

## Euphemisms for Same-Gender Relations in the *Holy Quran* and their English Translations<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** To support their argument about the position of Islam on same-gender relations, ‘Muslim’ proponents of these relations claim that there is no specific Arabic designation for these relations in the *Holy Quran*. Although it does not explicitly name them, the *Quran* addresses this topic euphemistically. This study aims to identify the Quranic euphemisms for same-gender relations and examine the Quranic strategies used for indicating them. Furthermore, it explores how these euphemisms were rendered in forty English translations of the meanings of the *Quran*. The findings reveal that particularization, metaphor, understatement, circumlocution and paraphrasing are the strategies used in the *Quran* to refer to same-gender relations. Most translators preserved the meaning of the Quranic euphemisms by producing similar euphemisms, established euphemisms in English, and occasionally, imprecise euphemisms. However, considering the controversy over the position of Islam on same-gender relations among Muslims, the study concludes that translators should strike a balance between politeness and clarity.

**Keywords:** euphemisms, same-gender relations, the *Holy Quran*, the people of Lut

### 1. Introduction

Euphemism is a common linguistic phenomenon where language users use polite expressions in place of socio-culturally unacceptable ones to avoid explicitly referring to what is considered taboo topics. This is particularly evident in religious discourse; using inoffensive expressions for offensive ones is a predominant feature of religious texts. Unquestionably, the *Holy Quran*, which uses a very decent language, is rich in euphemistic expressions<sup>2</sup>. It never explicitly states religious and social taboos, but it rather alludes to such topics. Al-Khatib (2012), for example, argued that the *Quran* utilizes indirectness as an effective strategy to minimize face-threatening acts.

Arab grammarians and rhetoricians, such as Al-Jurjani (1908) and Al-Ta‘alibi (2000), have extensively studied Quranic euphemisms, while Translation Studies researchers have explored translations of Quranic euphemisms related to topics like sex (Al-Barakati 2013), hardship (Al-Qahtani 2020a), and body parts (Al-Qahtani 2020b). However, euphemisms for same-gender relations in the *Quran* have received scant attention, despite the topic’s controversy among Muslims and non-Muslims. Hence, this study seeks to identify Quranic euphemisms and strategies for addressing same-gender relations and to examine their accuracy in

English translations of the meanings of the *Quran*. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What euphemisms and strategies has the *Quran* used to refer to same-gender relations?
- (2) How accurately did English translations of the meanings of the *Quran* render these euphemisms?

### 1.1 Setting the scene: The controversy of same-gender relations in Islam

With the rise of what is referred to as ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender’ (LGBT) movements and rights, same-gender relations have been the subject of heated debate among Muslims. On one side of the spectrum, ‘liberalist’ Muslims approve of these relations. At the other end of the spectrum, mainstream Muslims vehemently reject them.

Some scholars in the Muslim world argue that the *Quran's* condemnation of the people of Lut, who engaged in same-gender relations, should not be used to justify the general condemnation of such relationships in Islam (e.g. Murray and Roscoe 1997; Kugle 2003; Habib 2009; Jahangir and Abdullatif 2016). They suggest that Islam emphasizes the importance of sexual consent and the avoidance of immoral behavior. For example, El Menyawi (2012) proposed that the people of Lut were destroyed not for engaging in same-gender relations, but for humiliating and robbing men.

In fact, proponents of this practice often cite the verse (49: 13), “wadʿaʿal-na:kum juʿu:ban waqaba:ʿila litaʿa:rafu:,” as evidence that Allah created diversity, including sexual diversity. Moreover, they claim that the Quran mentions sexual diversity in verse (24: 31): “ʿawi ʿal-ta:biʿi:na ʿajri ʿu:li: ʿal-ʿirbati mina ʿalridʿa:li” (Lit. men who are not in need of women). Specifically, Kugle (2003) argued that the mention of such men, who might be according to him asexual or gay, in the Quran suggests the acknowledgment of different sexual orientations. Other researchers, such as Amreen (2001), maintained that the Quran’s perception of same-gender acts is not different from that of other forbidden opposite-sex acts, such as adultery, or sinful non-sexual acts, attributing a stronger condemnation of same-gender relations to the Hadith and Muslim exegetes.

In addition, proponents of same-gender relations sometimes argue that the Quran’s lack of a direct term for these relationships implies Islam’s neutrality on the subject (Kugle 2003). However, we believe that the absence of an explicit term does not mean the Quran ignores the subject. Islamic tradition, including the Quran, Sunnah, and scholarly consensus, consistently condemns same-gender acts as morally abhorrent. The Quran, while clear in its stance, uses euphemistic language to refer to these acts. Euphemism is a linguistic strategy that helps soften the expression to maintain respect between speaker and listener.

This study, hence, aims to examine the euphemisms used in the *Quran* to refer to same-gender relations and explore how they were translated in different English translations of the meanings of the *Quran*. This, in turn, can contribute to a deeper understanding of how the *Quran* decently addresses this topic while

maintaining its position against it. Further, the analysis of how these euphemisms were translated in different English translations can provide insights into the varying perspectives of these relations.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Euphemisms: Characteristics and strategies

The English term "euphemism" originates from the Greek word *euphemismos*, where "eu" means "well" and "phemi" means "speaking" (McArthur 1992). In contrast, Arab grammarians and rhetoricians do not agree on a single term for this linguistic phenomenon. Terms such as *ʔal-kina:jatu* (e.g., al-Qayrawani 1981; al-Ta'alibi 2000) and *ʔal-talat'uf* (e.g., al-'Askari 1952; Ibn Qutayba 1996) have been proposed, with *ʔal-talat'uf* often considered the closest equivalent to the English euphemism (Farghal 2005). Euphemisms in both languages are defined as strategies for expressing unpleasant or taboo ideas through indirect language. For instance, Hudson (2000: 261) described euphemism as "the extension of ordinary words to express unpleasant ideas," while Al-Jurjani (2004: 431; our translation) defined *ʔal-kina:jatu* as a strategy that "speakers use to convey a meaning, not by using an established word in the language, but by using a word that implies one meaning in the existent world". In both English and Arabic, euphemism serves to replace socially unacceptable terms with more acceptable ones, protecting both one's and others' face.

According to Warren (1992), euphemisms are created by either formal or semantic strategies. There are three main formal strategies: (1) word-formation devices (e.g. compounding, blending, acronyms and onomatopoeia), (2) phonemic modifications (e.g. letter reversal, rhyming slang, mispronunciation and abbreviation) and (3) using loan words. On the other hand, semantic strategies include the following sub-strategies: (1) particularization, (2) metonymy, (3) metaphor, (4) reversal, (5) understatement, (6) overstatement, and (7) paraphrasing.

