

# **A Comparative Study of Shifts in English Translations of The Quran: A Case Study on “Yusuf” Chapter**

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## **1. Introduction**

During the history of Translation Studies (henceforth TS), numerous theorists have provided different models, procedures and theories of translation studies. A controversial aspect, however, goes to the methods and procedures applied in the translations of sacred texts such as The Quran or The Bible. The underlying reason for such debate might go back to the sensitivity of such texts. As an example, the French humanist Dolet was burned at the stake after being accused of blasphemy and condemned by the theological faculty of the Sorbonne University in 1546. The same happened to Tyndale and Wycliffe's works which were banned. Moreover, many other sad endings happened during the history of sacred text translation (as cited in Munday, 2008, p. 23).

The translation of the Quran has always been a sensitive and daunting issue in Islamic theology. One of the reasons is actually rooted in the fact that “an Arabic word can have a range of meanings depending on the context” (Pickthall, 1977, p.2). This is commonly recognized as one of the main features of Semitic languages such as Arabic and Hebrew, in contrast with Analytic ones such as English and Latin. In the modern theology of Islam, the translation of the Quran is mostly referred to as an “interpretation” (Ruthven, 2006, p.90), rather than a precise translation given that the translator is necessarily a human being. This might indicate why Pickthall (ibid., p.3) choose to call his translation “*The*

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*Meaning of the Glorious Quran*” rather than “The Quran”.

As comparative studies of sacred texts have always been the center of attention in different fields of study, the present case study aimed at investigating one of the issues in the realm of translational comparative studies. This was carried out through delving into the strategies taken while translating from Arabic into English using Catford’s (1965) model of translation shift approach.

## **2. Translation Shift Typology**

The available translations of The Quran have been studied and analyzed through several models of TS. The translation ‘shift’ model was introduced by Catford (1965) and remains one of the most comprehensive translational comparative models. The term shift goes back to those linguistic changes a translator has to make during the translation process. Catford (ibid.) pointed to two general types of shifts including ‘level shift’ and ‘category shift’. The latter has some sub-categories. These are introduced briefly as follows:

1. Level shift (henceforth LS): “expressed by grammar in one language and lexis in another” (Catford, 1965, p.141).
2. Class shift (henceforth CS): a shift from one part of speech to another.
3. Unit shift or rank shift (henceforth US): in Munday's (2008) “where the translation equivalence in the Target Language (henceforth TL) is at a different rank to the Source Language (henceforth SL). Rank here refers to the hierarchical linguistic unit of sentence, clause, group, word and morpheme” (p.61).
4. Structural shift (henceforth SS): according to Catford (as cited in Munday, 2008, p.61), “this is the most common form of the shifts which involves mostly a shift in grammatical structure.”
5. Intersystem shift (henceforth IS): a shift that takes place when there is an approximately corresponding system between the SL and the TL, but is not applicable in the process of translation.

Chesterman considers the translation shift model to be a comparative model of translation. Furthermore, Chesterman (2009) believes that these types of models “show the translations in relation to other texts and are based on contrastive research” (2009, p. 7). Likewise, translation researchers and analysts have used the shift model to find out more about the relations existing between different languages.

### 3. Review of the Related Literature

One of the most controversial issues in translation has been the notion of equivalence. While dealing with sacred texts such as The Bible or The Quran, a translator is expected to have full and systematic control over the renderings made. As Larson (1998, p.153) claims, there is “seldom a complete match between languages and that is why it is often necessary to translate one word in the source text by several words in the target text in order to provide the best meaning”. She also sustains that there is a significant gap between the cultures of the people who are speaking different languages and as a result, it is the translator’s job to make as many adjustments as necessary during the process of translation.

On the other hand, the frequency of the shifts occurring in the translation process sometimes matters and has a significant role in terms of the existing relation between two languages, as shifts are known to be the tools of achieving a better piece of translated text. In a study conducted by Komijani (2005), different parts of three English novels were selected and then compared with their corresponding Persian translations in order to locate the dynamism of the shifts and also to uncover the so-called process. The results showed that structural shifts ( $f= 49\%$ ) achieved the most frequency in translations from English to Persian. Other shifts included unit shifts (or rank shifts), intra-system shifts, class shifts and level shifts with the frequency of 20, 15.1, 9.3 and 6.4 respectively.

