

RHYMING PROSE IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF SURĀH AL-FĀTIḤAH: A STUDY OF SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA'S APPROACH

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Abstract

Shawkat M. Toorawa is known for his innovative efforts in translating the Qur'ān in English. He pays attention not only to the accuracy of meaning, but also the aesthetic aspects such as rhyme and grammatical structure. In translating Surah Al-Fātiḥah, Toorawa managed to maintain rhyme consistently. The purpose of this study is to answer two academic problems, namely to examine how Shawkat Toorawa maintains rhyming prose in his translation of Surah Al-Fātiḥah, and how Toorawa balances the aesthetic elements and syntactical conformity of the source text. This research uses the library research method by utilizing and synthesizing Shawkat Toorawa's primary sources as well as some secondary writings that examine his thoughts. The results show that in translating Surah Al-Fātiḥah, Toorawa managed to balance the rhyming prose, choose diction that has syllable stress uniformity, and maintain the syntactic function of each word well. Sometimes

he also made idiomatic transformations in his translation, but he did not lose the essence of the verse. Toorawa's innovation reflects an attempt to bring back the essence of the beauty of the musical resonance of the Qur'anic verse for non-Arabic readers.

Keywords: *Shawkat M. Toorawa, rhyming prose, Al-Fātiḥah*

Abstrak

Shawkat M. Toorawa dikenal dengan upaya inovatifnya dalam menerjemahkan Al-Qur'an dalam Bahasa Inggris. Ia tidak hanya memperhatikan akurasi makna, namun juga aspek estetika seperti penggunaan rima dan struktur gramatikal. Dalam menerjemahkan Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, Toorawa berhasil mempertahankan rima dengan konsisten. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menjawab dua masalah akademik yakni bagaimana Shawkat Toorawa mempertahankan prosa berima (rhyming prose) dalam penerjemahannya di Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, dan bagaimana Toorawa menyeimbangkan unsur estetika dan kesesuaian sintaksis dari teks sumber. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode library reserach dengan memanfaatkan dan mensintesis sumber-sumber primer karya Shawkat Toorawa serta beberapa tulisan sekunder yang menguji pemikirannya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam menerjemahkan Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, Toorawa berhasil menyeimbangkan prosa berima, memilih diksi yang memiliki keseragaman tekanan suku kata, serta mempertahankan fungsi sintaksis setiap kata dengan baik. Dalam beberapa kesempatan, ia juga melakukan transformasi idiomatik dalam penerjemahannya, namun tidak menghilangkan esensi ayat tersebut. Inovasi yang dilakukan Toorawa mencerminkan upaya untuk kembali menghadirkan esensi keindahan resonansi musikal ayat Al-Qur'an bagi pembaca non-Arab.

Kata Kunci: *Shawkat M. Toorawa, rhyming prose, Al-Fātiḥah*,

Introduction

In translation studies, every translator operates within particular ideologies, approaches, and orientations shaped by theological, social, and cultural factors.¹ The history of Qur'ānic translation into English demonstrates the emergence of diverse translational models that reflect the development of interpretive thought and methodology over time. This historical trajectory underscores that translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but also an interpretive act embedded with motivation, context, and value systems that inevitably shape the final rendering. George Sale (1734), for instance, is widely recognized as an early translator whose work was

¹ Min Zhang, "Some Thoughts on the Influence of Culture on Translation in Literary Translation," Atlantis Press, May 2018, 399–403, <https://doi.org/10.2991/sncc-18.2018.81>.

strongly influenced by orientalist bias, then Muhammad Asad (1924) introduced a more comprehensive and contextual approach,² while Yusuf Ali (1934) enriched Qur'ānic translation through his use of poetic exegesis,³ More recently, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2004) has advanced a modern, clear, and communicative style of translation.⁴ Taken together, these translators illustrate the wide range of orientations and strategies employed in rendering the Qur'ān into English.

Within this diverse landscape of approaches, Shawkat M. Toorawa distinguishes himself by foregrounding aesthetics as a central translational strategy. In his translations, Toorawa seeks to recreate sound repetition, rhythmic end-words that echo the source text, diction with strong phonetic resonance, consistent aural patterns, and the highlighting of unique Qur'ānic vocabulary (*hapax legomena*).⁵ The rationale behind this approach is explicitly articulated in his writings, where he argues that the linguistic beauty of the Qur'ān is often diminished in existing English translations, leaving non-Arabic readers unable to fully experience its aesthetic impact. This awareness led him to undertake two interrelated projects: translating the Qur'ān into cadenced, rhyming prose and cataloguing rare lexical items in the Qur'ān.⁶

Toorawa's interest in Qur'ānic aesthetics was initially sparked by a personal experience at the Prophet's Mosque, where he heard the recitation of Sūrah al-Insān. Words such as *salsabil* and *zanjabil*, which appear exclusively in that sūrah, left a lasting impression on him⁷. Then when Toorawa paid attention to the surah, he also found quadriliteral words (words consisting of four root consonants) and quinquiliteral words (words consisting of five root consonants) such as *zamḥaīr* and *istabraq*. For Toorawa, these words contain the complexity of the beauty of the language in the Qur'ān and it would be unfortunate if the translation of the Qur'ān was done without maintaining these aesthetic elements⁸. Toorawa realized that existing translations did not fully reflect the beauty of the Qur'ān's rhythms (*saj'*) and unique words (*hapax*).

² Muhammad Ihsan, Abd Muid N, and Kerwanto, "Pendekatan Penerjemahan Muhammad Asad Dalam Karya The Message Of The Quran," *Lentera: Multidisciplinary Studies* 3, no. 2 (March 2025): 638–54, <https://doi.org/10.57096/lentera.v3i2.155>.