In addition to these techniques, Farghal (1995) argued that Arabic employs the following main strategies to form euphemistic expressions: figurative expressions, circumlocutions and remodeling. It is worth noting that the formal strategies of euphemisms that Warren proposed are not used to form Arabic euphemisms, or Quranic euphemisms in particular (Khanfar 2010).

### 2.2 Previous studies on the translation of euphemisms in the *Holy Quran*

The euphemistic language of the *Quran* has been the focus of significant scholarly interest. Al-Qahtani (2017), for example, investigated the strategies for translating Quranic euphemisms across various translators, i.e., Abdel Haleem, Khan and Al-Hilali, Yusuf Ali, Arberry, and Pickthall. Through content analysis and interviews with professional translators, he found that no single strategy could be applied to all euphemisms. Most translators resorted to literal translations, resulting in "meaningless or clumsy" renditions.

Similarly, Al-Barakati (2019) examined the translation of twenty sex-related euphemisms, evaluating the degree of domestication or foreignization in four English translations: Al-Hilali and Khan, Saheeh International, Asad, and Arberry.

Adopting Venuti's binary of domestication and foreignization and using Vinay and Darbelnet's translation techniques, he found that the translators primarily used literal translation rather than modulation, leading to more foreignized than domesticated translations of the euphemisms.

Al-Sharafi and Abu Khader (2019) moved a step further in that they examined the translation of four sex-related euphemisms in the *Quran* using Houses' functional-pragmatic model of translation quality assessment. Aiming at assessing the quality of English renditions of sex-related euphemism in the *Quran*, they found that the translators generally opted for established euphemisms in English or neutrally literal renditions, suggesting that they flouted Grice's Maxim of Manner in favor of Leech's Politeness Principle.

Unlike the previous studies that examined Quranic euphemisms out of context, Olimat (2018) emphasized the essential role of context in interpreting the euphemisms. He averred that relying solely on dictionaries and exegeses fails to capture accurate meanings. He developed a model for evaluating the renditions of Quranic euphemisms into English, focusing on intertextuality and contextuality. Through his model, he examined translations by Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Khan and Al-Hilali, Abdel Haleem, and Sher Ali, specifically for euphemisms related to health, death, sex, and sodomy. Olimat found that while translators conveyed the meanings, they often lost the euphemistic style, highlighting the need for contextual clues in preserving both meaning and tone.

While many studies have explored the translation of Quranic euphemisms, few have focused on euphemisms for same-gender relationships. Additionally, most research has primarily assessed translation quality, often examining a limited number of translators. Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to examine Quranic euphemisms for same-gender relations and their English translations. Using a bottom-up approach, it investigates how these euphemisms are rendered across 40 English translations of the meanings of the *Quran*.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Data collection procedures

The first objective of the present study is to examine how the *Quran* refers to same-gender relations. Since the *Quran* mainly mentions this type of relations with reference to the story of the people of Prophet Lut, we started by reading the Quranic verses related to the Prophet Lut and his people to identify the relevant euphemisms. After identifying the euphemistic expressions, we consulted 12 sources to verify that these expressions are really used euphemistically in the *Quran* to refer to same-gender relations. In particular, using the research engine "al-bahith al-qurani", we consulted four categories of books: (1) exegetical books (i.e. Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Al-Qurtubi, and Al-Baghawi), (2) exegetical books focusing on linguistic aspects of the *Quran* (i.e. Ibn Ashur and al-Zamakhshari), (3) books on the meanings of Quranic terms (i.e. Ibn Qutaibah, Al-Zajjaj, and Al-Nahhas) and (4) dictionaries of the meanings of Quranic terms (Al-Asfahani, Al-Halabi, and Ibn Faris). This resulted in identifying 10 euphemistic expressions for same-gender relations. Then, using Warren's (1992) and Farghal's (1995) classifications, we

categorized the euphemism strategies that the *Quran* employs to refer to same-gender relations.

The second objective of the study is to examine how Quranic euphemisms are rendered into English. To achieve this, we analyzed forty English translations of the meanings of the *Quran* using the 'Islam Awakened' website (see Appendix). These translations were deliberately chosen to represent a diverse range of translators, including Arabs and non-Arabs, native and non-native English speakers, Muslims and non-Muslims, Sunni and Shia Muslims, traditionalists and radicals, literalists and meaning-oriented translators, as well as male and female translators. This broad selection allows the study to encompass various perspectives and interpretations, making it more comprehensive than previous similar studies.

### 3.2 Data analysis procedures

Different taxonomies of the strategies for translating Quranic euphemisms have been proposed (e.g. Al-Barakati 2013; Al-Qahtani 2017). However, adopting previous taxonomies would not provide considerable insights as to understanding how same-gender relations were perceived in different English translations of the meanings of the *Quran*; these taxonomies have been developed to examine the translation of general Quranic euphemisms and may not be applicable euphemisms for same-gender relations. On this basis, and to achieve the objectives of the present study, we preferred to adopt a bottom-up approach rather than using pre-defined taxonomies.

Then, through inductive coding, we analyzed the 40 renditions of each euphemistic expression, grouping them into two main categories:

1. **Euphemism into euphemism:** where the original euphemism's meaning and form are preserved. This category includes:
  1. **Same euphemism:** a similar euphemism to the original.
  2. **Different euphemism:** an established euphemism in the target language (TL).
  3. **Imprecise euphemism:** a euphemism that understates the original meaning.
2. **Euphemism into non-euphemism:** where the original euphemism's form is sacrificed. This includes using:
  1. **Semantic rendering:** explicitly stating the original meaning.
  2. **Transliteration:** preserving the original's sound.
  3. **Omission:** deleting the euphemistic expression.
  4. **Couplets:** using two strategies to render the euphemism.

To accurately categorize each rendition, we consulted five English dictionaries. *Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *Collins English Dictionary*, and *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* were used to understand the meanings of the English renditions. Additionally, two dictionaries specifically on English euphemisms, namely, *A Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk* (Hugh 1981) and *How Not to Say What You Mean: A Dictionary of Euphemisms* (Holder

2002) were referenced to determine if the English renditions function as euphemisms in English.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

The analysis indicated that there are mainly 10 euphemisms for same-gender relations in the *Quran*, and they can be grouped into five formation strategies: (1) particularization, which means using a general term in a specific context that requires a more particular interpretation, is used in “ʔal-fa:ḥiḡatu,” “al-munkar,” “ʔalsajjiʔa:t,” “ʔal-xaba:ʔiθ” and “ʔal-xa:tʔiʔati”; (2) understatement, which means using a euphemism that downplays the connotations of the original, is used in “ʔamalikum”; (3) paraphrasing, which refers to providing a definition, explanation or a restatement of the meaning, is used in “taʔtu:na ʔalḡukra:n” and “taʔtu:na ʔalriḡa:l”; (4) metaphor, which employs a figurative comparison between the intended meaning (unpleasant) and the literal meaning (often more palatable) to indirectly refer to a sensitive topic, is used in “sakratun”; and (5) circumlocution, which is achieved by periphrasis, is used in “waʔinnaka lataʔlamu ma: nuri:du”.