In another study carried out by Akbari (2006), the researcher sought to investigate different types of structural shifts while translating children’s literature from English to Persian with the aim of delving into the act of message transfer from the source text to the target audience. To do so, the researcher gathered empirical data based on the stylistic comparison of the source text and the target text sentences from ten children’s literature publications. These shifts were categorized under three subcategories including ‘addition and deletion’, ‘sentence-bound word order’ and ‘tense’. The results of her study showed that the most frequent structural shift used in the translation of such texts was ‘sentence-bound word order’.

The term translation shift seems to have reached a high level of significance in nearly all areas in TS including the media. In Sangargir’s study (2006), the shift strategies in the translation of movie subtitles from English to Persian were investigated. This study consisted of a thorough examination of several best seller films and a laborious survey of the collected samples after hours of transcription. In

order to perform effective intra and inter-lingual subtitling, contrastive and comparative analyses were carried out among the sample subtitles gathered from five best-selling movies. As the results, the most frequently used shift types were listed as the means of achieving a translated text holding a higher level of readability.

When it comes to The Quran, many translations are available in several languages. But the question still remains as to what happens during the process of translation, making a piece of translated text seem better or worse. According to Raof (2001, p.12), while translating The Quran, the language and the cultural-bound linguistic and rhetorical features are simply “inimitable and unproduceable into other languages to a satisfactory level in order to make the equivalent effect”. In fact, Raof (ibid.) claims that “the Quranic intricacies have no equivalents in the target language and represent unique examples of linguistic and cultural untranslatability”; and it is here that translation shifts are manifested during the translation process.

As a case in point, Salman (2010) studied different aspects of shifts in Quranic texts. The study began with a review of the tenses in English and Arabic, focusing on the present and the past tenses in particular. Moreover, this study gave a detailed description of the term ‘translation shift’, as first initiated by Catford (1965). Two types of translation shifts, level shifts and category shifts were revealed. In addition, the sub-types of each level of shifts were exposed, surveying three translations of The Quran including Ali’s, Shakir’s, and Pickthall’s. The results indicated that the incidence of tense shift in Shakir’s translation was greater than in the other two translations. Moreover, four types of translation shifts were listed in terms of their frequency in the three translations studied including 1) tense shift from past to present, 2) tense shift from present to future, 3) tense shift from present to past and 4) tense shift from past to future.

With insight from the aforementioned studies, one of the most problematic renderings is assumed to be the translation of The Quran into English. In Shunnaq’s (1998, p.42) opinion “the Arab translators may find certain lexical items in Arabic that have no equivalences in English, because the concept they refer to does not exist in English.” Thus, the application of this model can be beneficial to the translators in order to understand what procedures other translators have taken ensure better decision-making.

The present study aimed to investigate the frequency of the shifts in translations from Arabic into English in the light Catford's (1965) shift model. Translation shifts might vary in number and nature. In line with the aforementioned discussions, the present study tends to find an answer to the following research question:

- Is there any statistically significant difference between the types and frequencies of shifts introduced by Catford (1965) in the seven translations of The Quran from Arabic into English?

## **4. Method**

### **4.1. Translation Samples**

Seven English translations from the first thirty verses of the Chapter 'Yusuf' in The Quran formed the translation samples needed for the present study. The list included Sarwar, Arberry, Iring, Pickthall, Saffarzade, Shakir and Yusef Ali's translations.