³ Nur Anis Rochmawati, "Cross-Reference Terhadap Bibel Dalam The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary Karya Abdullah Yusuf Ali," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 7, no. 2 (December 2021): 329–48, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v7i2.303>.

⁴ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *Oxford World's Classics The Qur'an A New Translation By M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (2021), <http://archive.org/details/oxford-worlds-classics-the-quran-a-new-translation-by-m.-a.-s.-abdel-haleem>.

⁵ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose: Process and Outcome in a Translation of *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah* (Q. 88)," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 2015): 103–17, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2015.0197>.

⁶ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'an: A Proposal, with Illustrative Translations and Discussion," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 2007): 134–48, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2007.9.1.134>.

⁷ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'an: A Proposal, with Illustrative Translations and Discussion," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 2007): 134–48, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2007.9.1.134>.

⁸ Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'an."

From this disappointment, he was inspired to take two steps, namely trying to translate with rhymed prose and researching words that rarely appear (hapax legomena). He started by translating Surah Al-Insān, then Yā-Sīn, Al-Fātiḥah, and so on⁹. However, in this study, the focus is on surah Al-Fātiḥah, because there is no research that examines Toorawa's translation of this surah.

In his translation of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, Toorawa employs resonant endings such as ...compassion(1), ...creation(2), ...compassion(3), ...determination(4), ...alleviation(5), ...direction(6), and ...*deviation*(7). Producing a consistent aural pattern across the verses. Phonetically, this strategy results in a harmonious and cohesive form, positioning sound as a meaningful component of interpretation. This consistency highlights the distinctiveness of Toorawa's translational strategy, which introduces a renewed emphasis on rhyme and resonance within English Qur'ānic translation. The aesthetic approach developed by Shawkat M. Toorawa reflects a sustained attention to the dimension of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, particularly *i'jāz lughawī*, which concerns the Qur'an's linguistic and rhetorical distinctiveness. Through this approach, Toorawa underscores that the distinctiveness of the Qur'an lies not only in its semantic content, but also in its formal structure and aural experience. Within Qur'anic translation studies, such an orientation signals a shift from predominantly meaning-oriented and explanatory approaches toward an engagement with the aesthetic dimensions of the source text that have often been overlooked.

Several studies have previously examined Shawkat M. Toorawa's translational approach. Among them is *Lexical Echoes in English Qur'anic Translation: A Study of Shawkat M. Toorawa's Thought*, which discusses Toorawa's method of translation with particular reference to Sūrah Maryam.¹⁰ Another study, *A Lexical Study of Shawkat M. Toorawa's Rhymed Qur'anic Translation: Method, Lexical Echo, and Hapax*, analyzes his translational methodology and his treatment of lexical echoes and hapax legomena.¹¹ A further study, *Lexical Resonance in English Qur'anic Translation: An Analysis of the Translation of Sūrah at-Ṭāriq*, focuses on Toorawa's translation of Sūrah at-Ṭāriq.¹² Nevertheless, these studies are generally descriptive in nature, as they largely elaborate Toorawa's ideas as explicitly articulated in his own writings, such as *Sūrah Maryam (Q. 19): Lexicon, Lexical Echoes, English Translation, Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose: Process and Outcome in a Translation*

⁹ Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'an."

¹⁰ Ayus Ratna Dilla, "Pengganaan Gema Leksikal Dalam Terjemah Al-Qur'an Berbahasa Inggris: Studi Atas Pemikiran Shawkat M. Toorawa" (undergraduate, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2024), <http://digilib.uinsa.ac.id/67759/>.

¹¹ Nur Fiatin Hafidh, "Kajian Leksikon Atas Terjemah Al-Qur'an Bersajak Shawkat M. Toorawa," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (December 2023): 233–349.

¹² M. Afif Wafiudin, Moh. Yardho, and Muhammad Naufal Hakim, "Resonansi Leksikal dalam Terjemahan al-Qur'an Berbahasa Inggris: Analisis Alih Bahasa Surah at-Ṭāriq Shawkat M. Toorawa," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 13, no. 2 (November 2024): 286–305, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v13i2.41712>.

of Sūrah al-Ghāshiyah (Q. 88), and Sūrah al-Ṭāriq (Q. 86) Translated into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose.

In contrast to previous studies, this research seeks to move a step further by examining, through close textual analysis, how Shawkat M. Toorawa's translational method is realized in his translation of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*. By analyzing the translated text directly, this study not only outlines the concepts articulated by Toorawa, but also identifies the concrete manifestations of rhyme, rhythm, and resonance that shape the distinctive experience of his translation. Accordingly, this research aims to address a gap in earlier scholarship, which has given limited attention to the implementational aspects of Toorawa's aesthetic approach. This article also offers an evaluative analysis of the methodological consequences of such aesthetic strategies, particularly with regard to lexical choice, semantic negotiation, and readability.

In terms of translation studies, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on Qur'ānic translation by offering a focused examination of how aesthetic considerations are realized in an English translation of the Qur'ān. This study complements existing scholarship by illustrating one possible way in which sound, rhythm, and resonance are negotiated within translation practice. The analysis presented in this article seeks to clarify how such aesthetic strategies operate in Toorawa's translation, without extending its claims beyond the specific scope of the study.

