Holy text's meaning transferred into those languages, with English being regarded as the most essential one among those languages. According to Al-Jabari (*ibid.*), the reason behind this lies in the increasing communities of non-Arab Muslims in English-speaking nations, greater interest about Islam academically and the ongoing discussions about the so-called Muslim terrorism so as to obtain different translations of the Holy Book with the aim to understand the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Muslim mentality.

Consequently, several translations of the Holy Quran have been presented by different translators: Muslims, non-Muslims, males and females alike. Nassimi (2008) points out that in the last four centuries, the translation of the Holy Quran has been done by many people, few of those were by non-Muslims in the period amidst the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, while through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 30 translations have been carried out by Muslims. In the final few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 10 additional

renditions by Muslims have been issued. Yet the different interpretations of the verses still stand. Abdul-Raof (2001) concludes that the translations of the Holy Quran are interpretations of its meanings and not the Holy Quran itself. He agrees with the Murata and Chittick's (1994) argument that these many renditions of this Holy Book represent each translators' comprehension of the Holy text which differs significantly from others, and yet none of these renditions is the Holy Quran itself. Only one Word of God exists, yet many interpretations of that Word, as well as readers exist. Several translations and different interpretations are available due to the reasons mentioned above, and as a result, perceived differently.

Muslim women constitute more than half a billion of the women in the world (Offenhauer, 2005). To illustrate a point, in Islam, it is realised that women are to abide by a specific attire; loose garments covering their entire body as well as their hair (Al-Maliki, 2001). In the Holy Quran, two specific verses address this particular issue of proper attire for women (24: 31 and 33: 59). Muslim women universally wear different attire. For instance, in Turkey, Secor (2002) claims that Istanbul is composed of "regimes of veiling, that is, different, spatially realized sets of hegemonic rules and norms regarding women's veiling" (p. 8). The regimes involving not to wear the veil are officially enforced public spheres, specifically in schools, universities and offices. However, when women go into a mosque, they pull a scarf, cover their heads, and pray. After finishing, they remove the head scarf and go on their ways (Al-Maliki, 2001). As a norm in Malaysia, Malaysian Muslim women adopt traditional full *abaya* or front-buttoned *jilbab* tunic and *hijab*, a head covering. Such attire distinguishes them in Malaysia from other ethnic groups and this dress code is retained even when they travel to Europe (Bigger, 2006). Traditionally, Muslim women in Malaysia wear a dress with

long skirt, long sleeves and tight neck known as the *Baju Kurong*, and cover their heads with a scarf or a small headdress, the *mini-telekung* (Boulanouar, 2006). Yet in Afghanistan, Khinjani (2012) explains that women in public must cover their entire bodies, typically with a dress consisting of pants ‘*tombaan*,’ an overdress ‘*perahaan*’ and a head covering, ‘*chadar*’. In some African countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, women cover their bodies with a wrap cloth of daily use called *Leso/Kanga*; widely spread printed cloths mainly worn as dresses, and which are colourful, with messages of wisdom or proverbs printed on them. This played an important role in the emancipation of slaves and their integration into the Muslim, Swahili community of the East African coast (cited in Beck, 2000). While in some parts of Europe like France, French Muslim women wear casual, loose-fitting outfit and a hijab on their heads when going out. A statistic conducted in 2019 represents the percentage of French Muslim women who wear a headscarf (*hijab/niqab*), by frequency where 31% of Muslim women residing in France in that year wore a headscarf (cited in Statista Research Department, 2020). These women are dedicated Muslims, whether from birth or by conversion, yet still one may wonder why the variation in their apparel while the Holy Quran has provided guidelines for proper Islamic dress. The answer is simple. These women are non-Arabic speakers constituting the overwhelming majority of Muslims; hence it might be difficult to understand the original word of Allah in Arabic, and likely dependent on translations of the Holy Quran (Elimam, 2017) as well as due to cultural differences.