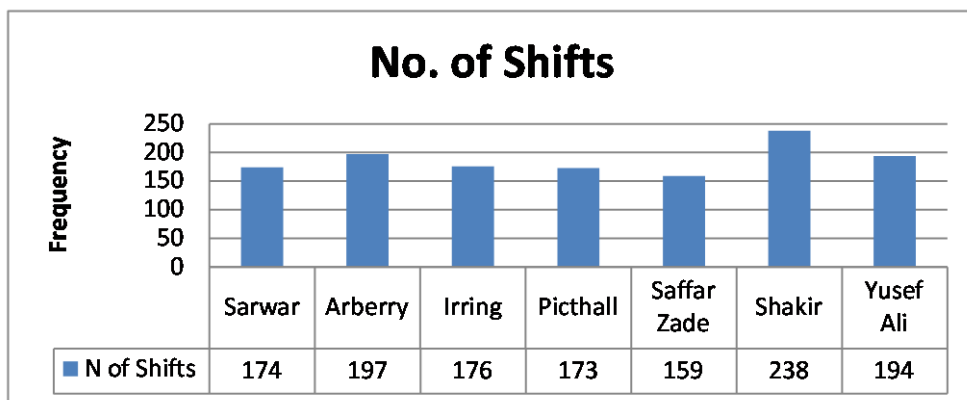
### **4.2. Data Collection Procedures**

Each and every possible element within the aforementioned seven translations was compared to its corresponding original and carefully recorded in tables of the comparative data collection. Appendix 2 provides a sample of the collected data. In some cases, one translation possibly referred to two (or in some rare cases, even three) types of shifts at the same time. Thus, in order to collect the data more precisely, all of the possible cases were carefully accounted for.

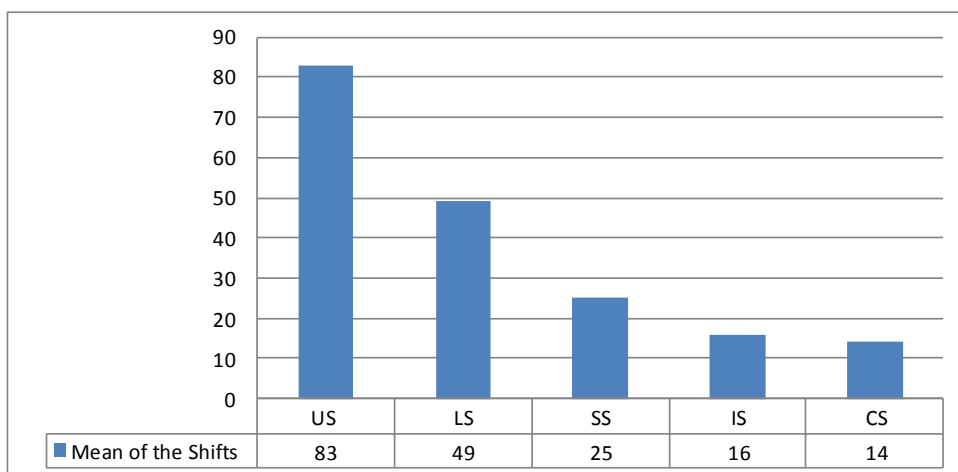
## **5. Results and Findings**

Initially, every shift was inserted into a graph (see Appendix 1.). The main merit of this graph was to provide a general overview of the shift frequencies. However, the total numbers of shifts are shown in Figure 1. In line with Salman's (2010) study on shifts in Quranic texts, it is important to note that Shakir's translation holds the highest number of shifts in the translation process.

With the general understanding of the data in Figure 1, Figure 2 provides the mean of each shift type in all the seven translations. Clearly, Unit shift and Level shift hold the highest means, compared to other three types of shifts applied while translating a text from Arabic into English.



**Figure 1.** *No. of Shifts in All Seven Translations*



**Figure 2.** *The Mean of Each translation Shift Type Within the Seven Translations Studied (Expected frequency = 37.4)*

Concerning the main aim of the present study, the data are analyzed using the Chi-square procedure. As the residual sums between the groups of shifts and their expected frequencies ( $=37.4$ ) held a high level of difference, the test was expected to be statistically significant. The research question was then addressed using a Chi-Square test.

**Table 1 illustrates the frequencies of different groups of translation shifts:**

**Table 1.** Frequencies of Different Groups of Translation Shifts

Shift	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
US	83	37.4	45.6
LS	49	37.4	11.6
IS	16	37.4	-21.4
CS	14	37.4	-23.4
SS	25	37.4	-12.4
Total	187		

With an understanding of Table 1, it is important to mention that US was the most frequent shift type detected. In contrast, CS held the lowest frequency. In order to search for the significance of all the five shift types, the Chi-square procedure was applied with the results presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Chi-Square Test Statistics for Different Groups of Translation Shifts

	Mean Shift
Chi-Square	90.193 <sup>a</sup>
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Based on the results of the Chi-square test and the significance level observed (Asymp. Sig. < 0.05), the differences indicated a statistical significance and thus it can be stated there was a significant difference between different types of shifts in the seven translations under investigation. The researchers then addressed the groups of shifts that held a statistically significant difference as compared to those that did not. To this end, different pairs of shifts were then compared with one another, using the Chi-square procedure. The first pair consisted in a comparison between US on the one hand, and LS on the other. Table 3 provides some basic descriptive information on this pair of shifts:

**Table 3.** Frequencies of US vs. LS

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
US	83	66.0	17.0
LS	49	66.0	-17.0
Total	132		

The differences between US and LS were tested through the Chi-square procedure, the results are shown in Table 4.:

**Table 4.** Chi-Square Test Statistics for US vs. LS

	US vs. LS
Chi-Square	8.758 <sup>a</sup>
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.003

As the results of the Chi-square tests in the two related tables above, a statistically significant difference between the frequencies of US and LS was revealed. The next pair of shifts included LS and SS. Table 5 presents the basic statistical information as related to these two shift types:

**Table 5.** Frequencies of LS vs. SS

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
LS	49	37.0	12.0
SS	25	37.0	-12.0
Total	74		

Once more, using the Chi-square procedure, the differences between these two shift types was tested. Table 6 provides the results of this test:



**Table 6.** Chi-Square Test Statistics for LS vs. SS

LS vs. SS	
Chi-Square	7.784 <sup>a</sup>
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.005

As the results of the Chi-square test in the two tables revealed, there was also a statistically significant difference between the frequencies of LS as compared to SS. The following pair of shifts included SS and IS. Accordingly, Table 7 presents the basic descriptive information as related to this pair.

**Table 7.** Frequencies of SS vs. IS

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
SS	25	20.5	4.5
IS	16	20.5	-4.5
Total	41		

In line with the methodology presented, the differences were retested through the Chi-square procedure. The results of this test are shown in Table 8, as follows:

**Table 8.** Chi-Square Test Statistics for SS vs. IS

SS vs. IS	
Chi-Square	1.976 <sup>a</sup>
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.160

As the results of the Chi-square test in the two tables revealed, there were no statistically significant differences observed between the frequencies of SS as compared to IS. The last types of shifts were compared with one another. In this

regard, Table 9 presents the basic descriptive data.

**Table 9.** Frequencies of SS vs. CS

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
SS	25	19.5	5.5
CS	14	19.5	-5.5
Total	39		

As the results of the Chi-square test show in Table 10, there were no statistically significant differences among the frequencies of these two types of shifts.

**Table 10.** Chi-Square Test Statistics for SS vs. CS

	SS vs. CS
Chi-Square	3.103 <sup>a</sup>
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.078

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, there was a statistically significant difference between US and LS, SS, IS and CS (i.e. all other groups of the shifts). This was true for all seven translations studied. In addition, there was a statistically significant difference between LS and SS, IS and CS in all seven translations studied. Moreover, the uses of the last three groups of shifts, namely SS, IS and CS held similar frequencies. Thus, there were not any statistically significant differences observed among these groups of shifts in all seven translations studied.

As mentioned before, the use of a shift has always been considered an inseparable element of a good and readable piece of translation. This could be due to the differences languages hold in nature (Yule, 1996). In other words these are the dynamics of languages; this phenomenon functions as a tool aimed at achieving a better piece of translated text. Finding the relationship between different languages

could be of considerable assistance to linguists, translators, researchers, etc., working in the realm of TS and other related disciplines.

As the results of the present study revealed, the most frequently found shift types encountered in translating from Arabic into English were US and LS respectively. The other three shift types did not show any significant level of difference within the texts studied. Another important issue to be pointed out here is that nearly all of the seven translators whose works were studied had used these two top shift types with the highest frequencies in their translations.

Comparing the results of shift-bound investigations in different languages of the world provides the readers with further data, which often contrasts the results of the present study (see for example Komijani 2005). The need for collecting empirical data on the frequency and type of shifts in several translation contexts was previously highlighted. As translation shifts are known to act as the means to achieve a better translation, becoming familiar with their nature could be beneficial to the translation researchers, critics, etc. Thus, the results obtained from the present study are assumed to provide a better understanding of the act of translating from Arabic into English.