Western Qur'ānic Translation Discourse and Qur'ānic *Ijāz*

For non-Arabic readers, Qur'ānic translation plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of the Qur'ān. Translation thus becomes a key medium through which the meanings of the source text are mediated and interpreted. As Amos Oz observes, “*the task of the translator is not only impossible but also extremely difficult*”, since the translator must select a single equivalent capable of representing the layered meanings of the source text. This challenge becomes even more acute when translating a sacred text such as the Qur'ān, each word choice inevitably shapes not only meaning, but also how the Qur'ān's language, form, and expression are perceived.¹³

These theoretical considerations are reflected in the history of Qur'ānic translation in the Western world, which has developed through complex dynamics over a long period. The earliest known English translation of the Qur'ān was *The Alcoran* (1649) by Alexander Ross, this translation is often regarded as one of the roughest early English translations of the Qur'ān, reflecting an anti-Islamic and orientalist

¹³ Fejrian Yazdajird Iwanebel and Iffah Iffah, “The Development of Methodology and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Western Translations of the Qur'an,” *QOF* 8, no. 1 (June 2024): 93–110, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v8i1.2512>.

approach.¹⁴ Over the centuries, English translations evolved with diverse priorities, some emphasizing commentary and interpretation, others readability and contemporary language, some reflected sectarian or ideological perspectives, while some focused on clarity and accessibility for modern readers. This diversity in translational approaches demonstrates that translators approached the Qur'ān with varying methodologies and motivations. In 2000, there were more than 30 English Qur'an translations with various methodologies¹⁵

While many English translations focused primarily on meaning, commentary, or readability, few paid close attention to the Qur'ān's unique linguistic and aesthetic qualities. This creates a space for approaches that engage with *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. The term *i'jāz* comes from the Arabic root *a'jaza*, meaning 'to weaken,' referring to the Qur'ān's inimitability. *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* is the ability of Al-Qur'an to weaken everything that tries to create works similar to it.¹⁶ According to Manna' khalil Al-Qattan *I'jāz Al-Qur'an* includes several aspects, namely *I'jāz lughawi* (beauty of language style), *I'jāz ilmi* (scientific depth) and *I'jāz tash'iri* (perfection of the legal system).¹⁷

Shawkat M. Toorawa's translations illustrate this focus, as he carefully incorporates rhyme, rhythm, and sound patterns to convey not only meaning but also the Qur'ān's distinctive auditory and lexical features. Toorawa's attempt to translate the Qur'ān by emphasizing musicality and sound repetition indirectly approaches *i'jaz* in English. Toorawa tried to integrate the *lughawi* model of *I'jāz* while still considering the syntax and phonetics of the target language. The beauty of the Qur'ānic language is a part that should not be omitted in translation, so that Qur'ānic translation is not merely a process of language transfer but also a process of preserving the beauty of the divine words in a different language medium.

Biography of Shawkat M.

Shawkat M. Toorawa was born in London, 1963. He describes himself as a multicultural Muslim, having lived in several countries including France, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States.¹⁸ Two years after his birth, Toorawa moved from London to France with his father. In Paris, he learned with his private teacher, Abdullah Dion, and began attending an English school where he was introduced to the prophets of various religions and religious diversity. In 1972, he moved to Osaka,

¹⁴Abdullah Saced, *Pengantar Studi Al-Qur'an*, 3rd ed., trans. Shulkhah; Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: Baitul Hikmah Press, 2020).

¹⁵ Iwanebel and Iffah, "The Development of Methodology and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Western Translations of the Qur'an."

¹⁶ I'jaz Al-Qur'an, "AL-AFKAR: Journal for Islamic Studies," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2025).

¹⁷ Riski Agus Setiawan, "I'jaz Al-Qur'an Dalam Perspektif Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid" (UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2024).

¹⁸ Nur Fiatin Hafidh, "Kajian Leksikon Atas Terjemah Al-Qur'an Bersajak Shawkat M. Toorawa," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (December 2023): 233–49.

Japan, then Hong Kong after performing Hajj, and a year later to Singapore to study at the United World College of South East Asia (UWCSEA).¹⁹

In 1981 he moved to the United States, earning a Bachelor's degree in Oriental Studies, a Master's in Arabic and Islamic Studies, and a Master's in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with cum laude honors. After graduate, Toorawa has taught Arabic and literature at several universities, including Duke University, Mauritius University, Cornell University, and currently Yale University, where he is a professor of Arabic. He is also the director of The School of Abbasid Studies and co-executive editor of the Arabic Literature Library, which focuses on editing and translating pre-modern classical Arabic literary heritage such as the *Journal of Abbasid Studies*, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, and *Journal of Qur'anic studies*²⁰.

In his intellectual journey, Toorawa wrote many books and articles on Arabic translation and literature.²¹ Some of the letters that Toorawa has translated are Surah al-Ḍuḥā- al-Nās in his article, "The Inimitable Rose, being Qur'anic saji from Surah al-Ḍuḥā to Surah al-Nās (Q.93-114)"²², then Surah Maryam, in his article "Maryam (Q.19): Lexicon, Lexical Echoes"²³, then Surah al-Ghāshiyah in his article entitled "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose"²⁴, then Surah al-Insān, Yā-Sīn and al-Fātiḥah in his article "Referencing the Qur'an, A Proposal with Illustrative Translation and Discussion"²⁵, Surah al-Raḥmān, al-A'lā and al-Balad in their articles entitled "Surah al-Raḥmān (Q.55), Sūrah al-A'la (Q.87), and Sūrah Al-Balad (Q.90) Translated into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose"²⁶. In addition to Qur'anic translations Toorawa is also active in translating poetry and literary works such as Dracula, a translation of Salwa Al-Naimi, New York a translation of Federico Garcia, this is My Name, a Translation of Adonis Hadha Huwa Ismi, and so on. Toorawa's writing interests are all expressed on his personal website

¹⁹ Ayus Ratna Dilla, "Penggunaan Gema Leksikal dalam Terjemah Al-Qur'an Berbahasa Inggris; Studi Atas Pemikiran Shawkat Toorawa" (UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2024).