Further, for more than 1400 years, the Holy Quran has remained unchanged, and stood the test of time (Meraj, 2016), yet different interpretations emerge with time. It can be due to several reasons such as misinterpretation of the original message, distortion of the true meaning, imposing certain ideologies, misleading people (Al-Jabari, 2008;

Nassimi, 2008). Further, quality translations in which accuracy and meaning conveyance are of high prominence, are difficult to obtain (Boulanouar, 2006) and translations rest on the translators' culture, knowledge and background (Roald 2001). Thus, comes the rationale behind the selection of the Holy Quran in general, and specific verses regarding women in particular. Because of different translations and interpretations, the one message may be inversely perceived and differently conveyed.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

Particularly, translating religious texts requires more of the translators. Al-Halawani (2016) agrees that besides being precise and accurate, the Holy Quran's translation should also perfectly conform with the Islamic faith. For this to be achieved, full and precise comprehension of the source text (henceforth ST) along with faithful, accurate and precise transference of the meaning into the TL with no violation of the features and meanings of the ST is required of the translator. He quotes Dickins, Hervey and Higgins (2002) who believe that the content of sacred texts suggests the presence of a non-fictive spiritual world which possesses its own truths and realities. According to them, authors have no freedom in creating a world that animates the content, however, they are simply to be instrumental in probing and analysing it (p. 178).

Generally, due to the several different interpretations of the Quranic verses, controversy inevitably emerges. For instance, Al-Maliki (2001) explores the translations of two verses about *hijab*, and according to her, the question whether Muslim women must cover their faces or may expose their faces is rather controversial due to the various interpretations of the verses. She refers to liberal and feminist thinkers who argue that, due to the misinterpretation of these verses, the social tradition of wearing *hijab* has

persevered till now. Similarly, several verses in relation to women affairs cause misunderstanding among Muslims generally, and Muslim women particularly because of the false claims and accusations that Islam is a religion in which women are oppressed and their rights abused. For example, According to Arlandson (2005), the ultimate source of sharia (the Holy Quran) oppresses women in particular, and people in general, and it is too patriarchal and bound to culture to be relevant to the new era.

The translation of the verses regarding women affairs is fundamental. There are various means that have been used to deny women their rights, and these include selective interpretation of key religious texts (Al Khayat, 2003). Shehata (2020) claims that in the Holy Quran, the women's image has been misrepresented in its translations. This is due to reasons like that of lack of understanding the Arabic language as well as its rules, the rise of Islamophobia, the application of the Islamic laws in our modern-day world, lack of interest in the interpretations of the Holy Quran, and prevalence of secularism. In fact, as argued by Barlas (2001), the readings and representations of Islam and its Holy scripture as being oppressive or patriarchal, depend on several errors, and indeed, the Holy Quran can be read as an antipatriarchal text, which undermines the fundamental claims of patriarchies. Additionally, Al-Tarawneh (2022) proclaims that most translations of the Holy Quran are stained with mistranslations due to translators' adoption of the literal approach, and this has an impact on many aspects of meaning, but especially the representation of women.

Saifee *et al.* (2012) declare that the issue regarding women is one that arises contention among two global perspectives: secular liberal humanist under Western culture and the Islamic customs of the Muslims. The view of the former is that it is solely under Western culture that women are elevated and achieve much more, while in

the world of Muslims, women are still suffering of the deprivation of their basic rights. The latter's perspective is that in Islam, a system where one and all (men and women) have the liberty to live life freely but within the boundaries that the Islamic religion ascribes for their own well-being is proposed. Qureshi and Khan (2018) assert that women's oppression is a fact, which is not given but rather constructed. While Al-Tarawneh (2022) concludes that many translations of the Holy Quran instantiate a fertile ground, contributing to the creation of a negative image of Muslim women in the eyes of the West.

As put by Al-Jabari (2008), non-Muslims have the idea that the Holy Quran, besides enjoining the killing of non-Muslims by Muslims, it mistreats and abuses women, and this conception arises from the incomprehensibility in the translated versions of the Holy Quran. In line with this is Nassimi's (2008) argument that the spread of the distorted messages of the Holy Quran is because of the inaccurate conveyance of its true messages and the misunderstandings by the world's populace majority, particularly in the Western communities. For instance, Arlandson (2005) believes that the Holy Quran advocates for gender inequality and oppression, and declares that a culture of violence against women, particularly within the family has been encouraged by the Islamic punishments. Also, as Abdel Haleem (2011) explains, the Holy Quran's English translations have contributed to the popular image of the treatment of women in Islam, and in some of those translations, most of the words of the passage have been misunderstood and mistranslated. Thus, how women in Islam are looked at is a result of some of the inaccurate renditions. Misinterpretation is usually based on male prejudice, imitating others' views devoid of close consideration of the passage, age-old prejudice and media sensationalism (Abdel Haleem, 2011).