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## SUMMARY

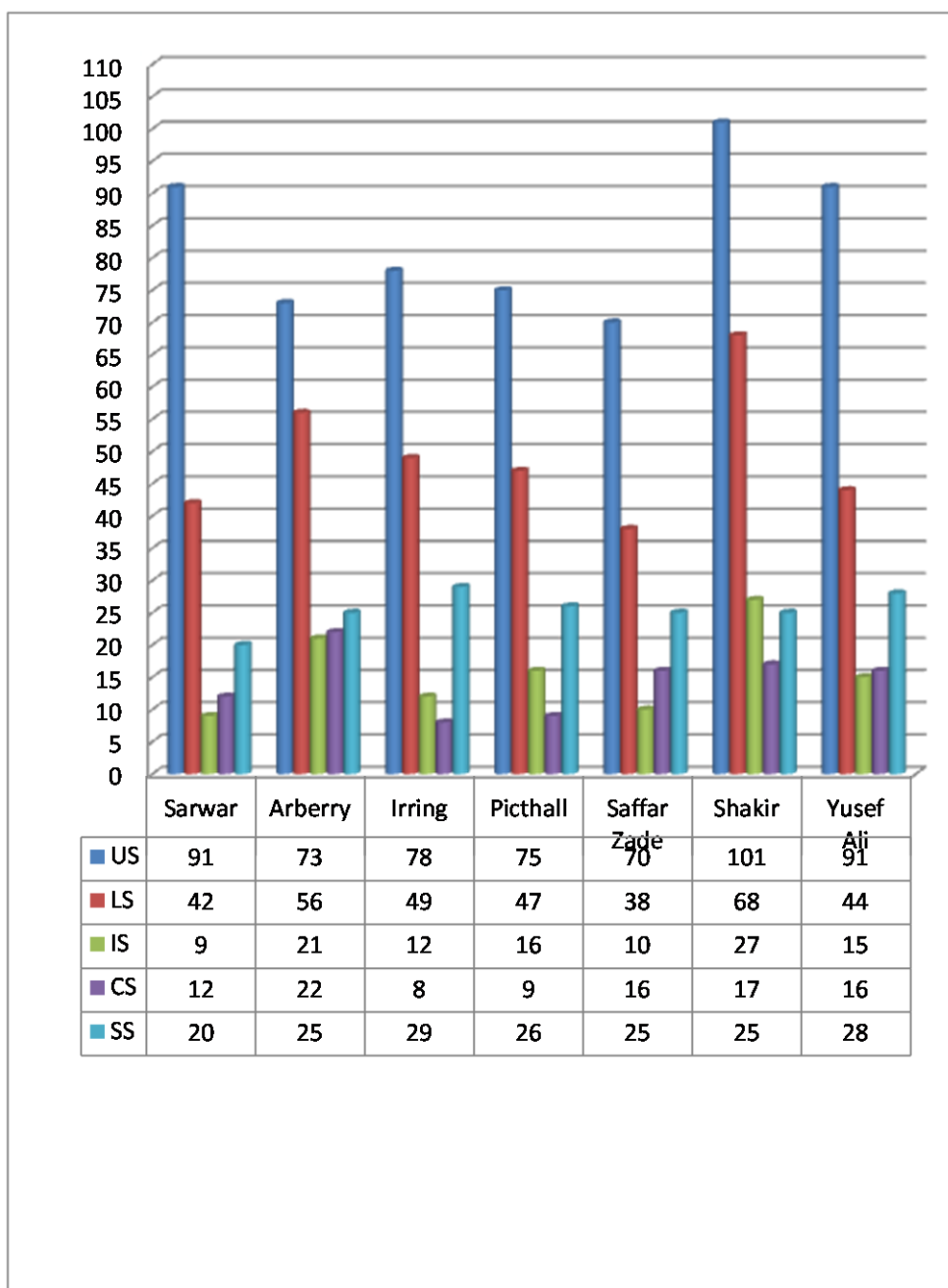
### **A Comparative Study of Shifts in English Translations of The Quran: A Case Study on “Yusuf” Chapter**

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Long since Translation Studies emerged as a nascent academic discipline, it has seen a considerable number of descriptive theories and models, among which, Catford's (1965) translation 'shift' approach has garnered particular attention within the realm of translational comparative studies. Quranic texts have constantly been the center of attention, as the Quran has established itself as the most famous and sublime text in Arabic. As such, the present comparative study aimed at investigating the frequencies of different types of translation shifts occurring in translations from Arabic into English drawing on Catford's (1956) shift typology. To this end, seven translations of the first thirty verses of the Chapter 'Yusuf' rendered by Sarwar, Arberry, Iring, Pickthall, Saffarzade, Shakir and Yusef Ali were selected to be studied. First, each element was compared for any probable shift(s). Then, the Chi-square procedure was applied in order to establish the existence of any statistically significant differences in shift frequencies. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between five types of shifts. The results also revealed that the most frequent translation shifts from Arabic into Persian were Unit shifts and Level shifts with a mean of 83 and 49 respectively.