²⁰ "About," Shawkat, accessed August 21, 2025, <https://shawkutis.weebly.com/about.html>.

²¹ M. Afif Wafiudin, Moh. Yardho, and Muhammad Naufal Hakim, "Resonansi Leksikal dalam Terjemahan al-Qur'an Berbahasa Inggris: Analisis Alih Bahasa Surah at-Tāriq Shawkat M. Toorawa," *JOURNAL OF QUR'AN AND HADITH STUDIES* 13, no. 2 (November 2024): 286–305, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v13i2.41712>.

²² Shawkat M. toorawa, "'The Inimitable Rose', Being Qur'anic Sajfi from Sūrat al-Duha to Sūrat al-Nas (Q. 93–114) in English Rhyming Prose," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, n.d.

²³ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19): Lexicon, Lexical Echoes, English Translation," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 2011): 25–78, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2011.0004>.

²⁴ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose: Process and Outcome in a Translation of Sūrat al-Ghāshiyā (Q. 88)," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 2015): 103–17, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2015.0197>.

²⁵ Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'an," April 2007.

²⁶ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Sūrat al-Raḥmān (Q. 55), Sūrat al-A'lā (Q. 87) and Sūrat al-Balad (Q. 90) Translated into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 2 (October 2011): 149–54, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2011.0026>.

<https://shawkutis.weebly.com>. In the blog Toorawa lists all his works both books and articles

Key concepts in Qur'anic translation from Shawkat Toorawa's perspective

A. Rhyming prose

In his writing, Toorawa does not explicitly mention a clear definition of this term, but from his article entitled "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose: Process and Outcome in a Translation of Sūrah al-Ghashiya (Q.88)" it can be inferred that this term refers to a form of translation that pays attention to the rhyming elements contained in the source text. In Toorawa's statement "*I have been rendering Qur'anic passages rhythmically and into rhyme because I wish to underscore the importance of rhythm and rhyme in the original*"²⁷ it appears here that Toorawa not only wants to convey the meaning in the Qur'an but also wants to convey or replicate the beauty of the rhythmic arrangement from Arabic to English. Hence the concept of rhyming prose became his approach to preserve the aesthetic aspect of the verse.

B. Hapax

Hapax legomenon or simply *hapax* (*hapaxes*: plural) means "spoken only once". In Toorawa's article entitled "Hapaxes in the Qur'an: Identifying and Cataloguing Lone Words and Loanwords", hapaxes are defined as words, forms, phrases or expressions that appear in a text or work. Toorawa mentions that a list of hapaxes would be a valuable guide to understanding the content of the Qur'an. Unfortunately, the study of hapax has not been widely discussed although it occasionally appears in the discussions of modern Qur'ānic scholars, and even if it appears it is only incidental. According to him, in-depth hapax studies are only found in a catalog made by one of the Cairo scholars in 2002 and a dissertation from the University of Vienna in 2008.

In the Hebrew tradition, biblical masoretes used to write unique words, rare spellings, and some rarely used grammatical forms in their books to help understand the text. However, this tradition does not exist in Islam, but even in the absence of such an endeavor, scholars still explain words that rarely appear in the Qur'ān. Therefore, although the study of hapax in Islam is not very specific, hapax plays an important role in understanding the meaning of the Qur'an. Toorawa is a figure who pays a lot of attention to hapax, because according to him hapax will expand the understanding of the Qur'an in terms of language, literature and rhetoric. Something that is mentioned repeatedly will be easier to understand the context, but for words that only appear once or

²⁷ Toorawa, "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose," June 2015.

several times, of course it is more difficult to find the appropriate meaning, especially if the word does not have a common language²⁸

In determining hapaxes, Toorawa highlights clear criteria because not all words that appear once can be called hapaxes. A hapax is one whose root word is not mentioned repeatedly. For example, *hasad* in Surah Al-Falaq is not a hapax because its root word appears several times in the form of *yaḥsudūn*. Examples of words that can be called hapaxes are *naffāthāt* and *waqab*. Because the root word cannot be found in other surahs.

Toorawa managed to catalog the hapaxes in the Qur'ān up to 449 words. In making this list Toorawa referred to books of tafsir, works on Qur'ānic *gharib*, works on Qur'ānic *mufradāt* and so on. In keeping with the uniqueness of this hapax, in his translations he tries to use unpopular equivalents as well. For example, in translating the word *hazl* in Surah Al-Ṭāriq, most translators use the word *amusement* as its equivalent, which means fun. For Toorawa, the word *amusement* would resemble *laib*, and *lahw*. Therefore, he uses the word *merriment* which is an unpopular word.²⁹

C. Lexical 'echo'

It is the use of repeated words in a text that produces similar sound structures between sentences or verses and serves to maintain narrative continuity between verses. According to Toorawa, the structure of repeated words in the Qur'an is so uniquely arranged that a serious study is needed. An example is in surah Maryam which repeats lafaz *iyyan* 13 times, *shaqiyyan* three times, *samiyyan* twice, and *itiyyan* twice.