One might argue that these euphemisms, especially the ones formed by particularization, carry strong negative connotations, and this is against the very concept of euphemism. It is noteworthy, however, that, although they seem dysphemistic, they act as hypernyms that are euphemistically used to refer to a hyponym (i.e., same-gender relations). Put differently, rather than explicitly mentioning the repulsive act of ‘homosexuality’, the *Quran* opts for more general terms, albeit with rather negative connotations, to refer to the act.

Overall, the following Table shows that rendering euphemistic expressions into euphemistic ones registered a far higher percentage compared to rendering euphemistic expressions into non-euphemistic ones, 74.6% and 25.4% respectively. This reveals a marked tendency towards preserving the euphemistic meaning of the original. Specifically, using similar euphemism is the most commonly employed strategy (40.7%), whereas omission was the least used strategy (0.4). Notably, the euphemistic term “taʔtu:na ʔalriḡa:l” (7:81) is the only term that was rendered non-euphemistically across the translations. In contrast, the euphemisms “ʔal-xa:tʔiʔati” and “waʔinnaka lataʔlamu ma: nuri:du” were translated euphemistically by all translators. These patterns highlight the different degrees of sensitivity to euphemistic meanings among translations, depending on the terms and contexts, among other factors.

Frequency of euphemism strategies, expressions and their translation strategies

Quranic Euphemism Strategies	Quranic Euphemistic Terms	Euphemism into euphemism						Translation Strategies						Total					
		Same euphemism		Established euphemism		Impericse euphemism		Total		Euphemism into non-euphemism		Total							
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Sameanle rendition	Transliteration	Complets	Omission			Freq	%		
Particularization	Pah-la-hijaa (Q. 7:80)	13	32.5	14	35	0	0	27	67.5	12	30	1	2.5	0	0	13	32.5		
	Pah-la-hijaa (Q. 27:54)	16	40	14	35	0	0	30	75	7	17.5	1	2.5	2	5	10	25		
	Pah-la-hijaa (Q. 29:28)	12	30	13	32.5	0	0	25	62.4	13	32.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	15	37.5
	Al-munkar	19	47.5	1	2.5	16	40	36	90	3	7.5	0	0	1	2.5	0	0	4	10
	Pah-sajjari	34	85	0	0	1	2.5	35	87.5	0	0	0	0	5	12.5	0	0	5	12.5
Metaphor	Pah-saba:799	27	67.5	5	12.5	5	12.5	37	92.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	3	7.5
	Pah-xa:fi7adi	1	2.5	25	62.5	14	35	40	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
metstatement	sakarum	23	57.5	0	0	10	25	33	82.5	0	0	0	0	7	17.5	0	0	7	17.5
	Samalkum	34	85	0	0	0	0	34	85	4	10	0	0	0	0	2	5	6	15
Inconlocation	wa7inaka laa7lamu ma: nuri du	7	17.5	0	0	33	82.5	40	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	ta7urna Pahbukaruna	20	50	3	7.5	0	0	23	57.5	17	42.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	42.5
	ta7urna Pah7dax:la (Q. 7:81)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	40	100
Paraphrasing	ta7urna Pah7dax:la (Q. 29:29)	17	42.5	0	0	1	2.5	18	45	22	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	55
	Total	223	42.9	75	14.4	80	15.4	378	72.7	119	22.9	4	0.8	17	3.3	2	0.4	142	27.3

## 4.1 Particularization

### 4.1.1 “الفاحشة” (ʔal-fa:hiʔata)

“ʔal-fa:hiʔata” (Lit. indecency) is one of the general words the *Quran* uses to refer to the act of homosexuality that the people of the Prophet Lut perpetrated. “ʔal-fa:hiʔata” and its different derivatives in the *Quran* refer to all loathsome and abominable words and deeds beyond measure. Izutsu (2002) suggested that forbidden sexual acts in Islam are often called “ʔal-fa:hiʔata.” For example, Allah labels fornication as “fa:hiʔata” in (17: 32). Moreover, Allah uses the same word to refer to women who commit adultery, fornication, and/or even same-gender acts in verse (4: 15). Another example of the use of “ʔal-fa:hiʔata” that refers to a sexual act that Islam forbids is marrying the wives of one’s father as in verse (4: 22).

Regarding the act of the people of Lut, the euphemistic term, “ʔal-fa:hiʔata,” is used three times in the *Quran* to admonish them for engaging in same-gender relations.

“وَلَوْطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ (7: 80) إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ (7: 81)”

“And [We had sent] Lot when he said to his people, “Do you commit such **immorality** as no one has preceded you with from among the worlds [i.e., peoples]? (7: 80) Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people.” (7: 81, translated by Sahih International (SI))”

وَلَوْطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُنصِرُونَ (27:54) أَبِئْتُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ (27: 55)

And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, “Do you commit **immorality** while you are seeing? (27: 54) Do you indeed approach men with desire instead of women? Rather, you are a people behaving ignorantly.” (27: 55, translated by SI)

وَلَوْطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ (29:28) أَبِئْتُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ وَتَقْطَعُونَ السَّبِيلَ وَتَأْتُونَ فِي نَادِيكُمُ الْمُنْكَرَ فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَنْتِنَا بِعَذَابِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ (29:29)

And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, “Indeed, you commit such **immorality** as no one has preceded you with from among the worlds. (29: 28) Indeed, you approach men and obstruct the road and commit in your meetings [every] evil.” And the answer of his people was not but that they said, “Bring us the punishment of Allāh, if you should be of the truthful.” (29: 29, translated by SI)

In the three verses, through co-textual clues, “ʔal-fa:hiʔata” refers specifically to the act of men who approach other men lustfully. Since “ʔal-fa:hiʔata” refers to same-gender relations in a euphemistic manner in these verses, the English renditions of the three instances shall not be analyzed individually. Instead, it is important to understand that the use of “ʔal-fa:hiʔata” in these verses collectively

condemns same-gender relations. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that the use of “ʔal-fa:ḥifata” in verse (29: 28) differs from that in the other two verses (7: 80) and (27: 54) in that there is no mention of the word “fahwatīn” (lit. lustfully).