**Keywords:** Translation shift, Yusuf, comparative translation studies, the Quran, Catford.

**Appendix 1. No. of Shifts in the Seven Translations Studied**

## Appendix 2. Samples of the Shifts Occurred in the Seven Translations Studied

Source Text	Target Text	SHIFT TYPE	Verse
<b>1. Sarwar's Translation</b>			
يوسف	The story of Joseph	US	7
اخوته	His brothers	SS	7
ايت	There is evidence	LS	7
ايت	Evidence of the truth	US	7
سائلين	Those who seek to know	US	7
قالوا	Joseph's brother said to one another	LS	8
ل	There is no doubt that	US	8
اخوه	His brother	SS	8
احب	Are more loved by	SS, US	8
ابينا	Our father	SS	8
و	Even though	CS	8
نحن	We are	LS	8
عصبه	All his offspring	US	8
ابانا	He	CS	8
ابانا	He is	LS	8
ارضاً	Somewhere far away from father	US	9
يخل	Shall we receive equal treatment	US	9
من بعده	Thereafter	US, CS	9
و	But	CS	10
غيبت	A dark well	US	10
يلتقطه	Will take him away	US	10
قالوا	They asked	LS	11
ناصرون	Well wishes	US	11
يرتع	Enjoy himself	US	12
<b>2. Arberry's Translation</b>			
قال	He said	LS	13
ليخزنني	It grieves me	US	13
تذهبوا	You should go	LS	13
اخاف	I fear	LS, US	13
الذئب	The wolf	IS, US	13
و	While	CS	13
انتم	You are	LS	13
قالوا	They said	LS	14
الذئب	The wolf	IS	14
عصبه	A band	US	14
انا	We are	LS	14
ذهبوا	They went	LS	15
غيبت	The bottom of	US	15
الجب	The well	IS, US	15
اوحينا	We have revealed	SS	15

لَتَبَيِّنَهُمْ	Thou shalt tell them	US	15
لَا يَشْعُرُونَ	When they are unaware	US	15
جَاءُوا	They came	LS	16
آبَاءَهُمْ	Their father	SS	16
عِشَاءً	In the evening	US	16
يَبْكُونَ	They were weeping	US, LS	16
قَالُوا	They said	LS	17
يَا أَبَانَا	Father	US	17
نَسْتَبِقُ	Running races	CS	17
مَتَعْنَا	Our things	SS	17
الذِّئْبِ	The wolf	IS, US	17
صَادِقِينَ	Truly	CS	17
جَاءُوا	They brought	LS	18
قَمِيصَهُ	His shirt	SS	18
قَالَ	He said	LS	18
أَنْفُسَكُمْ	Your spirits	SS	18
أَمْرًا	To do somewhat	US	18
تَصِفُونَ	You describe	LS	18
<b>3. Irring's Translation</b>			
وَأَرْدَهُمْ	Their water boy	SS, US	19
يَبْشُرِي	What a godsend	US	19
هَذَا	This is	LS	19
غُلْمًا	A boy	US	19
أَسْرَوْهُ	They hid him	LS, US	19
بَعْضَهُ	A piece of merchandise	US	19
يَعْلَمُونَ	They were doing	LS, US	19
ثَمَنًا	A trifling price	US	20
مَعْدُودَةً	Just a few	US	20
الزَّاهِدِينَ	Quite indifferent	US	20
أَشْتَرْتَهُ	Who bought him	US	21
أَمْرَاتِهِ	His wife	SS	21
أَكْرَمِي	Let be dignified	US	21
مَثْوَاهُ	His stay	SS	21
وَلَدًا	As a son	IS, US	21
تَأْوِيلًا	To interpret	US	21
بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ	He became of age	LS, US	22
الْمُحْسِنِينَ	Those who act kindly	US	22
رُودَتَهُ	Wanted to seduce him	US	23
غَلَقَتْ	She bolted	LS	23
هَيْتَ	Come here	US	23
مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ	God protect me	SS	23
رَبِّي	my lord	SS	23
أَحْسَنَ	the best shelter	US	23
مَثْوَايَ	to hold on by	US	23