Based on Toorawa's observations, he managed to deduce the existence of *parallel context* for each repeated word. In this case, the word repetition is divided into two kinds:

- 1) Similar words that contain the same function and context, for example in the repetition of the word *shaqiyyan* in surah Maryam verses 4, 32 and 48. In these three verses lafaz *shaqiyyan* contains the same function and context, namely echoing the power of God over his gift. verse 4 on God's gift to Prophet Zakaria in the form of a son even though he was old and his wife was barren. The 32nd verse on God's gift in the form of Prophet Isa even though Maryam was still a virgin. Verse 48 on God's grace on Prophet Ibrahim.
- 2) Some other words contain the same function but for different contexts. Such as the repetition of the word *waliyyan* in verses 5 and 45 of Surah Maryam. The word *waliyyan* in verse 5 explains the prayer of the prophet Zakariya who wanted pious offspring. While verse 45 relates to

²⁸ Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Hapaxes In The Qur'an: Identifying and Cataloguing Lone Words," in *New Perspective on The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2* (London, 2011).

²⁹ Hafidh, *Kajian Leksikon Atas Terjemah Al-Qur'an Bersajak Shawkat M. Toorawa:*

the prayer of a child (prophet Ibrahim) who wants his parents in obedience and not become friends of the devil.³⁰

D. Aurality

Aural refers to something related to the sense or organ of hearing³¹. In his writing, Toorawa clearly states that the approach he uses is an approach that tries to create *aural* patterns, although it does not have to have phonetic similarity between the source and target languages, but the impression of repetition of sounds or *aural* patterns must still exist in translation. For example, when Toorawa chooses the equivalent of the main word that has the *f* sound, then he will choose diction that contains the *f* sound as well, as well as when he decides to use a word that contains the letters *C/S*, then he will try to evoke the sound pattern repeatedly using diction that contains the letters *C/S*.

*"My 'theory' is that the repeated Arabic sound or pattern in the English need not always correspond to the repeated sound or pattern in the Arabic, what matters is the fact of replication of an aural feature. The choice of f was dictated by my decision to use enfoldment to render ghāshiyā. Had I decided to use concealment, I would have tried to repeat a hard or soft C/S sound throughout"*³²

Shawkat Toorawa Qur'an Translation Method

Shawkat M. Toorawa's translation process and methodology in translating the Qur'an is described in his article entitled "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose: Process and Outcome in a Translation of Sūrah al-Ghāshiyā (Q. 88)". In his preamble, Toorawa mentions that he wrote this article with the aim of making readers understand the process of translation from start to finish. This is based on the fact that many translators explain their general principles and strategies in translating but do not explain in detail how the translation process works. According to Toorawa, this is unfortunate because it prevents readers from knowing the kind of translation choices made by the translator.

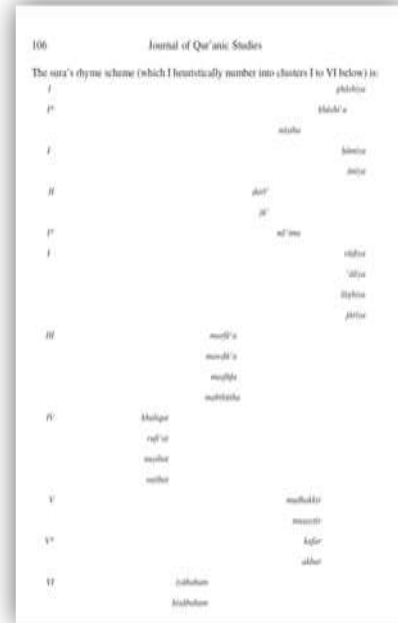
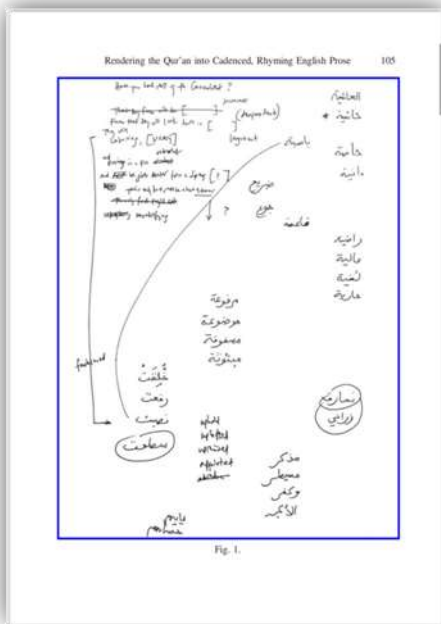
The first step Toorawa took was to write it down on a piece of paper, with one line indicating one verse and one column representing the rhyming word groups. Since there are several words in Surah Al-Ghāshiyah that have a certain rhyming pattern, he thought it would be easier if he saw these word groups on one page of paper. He also circled words that only appear occasionally (*Hapax legomena*) such as *suṭīḥat* which is an *endword* and *namāriqū* and *zarābiyyū* which are not *endwords*. In the picture, Toorawa divides the rhymes in Surah Al-Ghashiyah into 6 groups (rhyme clusters).

³⁰ Toorawa, "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose," June 2015.

³¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "aural," accessed March 1, 2025, <https://www.oed.com/?t1=true>.

³² Toorawa, "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose," June 2015.