The translations of “ʔal-fa:ḥifata” into English clearly indicate that the meaning and form of the Quranic euphemism were generally preserved. In fact, most translators rendered it into an established euphemism in English, such as “indecent,” “sin” and “filthy.” “Filthy” refers to “any taboo act”, which might be “masturbation, unwanted sexual approaches, lewd act, and the like” (Holder, 2002: 141). In a similar vein, “indecent” is a euphemism used in English to refer to “an illegal sexual act nearly always by a male. [...] Literally, it means the unseemliness of any kind” (Holder 2002: 206). In addition, “sin” is an established euphemism in English that means “to copulate extramaritally [...] to commit a forbidden act and” and is used to refer to “any activity which is taboo sexually” (Holder 2002: 363). Translators who opted for these renditions used euphemisms with which target readers are familiar.

Another group of translators rendered the original euphemism into similar euphemisms: “abominations,” “shameful deeds,” “immorality,” “outrage,” “wickedness,” “evil,” “vile deeds” and “depravity.” Although these translators did not provide established euphemisms, they managed to preserve the meaning of the euphemism. There are, however, several translators who did not respect the original euphemism. Providing highly explicit renditions of the euphemism, these translators seem to prioritize clarity over politeness. “Lewdness,” “sexual practice,” “sexual misconduct,” “obscenity,” and “lecherous act” are among these renditions. All these expressions carry, in one way or another, explicit sexual connotations.

Two translations, i.e. Kamal Omar’s and Khan and Al-Hilali’s, opted for transliterating the euphemism: “Fahisha,” a choice that did not preserve the meaning nor the style of the Quranic euphemism. Unlike Omar, Khan and Al-Hilali provided an in-text addition along with the transliteration. It is worth noting, however, that the kind of in-text additions they provided in the verses (7: 80) and (27: 54) is different from that in verse (29: 28). In the first two instances, they explained “Al-Fahishah” as “(evil, great sin, every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse, sodomy, etc.)” By contrast, they provided the following in-text addition for “ʔal-fa:ḥifata” (29: 28): “(sodomy the worst sin).” By doing this, they limited the meaning of the third instance of “ʔal-fa:ḥifata” to the act of the people of Lut. It might be safely suggested that the translators felt the critical need to stress the act to avoid any misinterpretation on the part of the reader, because verse (29:28) did not include the term ‘lustfully’, as previously discussed.

#### 4.1.2 “المنكر” (al-munkar)

أَنتُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ وَتَقْطَعُونَ السَّبِيلَ وَتَأْتُونَ فِي نَادِيَكُمُ الْمُنْكَرَ فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا إِنَّنَا بَعْدَآبِ  
اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ (29: 29)

Indeed, you approach men and obstruct the road and **commit in your meetings [every] evil.**” And the answer of his people was not but that they

said, "Bring us the punishment of Allāh, if you should be of the truthful."  
(29: 29, translated by SI)

In verse (29: 29), the *Quran* employs another generic term, i.e. "al-munkar" (Lit. what is deemed religiously and morally wrong), to refer to the different ignominious acts of the people of Lut. Among these acts are ridiculing people, robbery, and, most importantly, same-gender relations. Allah makes it clear that the people of Lut exceeded all bounds in their acts. Not only did they engage in same-gender relations, but they also did it publicly in their assembly rooms. This strongly urged Prophet Lut to vigorously deny and reject (ʔankara) their despicable acts. Although the *Quran* euphemistically describes these acts by using a general word, the intended meaning can be deciphered from the contextual and co-textual clues of the verse.

Only four translations (i.e. Itani, Ahmad Ali, Khattab, and Khan and Al-Hilali) sacrificed the euphemistic style. To illustrate, Itani, Ahmad Ali and Khattab opted for a semantic rendition of the euphemistic term. They translated "al-munkar" into "lewdness," "obscenities" and "immorality," respectively. All these terms are suggestive of abnormal sexual behaviors, although to different degrees. Khan and Al-Hilali employed the couplet strategy to render the euphemistic term. They provided a transliteration, i.e., "Al-Munkar" and bracketed an explanation of the term, i.e. "(disbelief and polytheism and every kind of evil wicked deed)." Surprisingly, however, they did not name the act of the people of Lut, although they showed a clear tendency for explicitation in other instances, as will be demonstrated later.

Apart from these translations, "al-munkar" was generally translated euphemistically. For example, most translators preserved the euphemistic meaning of the original, by using similar euphemisms, such as "those shameful deeds," "abomination," "wickedness," "such a horrible thing," "depravities," "reprehensible deeds," "maleficence," "outrages," and "repulsive acts." Although with varying degrees, all these renditions foregrounded the awfulness of the act that the people of Lut committed without expressly mentioning it.

Nevertheless, some translators rendered the original euphemism into imprecise ones. This can be attributed to two main reasons: (1) using literal translation or (2) using very general words. To illustrate, Arberry and Daryabadi literally rendered the euphemistic term into "dishonour" and "that which is disreputable," respectively. Other translators used very general expressions that understate the seriousness of the act as they might refer to any detestable and unlawful acts. Among these expressions are "the unacceptable," "forbidden things," "that which is unlawful" and "evil deeds." Although the translators who used literal translation and general expressions euphemistically refer to the act of the people of Lut, they do not really reflect the extent to which this act is appalling. For example, "forbidden things" in Islam range from eating forbidden food to polytheism and disbelief in Allah.

It was only Rodwell, who provided an English established euphemism for the act. He rendered the original into “the crime,” an established American euphemism that means “sodomy or bestiality” (Holder 2002: 90).

#### 4.1.3 “السينات” (?alsajji?a:t)

“?alsajji?a:t” (lit. the evil deeds) is also one of the general terms that the *Quran* uses to refer to same-gender relations. In the *Quran*, “?alsajji?a:t” is attributed to believers and disbelievers. It is used to indicate the usually forgiven bad deeds of believers as in verse (66: 8), and the unforgivable evil deeds of disbelievers as in verse (4: 18).

Although “?alsajji?a:t” indicates forbidden sexual and non-sexual practices alike, it specifically refers to the practice of the people of Lut in verse (11: 78). This meaning can be reasonably inferred from the contextual and co-textual clues. To illustrate, in this verse, Allah describes the manner of the people of Lut, who used to do “?alsajji?a:t,” towards Lut’s guests, the two angels who were disguised as handsome men. When the people of Lut learnt of these guests, they rejoiced and hurried to the house of Lut to approach them. Prophet Lut, in his turn, asked his people to marry his daughters instead<sup>3</sup>.