Translations of the Holy Quran has had a profound impact on Western views of Muslim women (Al-Tarawneh, 2022). This is because of the circulation of several renditions of the Holy Quran in the Anglosphere placing women in an inferior position, including presenting them as second-class citizens (Lamrabet, 2016; Syed, 2004). Particularly, addressing the Quranic verses regarding women may clarify the claims that Islam abuses women's rights and oppresses them.

Another relevant aspect is the choices made by the translator in selecting a particular strategy, lexis, syntax etc, in rendering a particular verse. Chesterman (1997) states that the current goals of the translation theory might be the description of translators' acts, translators' strategies usage and roles in certain linguistic and sociocultural conditions, justification of their choices, the norms they follow and the value underlying them, and finally, assessment of the impact of the translatorial actions on both readers, and culture and intercultural relations. Thus, it can be understood that translation acts do not occur randomly. Despite Chesterman's (1997) claim that translators have manipulative power, he expounds that they are also bound by limitations that constrain them from being free agents. Their translation products are based on choices they make in terms of how they translate and why they translated in such a way.

As discussed earlier, the area regarding translating religious texts in general and QT in particular, is crucial as far as the difficulties they pose, and the strategies adopted are concerned. Moreover, in the process of the noted inaccuracies (Abdelaal & Rashid, 2015; Nassimi, 2008) and meaning loss (Alduhaim, 2021; Abdelaal, 2017; Aslam, 2018), it was also noted that literal translations of the verses were abundant. Al Fozan (2020) observes that Non-Arab Muslim translators of the Holy Quran face several problems, mainly that occur at the semantic level. Among the aims of the study is



determining and identifying the different translation strategies used to render thematically categorised Quranic verses regarding women, and whether the choice of certain strategy led to loss or gain in meaning. Besides, identifying the most dominant strategies used with regard to each theme, and exploring which theme demonstrate loss or gain the most. As Alduhaim (2012) argues, it is due to the linguistic complexity of the Holy Quran that challenges are posed for translators, which eventually lead to loss in meaning and inaccuracies. Further, the issue of loss becomes more serious when it is related to religious literature which defines the faith or rituals of a community (Abdullah, 2017).

Previously, several studies have been attempted to discover the methods and strategies (literal, non-literal, interpretive etc.) translators adopt in translating the Holy Quran in general. For instance, studies on the Holy Quran have been conducted from different aspects like that of comparative studies (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017), focusing on one particular surah (Almisned, 2001; Aslam, 2018; Sadiq, 2010), others dealing with certain verses (Abu-Milha, 2003; Ahmed *et al.*, 2017; Al-Maliki 2001), studies on female translators (Al-Maliki, 200; Hassen, 2012) etc.

However, a significant gap has been identified in terms of conducting an in-depth analysis of the specific selected corpus involved (verses regarding women affairs), and where the corpus will be categorised into major themes (matrimony, rights, duties, chastity and equity). These are generated based on the content of the verses, whether a verse presents a command, rule, injunction etc., regarding a specific issue like hijab, divorce, right, obligation etc. These themes serve to present a clear idea of verses regarding women that are more or less similar and suggest a comprehensive view on a certain topic.

Even though the translations of the Holy Quran as far as women's affairs are concerned have been studied from various aspects, for example, Al-Maliki's (2001) study where only female translators' renditions of the two verses about *hijaab* were examined; apart from tackling women translators of the Holy Quran, Hassen's (2012) study limited itself to attempting only three gender-related verses; while another study attempted a CDA of only four verses about women to examine only the translator's religious ideologies impact on their translations at the micro level (Khosravi & Pourmohammadi, 2016); and lastly, Shehata (2020) whose study analysed a single verse related to women from gender and linguistic perspectives, no substantial endeavour has hitherto been devoted to analysing the English renditions of the selected verses (women affairs) by diverse translators via an in-depth analysis, and through categorising the verses into major themes. Therefore, different from the above-mentioned studies, this research aims at extending studies on QT and providing a comprehensive study by conducting an in-depth analysis of the verses regarding women in particular, thematically categorised, by four different translators with the aim of identifying the strategies as well as determining loss or gain in meaning. A couple of recommendations partially support the proposed idea of this study, for instance, Nassimi (2008) recommends reviews that compare other English renditions of the Holy Quran to be performed, that would deal with themes such as women, Muslim and non-Muslim relationships, faith etc.; Khosravi and Pourmohammadi (2016) who recommend replication of their study but with different verses, translators as well as more renditions; and Shehata (2020) who suggests further studies on women representation in the Holy Quran via analysis of more verses, application of various linguistic areas of analysis and inclusion of more translations. Further, Adnan (2004) believes that women's