Table 1. Rhyme cluster division of Surah



Cluster 1	<p><i>ghā shiya</i> <i>ḥā miya</i> <i>ā niya</i> <i>rā ḍiya</i> <i>‘ā liya</i> <i>Lā ghiya</i> <i>Jā riya</i></p>
Cluster 1*	<p><i>khā shi‘a</i>. <i>nā ṣiba</i> <i>nā‘ima</i></p> <p>Nb: is asterisked because although it has the same morphological pattern as cluster 1, the final sound is slightly different. Cluster 1 ends in yes. Whereas <i>khā shi‘a</i>, <i>nā ṣiba</i>, <i>nā‘ima</i> have 'a, ba and ma endings.</p>
Cluster II	<p><i>ḍā nī‘</i> <i>jū‘</i></p>
Cluster III	<p><i>marfū‘a</i> <i>mawḍū‘a</i> <i>maṣ fū fa</i> <i>mabthūtha</i></p>
Cluster IV	<p><i>khuliqat</i> <i>rufi‘at</i></p>

	<i>nuṣibat</i> <i>suṭiḥat</i>
Cluster V	<i>fā-dhakkir & musayṭir</i> → suffix -ir
Cluster V*	<i>kafar & akbar</i> → the suffix -ar
Cluster VI	<i>Iyā bahum - Ḥisā bahum</i>

The next step Toorawa took after categorizing the rhyming words was "Quick Translation". The first focuses on *ghāshiyā* which is the first verse, the first rhyming cluster and the name of the surah. *Ghāshiyā* is a feminine singular active participle with the root *gh-sh-y*, and has the basic meaning of 'to cover, wrap, envelop, conceal, overcalm, overwhelm, and be dark'. Toorawa then realized that he could not translate these words into active participles (e.g. concealer). Toorawa then decided to translate the word *ghāshiyā* as concealment, which is not an active participle and is a noun.

By choosing concealment, Toorawa implicitly sets the phonetic tendency for the sentences in cluster I to have a similar ending, namely -ent. In addition, he also tried to find a word equivalent ending in -ent for cluster I* because the cluster is morphologically and aurally similar to the words in cluster I. Although in reality not all sentences in cluster I have -ent endings, rhyme uniformity is an important consideration for Toorawa in the translation process. However, Toorawa replaced the word *ghāshiyā* with enfoldment because it has meanings that include to cover, to conceal, to overcome and to overwhelm. In addition to this, the choice of the word enfoldment is also based on other things that will be explained below.

After deciding to replace the word concealment with the word enfoldment, he tried to find rhyme words for the other seven words in cluster I by considering two things:

- a) Possible need for slightly different rhymes for words in cluster I* (*khāshī'a*, *nāṣiba* and *nā'ima*)
- b) Desire to show the morphological similarity of the words in cluster I* with cluster I.

As for *nāṣiba* and *nā'ima*, which both have the root letter *n*, Toorawa translates them with rich equivalents that both begin with *de-* and end in *-ed* (defeated and delighted). As for *khāshī'a* Toorawa translates it with the prefix *di-* and ends *-ent* (diffident). Then for the four rhyming sentences in verses 13-16 (*sururūn marfū'a / akwābun mawḍū'a / namāriqu maṣfūfā / zarābiyyu mabthūtha*), Toorawa uses word equivalents beginning with the letter *c* (couches, cups, cushions and carpets) and then combined with verbs accompanied by the preposition *out* (decked out, set out, laid out, spread out). However, Toorawa is not satisfied with *namāriqu* and *zarābiyyu*, which are hapaxes, so he thinks it is necessary to find more unique and rarely used equivalents.

After several revisions, Toorawa produced a translation that satisfied him enough that he thought it needed to be tested in public, the result was:

"In the name of God, full of Compassion, ever Compassionate

(1) Has word reached you of the Enfoldment? (2) A Day when faces will be diffident, (3) Laboring and defeated, (4) "admitted into a vehement Fire, (5) given drink from a fulminant fountain! (6) For food they shall have only thorny bracken, (7) that neither satisfies nor fattens.

(8) A day too of faces delighted, (9) - their efforts a source of contentment, (10) in a lofty Garden recumbent, (11) free of idle rant, (12) graced with a fountain effluent. (13) And with couches laid out, (14) cups passed about, (15) cushions set out, (16) and carpets spread out.

(17) do they really not wonder how camels were fashioned? (18) how the high heavens were fastened? (19) How the mountains were battened? (20) And the level earth flattened?

(21) Go ahead - remind them! You were sent to remind, (22) not to oversee and mind. (23) but if any turn away and disbelieve, (24) the punishment from God will have no reprieve! (25) In the end, they return to Us! (26) And their Accounting will depend on Us!"

He then tested this translation in a public lecture at the University of Notre Dame attended by Davin Stewart. Previously, Toorawa had shown several versions before undergoing several revisions to Davin Stewart and Joseph Lowry. Then in this latest version, Toorawa received criticism from Stewart regarding the use of the word enfoldment which according to him has different syllable stress patterns with diffident, vehement, and fulminant. These words have stress in the first syllable while enfoldment has stress in the second syllable. Stewart suggests replacing enfoldment with the word tegument but Toorawa rejects the suggestion because he has made the decision to use the f sound in every verse except in verses 19, 23 and 26. This f sound is one of Toorawa's attempts to use repetitive aural patterns. So since he has decided to use enfoldment, he wants to consistently maintain the f sound in each verse, if he chooses concealment then he will also try to maintain the C/S sound in each verse.

The translation that he presented at the University of Notre Dame was not the final result, Toorawa revised some parts again to produce the final translation as follows:

"THE ENFOLDMENT"

"In the name of God, full of Compassion, ever Compassionate

(1) Has word reached you of the Enfoldment? (2) That Day some faces will be diffident, (3) laboring and defeated, (4) admitted to a vehement Fire, (5) given drink from a fulminant Fount! (6) For food only thorns and bracken, (7) that will not satisfy their hunger, not fatten.