وَجَاءَهُ قَوْمُهُ يُهْرَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَمِنْ قَبْلُ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ هَؤُلَاءِ بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ  
وَلَا تُخْزُونِ فِي صَنِيِّي الَّذِينَ مِنْكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيدٌ (11:78)

And his people came hastening to him, and before [this] they had been doing **evil deeds**. He said, "O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allāh and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?" (11: 78, translated by SI)

The analysis of the translations indicates that “?alsajji?a:t” has been variously translated. Overall, almost all the translators preserved the euphemistic meaning of the original; only four translators rendered the euphemistic term into a non-euphemistic one. The translators who produced a euphemistic term used one of the following five renditions: “abominations,” “sin(s),” “crime,” “wickedness,” and “deeds,” with the latter modified by one of these adjectives “shameful,” “foul,” “evil,” “odious,” and “despicable.”

“Crime” might be attributed to the different English designations of homosexuality as “the nameless crime,” “crime against nature,” and “the abominable crime of buggery” (Holder 2002: 262). The addition “of sinful nature” highlights that this act is vehemently condemned in Islam. Similarly, translators who opted for “abominations” managed to euphemistically convey the very meaning of the original, while vividly describing the acts of the people of Lut as “disgusting” and “vicious.” It might be argued that “crimes of a sinful nature” and “abomination” are the most accurate renditions of “?alsajji?a:t” in this verse. Despite the slight differences in meaning between these renditions, they achieve a reasonable balance between politeness and clarity.

Unlike the other translators, Khan and Al-Hilali, Hamid Aziz, Abdul Hye and Syed Vickar Ahmad employed a couplet. In addition to a euphemistic rendition

(e.g. crimes, abomination), they explicitly mentioned the repulsive act of the people of Lut. They arguably felt the need to do this to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of the reader. It is worth noting, however, that Syed Vickar Ahmad's addition of the term "alleged" to modify "homosexuality" remains open to question. Only one translator produced an imprecise euphemism by using the term 'bad' to refer to same-gender relations. "Bad" does not adequately reflect the loathsomeness of the act that the people of Lut perpetrated.

#### 4.1.4 "الخبائث" (?al-xaba:ʔiθ)

وَلَوْطًا أَنْبَأْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ تَعْمَلُ الْخَبَائِثَ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ (21: 74)  
 And to Lot We gave judgement and knowledge, and We saved him from the city that was committing **wicked deeds**. Indeed, they were a people of evil, defiantly disobedient. (21: 74, translated by SI)

In verse (21: 74), Allah mentions that He rescued Lut from the town whose people used to do "ʔal-xaba:ʔiθ" (Lit. impurities). Further, the *Quran* uses this general word (i.e. "ʔal-xaba:ʔiθ") to euphemistically refer to the act of the people of Lut in particular, and to other evil deeds they perpetrated in general. To illustrate, among the interpretations of "xabi:θ" in verse (24: 26) is wicked people who committed adultery.

Twenty-eight translators maintained the euphemistic meaning of the original, by providing similar euphemisms, such as "abominations," "shameful practices," "wicked deeds," "vile deeds," "dirty deeds," "foul deeds," "acted villainously," "disgusting acts," "vicious acts," and "the awful." Common among these translations, though varying in degree, is the emphasis on the extreme outrage associated with the acts of the people of Lut.

Another group of translators managed to translate the euphemism into an established one in English, by describing the act of the people of Lut as "filthy" and "indecent" (see section 4.1.1.). Although both "filthy" and "indecent" euphemistically refer to 'illegal' sexual acts, "indecent" is more accurate than "filthy", because the latter is more general, serving as a euphemism for any taboo act.

Four translators, however, provided imprecise euphemistic renditions: "deeds of corruption" and "bad things." "Corruption" refers to the illegal acts of people with authority. In the *Quran*, "ʔal-xaba:ʔiθ" is different from "ʔalfasa:d" (Lit. corruption). In fact, "ʔal-xaba:ʔiθ" is one of the reasons that lead to serious corruption in societies. Corruption, hence, is the devastating effect exerted on people rather than the cause. The choice of "bad things" overly softens the description of the outrageous acts committed by the people of Lut. Besides, as previously mentioned, the notions of 'bad' and 'good' are relative; what is bad for some may not be seen the same way by others.

On the other hand, few translators rendered the euphemism into non-euphemistic expressions. Kamal Omar is the only translator who opted for transliterating the euphemism: "*Al-Khabaith*." It might be argued that Omer most

probably could not find an equivalent to the Quranic term that can adequately convey all the shades of meaning of the original. Nevertheless, his choice resulted in a translation loss. This, in turn, might explain Khan and Al-Hilali's decision; they transliterated the term (i.e., Al-Khabaith) and euphemistically paraphrased it in brackets as "(evil, wicked and filthy deeds, etc.)" to clarify it for the reader. In contrast, Abdel Haleem provided a semantic rendition of the Quranic euphemism. He translated it into "obscenities," a term that *the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines as acts that are "connected with sex in a way that most people find offensive." Obscenities generally imply sexual matters that are deemed disgusting by standards of decency.

#### 4.1.5 "الخاطئة" (?al-xa:t'i?ati)

وَجَاءَ فِرْعَوْنُ وَمَنْ قَبْلَهُ وَالْمُؤْتَفِكَاتُ بِالْخَاطِئَةِ (69: 9)

And there came Pharaoh and those before him and the overturned cities with **sin**. (69: 9, translated by SI)

In (69:9), Allah mentions how Pharaoh, the disbelievers who came before him and the people of the overturned cities indulged in "?al-xa:t'i?ati." Exegeses highlighted that "?al-xa:t'i?ati" could be either a verbal noun (i.e., مصدر) or an active participle (i.e., اسم فاعل). Either way, exegetists explained that this word is a general word that covers all the cardinal sins in Islam, or what is known as Al-Kabaair in Arabic (Ibn Ashur and al-Zamakhshari). Indeed, the definite article (i.e., ال) highlights the graveness of these sins. The fact that Allah mentions "?almu?tafika:t," the sinful cities of the people of Lut that were destroyed by overturning them, indicates that "?al-xa:t'i?ati" can indicate same-gender relations, which is one of the most abhorrent of deeds in Islam.