برهن	A proof	US	24
ربه	His lord	SS	24
الفحشا	Sexual misconduct	US	24
عبادنا	Our servants	SS	24
<b>4. Pickthall's Translation</b>			
استبقا	They raced with one another	LS, US	25
قدت	She tore	LS	25
الفيما	They met	LS	25
سيدها	Her Lord	SS	25
ما	What shall be	LS, US	25
جزاء	His reward	US	25
اهلك	Thy folk	SS	25
هي	She it was	LS, US	26
رودتني	Who asked of me	US	26
شاهد	A witness	IS	26
اهليما	Her own folk	SS, US	26
صدقت	She speaks truth	LS, US	26
كذبت	She hath lied	LS, US	27
هو	He is	LS	27
الصديقين	The truthful	IS, CS	27
راءا	He saw	LS	28
انه	This is	LS	28
كيدكن	The guile of you women	US	28
عظيم	Is very great	LS, US	29
اسئغفري	Ask forgiveness for	US	29
ذنبك	Thy sin	SS	29
كنت	Thou are	SS	29
الخاطئين	The faulty	IS, CS	30
امراءت العزیز	The ruler's wife	IS, SS	30
فتئما	Her slave-boy	SS	30
شغفها	He has smitten her	LS, US	30
حبا	To the heart	US	30
<b>5. Saffarzade's Translation</b>			
امرات	The wife of	US	30
فتئها	Her slave-boy	SS	31
شغفها	She has affected her	LS, US	32
ظلل مبین	An obvious error	IS	35
<b>6. Shakir's Translation</b>			
سمعت	she heard of	LS, US	31
مكرهن	their sly talk	SS, US	31
اخرج	come forth	US	31
رأينه	they saw him	LS, US	31
اكبرنه	they deemed him great	LS, US	31



حش الله	remote is Allah	LS	31
بشراً	a mortal	IS	31
سمعت	she heard of	LS, US	31
مكرهن	the sly talks	SS, US	31
متكأ	a party	IS, US	31
اخرج	come out	US	31
راينه	they saw him	LS, US	31
اكبرنه	they did praise him	LS, US	31
حش الله	Allah forbid	SS	31
بشراً	a mortal human being	IS, US	31
لمتننى	you blamed her	LS, US	32
رودته	I asked him an evil act	LS, US	32
اسقضم	he refused	LS, US	32
ليسجنن	he shall be imprisoned	LS, US	32
الصفيرين	the humiliated ones	IS, US	32
قال	Yusuf prayed to Allah	LS, US	33
احب	is dearer	LS	33
يذعوتى	they call me	LS, US	33
لا تصرف	do not turn away	US	33
الجهلين	the ignorant ones	IS, US	33
كيدهن	their plot	SS, US	34
العليم	the knowing	IS, US	35
بدا	they dedicated	LS, US	35
راوا	they had seen	LS, US	35
الايت	the symptoms of his innocence	IS, US	35
ليسجبتة	they should imprison Yusuf	LS, US	35
فتيان	two young men	US	36
ارثنى	I dreamed	LS, US	36
اعصر	I was pressing	LS, US	36
احمل	I was carrying	LS, US	36
المحسنين	the right men	IS, US	36
<b>7. Yusef Ali's Translation</b>			
لمتننى	Ye did blame me	LS, US	32
رودته	I did seek to seduce him	SS, US	32
اسقضم	He did fairly save himself guiltless	LS, US	32
امره	My bidding	US	32
ايسجنن	He shall certainly be cast in prison	US	32
الصفيرين	The company of the vilest	US	32
احب	Is dearer	LS	33
يدعوننى	They invite me	LS, US	33
تصرف	Thou turn away	LS, US	33
كيدهن	Their snare	SS	33
الجهلين	The ignorant	IS, US	33
ربه	His lord	SS	34

صرف	Turned away	LS, US	34
السميع	Hearth	CS	34
العليم	Knoweth	CS	34
بدا	It occurred	LS, US	35
راوا	They had seen	LS, US	35
الايات	The signs	IS	35
حين	A time	IS	35
فتيان	Two young men	US	36
ارئني	I see myself in a dream	LS, US	36
اعصر	Pressing	CS	36
احمل	Carrying	CS	36
المحسنين	One that doth good	US	36