(8) That Day some faces will be jubilant, (9) their efforts their source of contentment -(10) in a lofty Garden recumbent, (11) free of idle prattlement,

(12) and graced with a Fountain effluent. (13) There, couches will be loftily conveyed, (14) cups carefully displayed, (15) cushions plentifully arrayed, (16) carpets beautifully laid.

(17) Do people not wonder how camels were fashioned? (18) How the high heavens were fastened? (19) How mountain cliffs were battened? (20) How the level earth was flattened?

(21) Go ahead and remind them! You were sent to remind, (22) not to dictate and to mind. (23) But for those who turn away and disbelieve, (24) they will receive God's Punishment without reprieve!

(25) In the end, all must return to Us! (26) And all their Accounting must go through Us!”

From the description above, it can be concluded that the steps taken by Toorawa in translating the Qur'an are to group words that have morphological and phonological similarities in one cluster so that the recurring sound patterns in a surah can be visualized systematically. The second step is to do a quick translation while considering the potential for developing more rhyming equivalents. The third step is to determine the main word equivalent as a reference for the continuity of phonetic patterns. The fourth step is to find word equivalents that match the main word equivalents for sentences in one cluster or clusters that have phonetic proximity or similarity. The fifth step combines rhythmic and aesthetic considerations and attention to syllable stress. The sixth step is to test the translation in public to receive constructive feedback for further revision. In addition, Toorawa also involves several other figures such as Devin Stewart and Joseph Lowry as discussion partners, which shows that Toorawa's process is open to criticism.³³

Analysis of Shawkat M. Toorawa's Translation of Al-Fātiḥah

Toorawa's translation of Surah Al-Fātiḥah shows his consistency in his aesthetic approach. His effort to translate is not only to transfer language but also to bring rhythm, sound flow and resonance from the language of the source text (Arabic) into the target language (English). The use of diction in the first verse "*In the name of God, Ever Compassionate, Full of Compassion*" reflects Toorawa's attempt to maintain the rhythm of beauty and repetition of the words "*rahman*" and "*rahim*" which share the same root *r-h-m*.

"THE OPENING

In the Name of God, Ever Compassionate, Full of Compassion,

Praise to the Lord of all Creation,

Ever Compassionate, Full of Compassion,

Sovereign of the Day of Determination:

You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek alleviation.

³³ Toorawa, "Rendering the Qur'an into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose."

*Guide us on the path of True Direction,
The path of those you favor, not of those who earn Your wrath, nor of
those in deviation".³⁴*

In the second verse, Toorawa chooses the diction "all creation" as the equivalent of the word "rabbil alamin", a choice that phonetically produces the same ending sound as the end of the first verse (compassion). Toorawa maintains this consistency until the seventh verse. In the first and third verses, the end of the verse uses the -sion ending and the other verses end in -tion. Although the writing is different, they all have the same punctuation of /ʃ/.

Table 2: How to read the end of the sentence in the translation of Al-Fatihah

no	End of Verse (Arabic)	End of Translations (English)	How to Read (british)
1.	<i>Raḥīm</i>	Compassion	/kə'm'pʌʃn/
2.	<i>'Ālamīn</i>	creation	/kri'eɪʃn/
3.	<i>Raḥīm</i>	compassion	/kə'm'pʌʃn/
4.	<i>Yawm ad-Dīn</i>	Determination	/dɪ,tə:mɪ'neɪʃn/
5.	<i>Nastaīn</i>	alleviation	/ə'li:vi'eɪʃn/
6.	<i>Mustaqīm</i>	Direction	/dɪ'rɛkʃn/
7.	<i>Ḍāllīn</i>	Deviation	/,di:vi'eɪʃn/

Note: Readers unfamiliar with phonetic symbols may listen to the pronunciation using *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>

Besides showing phonetic similarity at the end of the translation of each verse, each diction Toorawa uses also shows consistency in syllable stress (stress pattern). The seven words that end the translation of each verse of Surah Al-Fatihah in the table above have stress before the sound /ʃn/.

Table 3. Syllable stress of the final translated verse of Al-Fatihah

No.	End of verse translation	How to read	Syllable stress (stress pattern)
1.	Compassion	/kə'm'pʌʃn/	pæʃ (2nd syllable)
2.	creation	/kri'eɪʃn/	eɪ (2nd syllable)
3.	Compassion	/kə'm'pʌʃn/	pæʃ (2nd syllable)

³⁴ Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'an," April 2007.

4.	Determination	/dɪˌtɜːmɪˈneɪʃn/	neɪ (4th syllable)
5.	Alleviation	/əˌliːviˈeɪʃn/	eɪ (4th syllable)
6.	Direction	/dɪˈrɛkʃn/	rɛk (2nd syllable)
7.	Deviation	/ˌdiːviˈeɪʃn/	eɪ (3rd term)

Note: Readers unfamiliar with phonetic symbols may listen to the pronunciation using *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>

In some of his translated sentences, Toorawa also seems to maintain the grammatical structure of the source language (Arabic). As in the first verse, the sentence "*bismī*", which is a *Jar-Majrūr* composition, is maintained in the same form "in the name of God". This is followed by the adjective phrase because *Rahmān* and *Rahīm* are adjective isim.

Furthermore, in the second verse, Toorawa also appears to simplify two nouns. In the source text, there are two noun entities that show the relationship that *Rabb al-ʿālamīn* is an attribute of Allah. However, in Toorawa's translation, he combines the two elements into a single phrase without explicitly mentioning Allah. The phrase "the Lord of all creation" takes over the dual position of being both an adjective and a qualifier in the source text.