Most translators rendered the original euphemism into an established one in English by choosing the word "sin." According to Holder (2002: 363), "sin" is a euphemistic term that means "to copulate extramaritally [...] to commit a forbidden act and [...] is used of any activity which is taboo sexually." Since "sin" may not fully capture all nuances of the original meaning, some translators premodified it with adjectives such as "grave," "great," and "habitual." Interestingly, Yusuf Ali capitalized the word Sin. It is safe to suggest that such a decision creates a visual impact on the reader. The presence of the capital (S) stresses the seriousness of the sins of the people of Lut.

Although most translators produced a euphemistic translation of this word with no explicit reference to the act of the people of Lut, several translators attempted an imprecise euphemism by opting for one of the following renditions: "error," "misdeed," "a great mistake," "harmful deeds," "inequity," and "evil." These expressions do not do justice to the original euphemism as they do not accurately convey the intended meaning. This is attributed to different reasons: making the defined undefined by using indefinite articles, using inaccurate terms (e.g., error, mistake and harmful deeds), and using the singular form of the nouns

rather than the plural one. These renditions, in turn, failed to highlight how severe the sins of the people of Lut were.

It was only Shabir Ahmad who produced a euphemism quite like the meaning and form of the original one: “fault upon fault.” By opting for such a choice, Shabir Ahmad managed to achieve the following effects. First, the very choice of the word “fault,” unlike “error” or “mistake,” indicated that it is entirely their own fault to commit such acts. They are not allowed, under no condition, to deny responsibility for their sinful acts. Second, the repetition of the word “fault” stressed the gravity of the act and emphasized the accumulation of sins; the people of Lut had lost themselves in these sins. Third, the use of alliteration with the repetition of the 'f' sound in “fault upon fault” added a poetic touch to the translation.

## 4.2 Metaphor

### 4.2.1 "سكرة" (sakratun)

(15: 72) لَعْمُرُكَ إِنَّهُمْ لَفِي سَكْرَتِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

By your life, [O Muḥammad], indeed they were, in **their intoxication**, wandering blindly. (15: 72, translated by SI)

When the people of Lut learnt of his two handsome guests, they, with evil intentions, rejoicefully hurried to his house. Lut was greatly troubled by their behavior; he advised them: “fear Allah and do not disgrace me.” Attempting to persuade them to act sensibly and decently, Lut urged them to legitimately gratify their desires. However, having lost their moral compass, they were not in a state to heed Lut’s advice; their infatuation for the guests clouded their judgment.

In verse (15: 72), Allah uses the term “sakratun,” which literally means ‘stupor’, to emphasize their state of being intoxicated by their passion and deprived of rational thought. Specifically, exegetes suggested that “sakratun” can indicate misguidance, confusion, and intoxication. While this interpretation is valid, it is crucial to note that some exegetes (e.g., Ibn Ashur and al-Zamakhshari) specified the source of such states. Drawing parallels between the effects of such desires on one’s judgment and that of intoxication, Ibn Ashur and al-Zamakhshari posited that “sakratun” in this context can refer to the stupor of loving indecency that renders people of Lut blind to any condemnation or rebuke. Accordingly, it is safe to suggest that “sakratun” is a metaphor for the overwhelming and irrational state that individuals who engage in same-gender relations get into due to their illicit desires.

Most translators rendered the euphemistic phrase into similar euphemistic ones in English. The most frequently used rendition is “intoxication” (22 translators), with some translators premodifying it with the adjectives “wild” and “lustful.” Other translators opted for other similar euphemisms in English to convey the meaning of “sakratun.” To illustrate, Muhammad Ghali translated it as “in their stupor,” Sale used “their folly,” and Dawood chose “in their frenzy.” With varying degrees of accuracy, these renditions share the common meaning of *a departure from a typical and rational mental state*. It is noteworthy, however, that these euphemisms carry slightly different connotations. For example, the archaic

meaning of “folly” implies morally reprehensible actions, especially “lewd behavior” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This word choice, reflecting the understanding of “folly” in Sale’s time, aligns with the context of the verse, where the actions of the people of Lut were driven by their uncontrolled and illicit desires. Nevertheless, the more common and contemporary understanding of “folly” (i.e., lack of normal prudence) does not reflect the deviant behavior mentioned in the original.

“Drunkenness” stands as the second most utilized rendition (9 translators). However, compared to “intoxication,” it does not accurately convey the meaning of the original. This is attributed to the fact that this imprecise euphemism specifically refers to the effects of alcohol consumption on one’s mental capacity. To minimize meaning loss, Ahmad Ali and Rodwell premodified drunkenness with the adjective “lustful” and identified the cause of drunkenness as “their lusts,” respectively.

Other examples of imprecise euphemisms include “daze,” “dazzlement” and “frenzy of approaching death.” Although “daze” and “dazzlement” in this context refer to the state of being very impressed with somebody’s beauty, they may not fully convey the degree of loss of control and rationality expressed by the Quranic term “sakrah.” As for Pickthall’s choice of “the frenzy of approaching death,” it is the least successful attempt at conveying the original meaning. Attributing “frenzy” to “approaching death” introduces an irrelevant element, perhaps due to a possible confusion with the phrase “sokratu ʔal-mawti” found in verse 50: 19. Although it is true that Allah clearly mentions the severe punishment the people of Lut received in verse (15: 73), this specific meaning is neither attested in the verse under question nor in the exegeses.

Unlike other translators, Asad and Ali Unal explicitly mentioned the sexual reference implied in the original euphemism. Opting for couplets to convey the meaning of the original, they rendered it into “in their delirium [of lust]” and “in their delirium (of perversion),” respectively. These choices clearly convey the intensity and source of the state described by “sokratun.” While “delirium” expresses the literal meaning of the original (i.e., the loss of reason and control), the bracketed additions specify the reasons behind such a state. Nevertheless, it can be posited that “perversion” carries stronger connotations. Compared to “lust,” which simply refers to a strong sexual desire, not necessarily deviant ones, “perversion” indicates aberrant sexual practices and behavior.

### 4.3 Understatement

#### 4.3.1 "عملكم" (ʔamalikum)

قَالَ إِنِّي لِعَمَلِكُمْ مِنَ الْقَالِينَ (26: 168)

He said, "Indeed, I am, toward **your deed**, of those who detest [it]. (26: 168, translated by SI)

In addition to generic terms and metaphors, the *Quran* reports the words of Prophet Lut who employed the strategy of understatement, if we may say so, to

euphemistically describe same-gender relations. In (26: 165), Prophet Lut posed a rhetorical question, "ʔataʔtu:na ʔalʔukra:na mina ʔal-ʕa:lami:na," through which he rebuked his people for lustfully approaching males and eschewing their wives (Anis and Fareh 2023). Consequently, they warned the prophet not to continue advising them or they will expel him from the city. However, Lut refused to be intimidated by their threats and, instead, he declared that he absolutely loathes and detests their "ʕamal" (lit. deed).

