

“TRANSLATION OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS PROBLEMS AND SPECIFICITIES”

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Annotation. The translation of sacred and religious texts presents unique and complex challenges that extend beyond typical linguistic transfer, engaging deeply with theology, culture, and social belief. This article explores the specific problems encountered in this field, particularly the tension between formal fidelity to the source text (literal meaning and structure) and dynamic equivalence (conveying the original effect and message in the target culture). Key issues include handling archaic language, non-equivalent culture-specific terms, preserving the text's sacredness and rhetorical features, and managing the potential for ideological manipulation by translators. The study utilizes descriptive and comparative methods to analyze common challenges and the corresponding strategies employed by scholars and practitioners.

Keywords. Religious Translation, Sacred Texts, Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, Culture-Specific Items, Archaisms, Lexical Non-Equivalence, Theological Nuance, Fidelity, Ideology.

Methods. The analysis of problems and specificities in religious text translation primarily employs the following scholarly methods. Examining multiple existing translations of a single sacred text (e.g., the Qur'an or the Bible) into a target language to identify recurring difficulties, varying interpretations, and the resulting differences in linguistic and stylistic choices. Focusing on the phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic features of the source text, particularly archaic vocabulary, rhetorical devices (like alliteration, assonance, and rhyme), and complex grammatical structures. Investigating the socio-historical, religious, and cultural context of the source and target languages to understand the background of culture-specific terms, idioms, and theological concepts that lack direct equivalents. Applying established translation theories, such as Nida's Formal vs. Dynamic Equivalence and Newmark's Semantic vs. Communicative Translation, to categorize and evaluate the strategies used by translators, including borrowing, calque, descriptive equivalents, and paraphrase.

Introduction. Translation has historically been a critical vehicle for the dissemination of religious and philosophical thought, bridging cultural and linguistic divides. However, the translation of texts considered divinely inspired or sacred—such as the Qur'an, the Bible, or the Vedas—is arguably the most sensitive and demanding field in translation studies. The translator of a religious text is often seen not merely as

a language mediator but as a guardian of the sacred message. This dual role immediately introduces profound challenges, as a misstep can lead to theological misunderstanding, sectarian conflict, or perceived blasphemy. The central tension revolves around the imperative to achieve fidelity—faithfulness to the source—which must encompass not only the informational content but also the spiritual authority, tone, and rhetorical integrity of the original.

Results and Discussion. Specific Problems in Religious Text Translation. The difficulties faced by translators of sacred texts can be categorized into linguistic, cultural, and theological challenges.

Lexical and Semantic Non-Equivalence. **Culture-Specific Items.** Terms for religious concepts, rituals, personages, or objects often have no direct equivalent in the target language (e.g., Arabic terms like *Jihad*, *Zakat*, or *Hadith*). Translators must choose between transference (borrowing the word, perhaps with a footnote), descriptive equivalent (explaining the term), or functional equivalent (finding a word with a similar role in the target culture, which risks distortion). **Archaic Language:** Many foundational religious texts were written in an older, often classical, form of the language (e.g., Classical Arabic, Biblical Hebrew, Koine Greek). Translators must interpret these archaisms accurately and decide whether to maintain an elevated, archaic register in the translation (to signal 'sacredness') or modernize the language for better comprehension.

Rhetorical and Stylistic Features: **Sacred Tone and Rhetoric:** Religious texts often possess unique poetic qualities, rhythm, alliteration, and paratactic structures (like the frequent use of "and" clauses in Biblical prose) considered essential to their divine nature. Preserving these features in a natural-sounding target language text is highly problematic, forcing a trade-off between the form and the clarity of the message. **Ambiguity and Layers of Meaning:** Sacred language is frequently layered with polysemy, metaphor, and symbolism. Different religious schools or denominations may hold divergent interpretations (*tafsir* or exegesis) of a single verse. The translator must often choose one primary interpretation, potentially marginalizing others, or include a lengthy commentary (paratext) to cover the possible meanings.

Theological and Ideological Sensitivity. **Sacredness of the Source.** For many religious texts, the source language itself is deemed sacred. Any translation, by its very nature, is a human attempt to render the divine, leading to a constant scrutiny of the translation's perceived authority. **Ideological Manipulation.** The translator's own theological stance or political context can subtly influence the translation choices, leading to an intentional or unintentional manipulation of the source text's message to favor a particular doctrine or ideology. This requires translators to practice an exceptional level of ethical accountability and transparency.

Translation Strategies. To navigate these problems, translators employ a spectrum of strategies:

❖ Aims for a word-for-word or form-for-form correspondence to preserve the linguistic and structural features of the original. While valued for its faithfulness to the source structure, it often results in an awkward or incomprehensible text in the target language.

❖ Prioritizes conveying the "equivalent effect" or message of the source text, making the translation clear, natural, and culturally relevant for the target reader. While achieving high clarity, it risks losing the original text's specific stylistic or cultural flavor.

❖ Aims to render the exact contextual meaning so that both content and language are easily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. This approach often involves paraphrasing and adaptation to overcome cultural gaps.

❖ The frequent use of footnotes, glossaries, introductions, and commentaries is a unique and essential specificity of religious translation. These allow the translator to provide necessary context, explain ambiguities, and present alternative interpretations without altering the main body of the sacred text.

Conclusion. The translation of religious texts is a profoundly challenging, sensitive, and vital endeavor. Its specificity lies in the text's sacred status, which necessitates a constant negotiation between formal fidelity (preserving the divine word's form) and dynamic equivalence (ensuring the divine message's clarity and effect). The most significant problems—the gap created by archaic language, non-equivalent cultural concepts, and the pressure of theological exactitude—demand translators to be not only bilingual experts but also theologically informed, culturally sensitive, and ethically responsible scholars. Ultimately, all religious translations must be viewed as an interpretive commentary rather than an absolute replacement for the original, with paratextual aids playing a critical role in bridging the temporal and cultural chasms between the source revelation and the contemporary reader.

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