In the fourth verse, Toorawa maintains the *Muḍāf-Muḍāf Ilayh* form of *yawmi al-dīn* with the translation "day of determination". In this passage, it appears that there is a slight shift in semantic meaning to an idiomatic interpretation. The Arabic word *din*, most commonly understood to mean judgement, yet Toorawa's choice of determination leans more toward the notion of decisiveness or final resolution.

In the fifth verse "You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek alleviation". This sentence reflects Toorawa's attempt to maintain the concept of inversion, which puts the object (you alone) before the subject and predicate. The moving of the object to the front of the subject and predicate is similar to the source text's *taqḍīmu al-mafūli li al-takhsīs* (putting the object first to give specificity).

In the sixth verse, Toorawa also retains the *fiil amr ihdīna* form with the English imperative "guide us". Then followed by the phrase "true direction" where true becomes an adjective of the word direction in line with its Arabic form (*ṣirāṭa al-mustaqīm*) which is *na't-manūt*, but the highlight here is the equivalent of the word *ṣirāṭa al-mustaqīm* which is translated as true direction. It can be concluded that Toorawa here translates not only the spatial aspect (straight path) but also the moral aspect (right path). Toorawa's choice of implies that the straight path is not a geometrically straight path but also emphasizes the spiritual meaning. Furthermore, in the seventh verse when Toorawa translates the sentence *al-ḡāʾilīn* which is actually a

fail (active participle) into a noun phrase. Toorawa translates it with the sentence "those in deviation" which is formally shifted from what should be an *active participle*. However, despite the shift, the sentence still has the same consistent function of referring to the perpetrators or people who have gone astray and does not become a sentence with active actions.

From the description above, it can be seen that in general Toorawa tries to balance aesthetic aspects with grammatical form. Toorawa is not always literal, in some occasions he uses idiomatic ways of translating, but still does not leave the syntactic function. This is directly proportional to Toorawa's principle of *rhyming prose* so that his translations not only have functional meaning but are also aurally beautiful.

Methodological Reflection on Toorawa's Translation

From the preceding analysis, it is evident that Shawkat M. Toorawa's translational approach is grounded in an effort to position aesthetic considerations as an integral component of the translation process. Attention to rhyme, rhythm, and aural resonance is not treated as a supplementary ornament, but as a methodological principle that directly shapes lexical choices and syntactic structures. Within this framework, Toorawa does not consistently prioritize a strictly literal mode of translation; rather, he adopts strategies that allow for the continuity of sound patterns without entirely relinquishing the syntactic functions of the source text.

This approach, however, entails significant methodological consequences. When more constrained, requiring the translator to negotiate continuously between semantic equivalence and phonetic consistency. Such negotiation occasionally results in subtle shifts of meaning, particularly when certain terms are rendered idiomatically in order to preserve a unified sound pattern. Although these shifts do not amount to fundamental semantic distortion, they nevertheless introduce an additional layer of mediation between the source text and the reader.

A further consequence concerns readability, especially in the translation of *hapax legomena*. In several instances, Toorawa employs uncommon or marked diction as equivalents, reflecting a consistent methodological commitment to treating lexical uniqueness as an aesthetic value. By deliberately avoiding familiar or semantically transparent terms, he seeks to preserve the sense of strangeness inherent in Qur'ānic hapax. While this strategy enriches the literary texture of the translation, it simultaneously increases the interpretive distance for readers who lack a strong linguistic or philological background.

Within this evaluative framework, Toorawa's translation should be understood not as an attempt to fully transfer *i'jāz lughawī*, but as a conscious effort to approximate it through the aesthetic resources of the target language. This approach does not extend the concept of *i'jāz* in its theological sense; rather, it reconceptualizes it as a linguistic and aesthetic experience made available to non-Arabic readers.

Accordingly, Toorawa's translation is more appropriately regarded as a methodological experiment that foregrounds the aesthetic dimensions of the Qur'an and opens new avenues of reflection in Qur'ānic translation studies, rather than as a comprehensive or normative representation of revealed meaning.

Conclusion

The results show that Toorawa uses several specific strategies to maintain rhyming prose in his translation. In translating Surah Al-Fātiḥah, he chooses words that have similar final sounds, which are both pronounced /ʃn/, and he also uses diction that emphasizes the same syllable, which is the last syllable before the sound /ʃn/. This strategy is the same as when he translated Surah Al-Ghashiya, although in Surah Al-Ghashiya there is diction that has a difference in syllable stress (enfoldment, in the translation of the first verse). This strategy reflects a continuity with his earlier work on Sūrah al-Ghāshiya.

In terms of syntactic conformity, Toorawa seems to maintain the grammatical forms of the source text such as the *muḍāf-muḍāf ilayh* form, *taqḍīmu al-mafūli li al-takhsīṣ* and the *amr* (imperative) form. Although in some places Toorawa translates idiomatically, the translation chosen by Toorawa in Surah al-Fātiḥah is not out of context. Overall, the syntactic function of the source text is maintained, although in some places Toorawa seems to simplify the sentence as in the translation of the second verse "Praise to the Lord of all Creation".

This approach is effective in highlighting the aural and rhetorical dimensions of the Qur'anic text, thereby offering a mode of reading that differs from translation models focused primarily on the informative transmission of meaning. However, the strong emphasis on rhyme and sound patterning also entails interpretive consequences, particularly for general readers, as the effort to maintain phonetic cohesion may result in renderings that are less direct or not fully semantically transparent. In this regard, Toorawa's translation can be understood as a distinctive methodological contribution to Qur'anic translation studies, while simultaneously revealing a tension between the pursuit of aesthetic beauty, semantic clarity, and reader accessibility.

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