Lut avoided explicitly mentioning the act of homosexuality. Instead, the phrase he used understates the severity of their actions as it can cover good and bad deeds alike. In fact, Allah uses this term to refer to the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad as in verse (39: 65), the deeds of the believers as in verse (9: 105) and the deeds of the disbelievers as in verse (10: 41). It is only through its context that one can interpret the meaning of this phrase. In (26: 168), it refers to bad deeds, and, in particular, same-gender relations. This precise meaning is understood from the co-textual clues in the verses (26: 165-167) that precede the verse in question. It is noteworthy, however, that Lut's indirect reference may emphasize its gravity, implying that the act is so vile that it is unspeakable. It also highlights his decency, as he refrains from explicitly mentioning the shameful act and alludes to it indirectly.

Except for six translators, all others maintained the same euphemism-formation technique of the original. Using different TL equivalents, they literally rendered the term "ʕamal" into "doings," "conduct," "actions," "ways," "behaviour," "practice," "act," "deeds," and "work." Although the co-textual and contextual clues might aid the TL reader to decipher the intended meaning, these terms are open to interpretation. Some people might use such translations to advance willful arguments about Islam's position on same-gender relations.

This, in turn, might explain the decision of Khattab, Omer, Ahmad, and Khan and Al-Hilali to opt for a semantic rendition of the Quranic euphemism. They translated it into "your 'shameful' practice," "your act (of homosexuality)," "your acts (of sodomy)," and "your (this evil) action (of sodomy)," respectively. At face value, Khattab's rendition (i.e. "your 'shameful' practice") is euphemistic since he did not plainly state the act of homosexuality. Nevertheless, by describing the practice as "shameful," Khattab alluded to the act. With the help of co-textual clues, readers of Khattab's translation can get the hidden meaning. Apart from Khattab, the other three translators bluntly mentioned the act of the people of Lut, with some preferring the term "homosexuality" while others using the term "sodomy."

#### 4.4 Circumlocution

##### 4.4.1 "وَإِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ مَا نُرِيدُ" (waʔinaka lataʕlamu ma: nuri:du)

قَالُوا لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا لَنَا فِي بَنَاتِكُمْ مِنْ حَقٍّ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ مَا نُرِيدُ (11: 79)

They said, "You have already known that we have not concerning your daughters [i.e., women] any claim [i.e., desire], and indeed, **you know what we want.**" (11: 79, translated by SI)

In addition to Prophet Lut's words, the Quran refers to same-gender relations by reporting the words of his people, who used the device of circumlocution to refer to their desires and lusts. Rather than openly declaring their intentions, the people of Lut vaguely said to Lut: "you certainly know what we desire." Since circumlocutionary euphemisms are vague, Warren (1992: 145) argued that interpreters "can only conclude from circumstantial evidence whether they are intended or not." Indeed, in (11: 78), Lut asked his people to marry his daughters. In (11: 79), however, his people turned down his offer and, instead, insisted that they wanted to have sexual contact with his guests, the two angels who were disguised as handsome men.

All translators rendered the euphemistic term into a euphemistic one. However, some rendered the euphemism into a same euphemism, while others translated it into an imprecise one. On the one hand, some translators opted for the term "desire" to translate the Arabic "nuri:du." On the other hand, the majority produced an imprecise euphemism by choosing the word "want." The fact that Allah mentions "wamin qablu ka:nu: jaʿmalu:na ʔalsajjiʔa:ti" means that the people of Lut used to habitually commit this act. Accordingly, and due to the contextual and co-textual clues, it seems that "desire" is more accurate than "want." More specifically, although both means to have a wish for something or somebody, a "desire" is a more intense feeling than a "want." The latter is usually a passing interest in something, while a "desire" is lingering, and it often carries sexual connotations.

#### 4.5 Paraphrasing

##### 4.5.1 "تَأْتُونَ الذُّكْرَانَ" (taʔtu:na ʔalḏukra:na) and "تَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ" (taʔtu:na ʔalridʒa:la)

In verses (7: 81), (26: 165) and (29: 29), rather than providing a graphic description of the act of the people of Lut, the *Quran* uses paraphrasing to refer to the act. In these verses, Allah condemns men who approach other men with desire instead of women: "taʔtu:na ʔalridʒa:la" and "taʔtu:na ʔalḏukra:na," without explicitly mentioning the specific act.

إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ ۚ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ (7: 81)

Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people." (7: 81, translated by SI)

أَتَأْتُونَ الذُّكْرَانَ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ (26: 165)

Do you approach males among the worlds (26: 165)

أِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ وَتَقْطَعُونَ السَّبِيلَ وَتَأْتُونَ فِي نَادِيكُمُ الْمُنْكَرَ ۖ فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا إِنَّنَا بِعَذَابِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ (29:29)

Indeed, **you approach men** and obstruct the road and commit in your meetings [every] evil." And the answer of his people was not but that they said, "Bring us the punishment of Allāh, if you should be of the truthful." (29: 29, translated by SI)

The trilateral root “ʔata:” is euphemistically used in several Quranic verses to refer to sexual relations, including religiously licit ones (e.g., 2: 222) and illicit ones, such as adultery (e.g. 4: 15, 60: 12, 65: 1) and same-gender relations (e.g. 7: 80, 27: 45, 29: 28). In fact, “taʔtu:na ʔalridʒa:la” is considered one of the most prime examples of Quranic euphemisms. The phrase “qawmun musrifu:na” (a people transgressing beyond bounds) and the addition of “min ʔal-ʕa:lami:na” (among the worlds) in verses (7: 81) and (26: 165) emphasizes the worst excesses committed by the people of Lut. This transgression against the natural order established by Allah is further highlighted in the rhetorical questions posed in (26: 165) and (29: 29). These questions serve to rebuke those who engage in same-gender relations and to underscore the unnaturalness of their desires. Since the euphemistic expressions in verses (7: 81), (26: 165) and (29: 29) are similar in structure, we will examine their translations together. This is, however, not to indicate that they do not convey subtle nuances of meaning.