discrimination and oppression are allowed, and such attitudes are permissible due to gender bias in the interpretation of some religious scriptures. Thus, it is a necessity to re-examine and re-interpret certain gender-related verses, which can bring a fresh breeze to building an equal and harmonious inter-relationship between man and woman.

Based on the statement of the problem above, this study attempts to identify the different translation strategies by the different translators in dealing with verses regarding women. Moreover, determining any loss or gain in meaning based on the strategies applied is also an objective the study intends to achieve. This is because application of different strategies leads to different outcomes, loss, gain, or inaccuracies. For instance, Abdelaal (2019) argues that some losses in translation are due to translators' use of improper strategies. Besides, determining the dominant and least strategies employed, as well as identifying loss or gain in meaning, with regard to the themes. Such an attempt may clarify the reason behind the Quranic verses being deemed to advocate against women Arlandson (2005); i.e., if a verse has been rendered inaccurately or its meaning is not fully conveyed, then it could be justifiable that misconceptions are propagated widely.

Briefly, the study is a translational study whose research problem is to determine the translation strategies of different translators from diverse backgrounds, loss or gain in meaning based on the choice of strategy used, thereby providing a descriptive and comparative study of the English renditions of verses regarding women affairs from the Holy Quran. Through this research, beginning with the translation decisions made by the translators in terms of the translation strategies they employ, their choice of lexis and syntax, it is hoped that translators and researchers might be able to better understand the translation process and provide a descriptive study of the particular verses and the Holy

Quran in general. In other words, this descriptive study intends to provide empirical evidence to a clear description of the strategies employed in the translation of the Quranic verse regarding women into English by different translators of diverse backgrounds. The aim is to shed light on these issues because it is hoped to assist translators in selecting more appropriate strategies in dealing with the Holy Quran in general and specific verses in particular, as well as help them familiarise with any possible pitfalls that might come up so as to try to avoid them while translating in the attempt to preserve the intended meaning.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To identify the translation strategies used in the rendering of thematically categorised Quranic verses regarding women in four English renditions.
2. To determine the extent to which the strategies used in the rendering of thematically categorised Quranic verses regarding women in four English renditions may have resulted in loss or gain in meaning.
3. To identify the most dominant and least used translation strategies with regard to theme.
4. To determine the themes that demonstrate the most loss and the most gain in meaning.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are the translation strategies used in the rendering of thematically categorised Quranic verses regarding women in four English renditions?
2. To what extent did the translation strategies used in the rendering of thematically categorised Quranic verses regarding women in four English renditions may have resulted in loss or gain in meaning?
3. What are the most dominant and least used translation strategies with regard to theme?
4. Which themes demonstrate the most loss and the most gain in meaning?

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Translating religious texts in general is of great importance because they are regarded to be the mirror image of one culture (Ahmed, 2016). Due to several elements such as historical, social and cultural backgrounds available in sacred texts generally and the Holy Quran in particular, it is challenging for translators to deal with such elements and to render them in a comprehensible manner. It is beyond doubt that the translating the Holy text causes difficulties for translators in conveying its exact message to the readers of the target language text (henceforth TLT) in the same way that its original has been conveyed to the readers of the original. The study at hand primarily sheds light on the suggestions about dealing with translating sacred texts. This study is expected to be beneficial to not only translators, but also circles of academia and readers in general.

Theoretically, the study aims to present additional references and insights regarding translating the Holy Quran. Practically, it hopes to be useful to the academic society by providing valuable information about different translation strategies involved in Arabic-English translation of Quranic verses, which may hopefully become a useful