Due to the relatively explicit nature of these euphemisms compared to others, most translators provided semantic renditions, sacrificing the euphemistic style of the original. This is particularly notable in the renditions of the euphemistic phrase in verse (7: 81). Understandably, the presence of co-textual clues, i.e., the use of the word “jahwatin,” which literally means lustfully, motivated all translators to provide explicit renditions. Among those renditions are “approach lustfully,” “lust after,” “satisfy your lusts with,” “get intimate with,” “commit the sexual act,” “practice your lusts,” “run after” and “come to lustfully.” Choosing a more direct, albeit very explicit, approach, other translators opted for “indulge in homosexuality” and “commit sodomy.” It is noteworthy that these choices were used in verses (26: 165) and (29: 29) in which the word “jahwatin” is absent. This might be an attempt by the translators to avoid any misinterpretation of the original meaning.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The present paper aimed at examining euphemisms for same-gender relations in the *Quran* and their English translations. The findings revealed that the *Quran* employs five main strategies to euphemistically describe these relations. Instead of explicit references, the *Quran* uses particularization, metaphor, implication, understatement, circumlocution, and paraphrasing. These strategies, in turn, save face for the reader by avoiding distasteful expressions. Specifically, the findings of the study show how the *Quran* addresses same-gender relations with both discretion and directness by balancing the need to strongly condemn these actions with the importance of maintaining politeness.

As for the translation of these euphemisms, the findings revealed that some translators sacrificed the form of the Quranic euphemism by semantically rendering them. However, most translators preserved the meaning of the Quranic euphemisms. They opted for producing similar euphemisms, established euphemisms in English, and, to a lesser extent, imprecise euphemisms. Nevertheless, ‘Muslim’ proponents of same-gender relations might exploit the somewhat indirectness of the *Quran* in relation to same-gender relations to back up

their unsubstantiated claim about the lawfulness of these relations in Islam. On this basis, this study argues for sustaining a balance between politeness and clarity when translating Quranic same-gender-related euphemisms. More specifically, we believe that translators should use paratexts (e.g., footnotes and in-text additions) when necessary, while maintaining, to the extent possible, the form of the Quranic euphemism.

This study is not without its limitations. The present study examined only euphemistic expressions related to same-gender relations in the *Quran*. It would be interesting to explore Quranic euphemisms related to those who indulge in these relations. For example, in the *Quran*, Allah depicts the people of Lut as “ʔalajsa minkum radʔulun rafī:du:n,” “qawma sawʔin fa-a:siqi:n,” “qawmun musrifu:n,” “qawmun tadʔhalu:na,” “qawmun ʕa:du:n,” “ʔal-qawmi ʔal-mufsidi:n,” “ʔal-ya:biri:n,” “ʔal-mudʔrimi:n” and “ʔal-munḏari:n.” Analyzing these euphemistic expressions can give a full picture of the representation of the act of homosexuality and homosexuals in the *Quran*, and in Islam in general. Another potential area for future research is exploring the impact of translators’ socio-cultural and ideological backgrounds on their renditions of Quranic euphemisms for same-gender relations. For example, it has been noted that Khan and Al-Hilali, among others, demonstrated a clear preference for explicitness over implicitness. This might be traced back to their social milieu and their ideological motivations.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the *New Horizons in Language, Literature and Translation Studies* Conference in April 2024, Jordan. We would like to thank the conference attendees for their valuable comments and feedback. We would also like to thank our colleague Lobna Burohaima for her incisive comments on the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> One of the reviewers expressed a different opinion regarding the use of euphemism in the *Quran*, noting that it sacrifices the precise wording of the *Quran*. We appreciate the reviewer’s feedback. However, our approach to Quranic euphemisms aligns with the overwhelming consensus among Arab grammarians and rhetoricians that these euphemisms serve to politely convey sensitive or socially unacceptable topics without diminishing the clarity and precision of the *Quran*.

<sup>3</sup> The reason behind the instance of Prophet Lut offering his daughters to his people for marriage is beyond the scope of the study. The primary focus is on the linguistic and translational aspects of the euphemisms, rather than the ethical and theological interpretations of the events. However, it is noteworthy that the offer Prophet Lut made is widely interpreted as an attempt to guide his people to righteous behavior through legitimate means rather than handing his daughters over for harm.

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**Appendix: List of the 40 English Translations of the Meanings of the *Holy Quran***

1. *A Simple and Concise Translation of the Quran* by Ali Bakhtiari Nejad
2. *Critical Introductory Translation and Commentary of The Quran* by Kamal Omar
3. *Al-Qur'an Guidance For Mankind* by Muhammad Farooq-i Azam
4. *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* by Ahmed Ali
5. *English Translation of The Message of The Quran* by Syed Vickar Ahmad
6. *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an* by Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Taqi ud-din al-Hilali
7. *Ma'ariful Qura'an: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Holy Quran* by Mohammad Shafi
8. *The Noble Quran: Meaning With Explanatory Notes* by Taqi Usmani
9. *The Holy Quran Translation* Munir Munshey
10. *Qur'an: The Final Revelation* by Abdul Hye
11. *Quran in English: Clear and Easy to Read* by Talal Itani
12. *Quran: Translations Compiled* by Members of the Imam W.D. Mohammed Community
13. *The Clear Quran* by Mustafa Khattab
14. *The Glorious Qur'an: Text, Translation & Commentary* by Abdul Majid Daryabadi
15. *The Holy Qur'an* by Ghulam Sarwar
16. *The Holy Qur'an: Text Translation and Commentary* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali
17. *The Koran* by J. M. Rodwell
18. *The Koran Interpreted A Translation* by A.J. Arberry
19. *The Koran* by N. J. Dawood
20. *The Koran: Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohamed* by George Sale
21. *The Majestic Quran: A Plain English Translation* by Musharraf Hussain
22. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* by Marmaduke Pickthall
23. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an with Explanatory Notes* by Hamid S. Aziz
24. *The Message A Translation of the Glorious Qur'an* by The Monotheist Group
25. *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad
26. *The Noble Qur'an: A New Rendering of Its Meaning in English* by Abdalhaqq Bewley and Aisha Bewley
27. *The Qur'an as It Explains Itself* by Shabbir Ahmad

28. *The Qur'an* by Mohammedali Habib Shakir
29. *The Qur'an: English Meanings* by Sahih International
30. *The Qur'an Translated* by E. H. Palmer
31. *The Quran with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* by Ali Quli Qarai
32. *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* by Ali Unal
33. *The Qur'an: A Contemporary Understanding* by Safi Kaskas
34. *The Qur'an: A New Translation* by M.A.S Abdel Haleem
35. *The Qur'an: The First American Version* by T. B. Irving
36. *The Quran: Translation and Commentary with Parallel Arabic Text* by Maulana Wahiduddin Wahiddun Khan
37. *The Study Quran: A New Translation And Commentary* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr
38. *The Sublime Qur'an* by Laleh Bakhtiar
39. *The Meaning of the Quran* by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi
40. *Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Qur'an* by Muhammad Ghali