

Translation Strategies of Arabic–Malay Religious Texts: A Systematic Review of Scopus-Indexed Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the lack of a comprehensive synthesis of translation strategies in Arabic–Malay religious texts despite the growing body of research. Guided by the PRISMA framework, it systematically reviews 15 Scopus-indexed studies published between 2011 and 2025 to identify recurring patterns, strengths, and gaps. The findings reveal that explication is the most frequently applied strategy, followed by functional equivalents, which together ensure cultural clarity and acceptability. Other strategies such as transference, calque, and literal translation are also used to maintain cultural and linguistic identity. Qur’anic translation, however, requires greater sensitivity to rhetorical devices, euphemisms, and lexico-semantic nuances. Although machine and neural-based translation tools show potential, they still require human post-editing to safeguard theological accuracy. Overall, this review maps the evolution of strategies from traditional to technology-assisted approaches and underscores their pedagogical and practical implications. It also highlights directions for future research, including expansion beyond Qur’anic texts, integration of cognitive and reader-response perspectives, and critical evaluation of AI-assisted translation in balancing accuracy with cultural fidelity.

Keywords: translation strategies, Arabic–Malay, religious texts, systematic review, Scopus-indexed studies

INTRODUCTION

The translation of Arabic religious texts into Malay involves complex linguistic, cultural, and theological challenges. Scholars have emphasized that balancing fidelity to the source text with accessibility for target readers is a recurring issue (Mansor, 2012, 2021; Ricci, 2016). Significant research has explored translation strategies for Qur’anic texts and classical works (Abdullah, 2017; Saad & Rouyan, 2024), as well as recent applications of neural machine translation (NMT) (Alharazi, Alhebshi, & Taleb, 2024). However, a

comprehensive synthesis that maps the evolution of strategies and assesses their implications for both practice and pedagogy remains lacking.

To address this gap, the present study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 15 Scopus-indexed studies published between 2011 and 2025. By identifying recurring patterns, evaluating the effectiveness of strategies, and examining emerging technological approaches, the review provides a structured perspective that can inform translator training, scholarly inquiry, and the integration of AI-assisted methods in religious translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural and Linguistic Challenges in Translation

Scholars have examined the challenges of mediating cultural and linguistic differences between Arabic and Malay. Mansor (2012, 2021) highlighted the effectiveness of explicitation in clarifying cultural references such as food, clothing, and ritual practices in *Rihlat Ibn Battutah*. Abdullah (2017) warned that literal translation of Qur'anic metonymy often creates semantic ambiguity. Ricci (2016) traced the tradition of interlinear translation in Southeast Asia, acknowledging its precision but noting its limitations in conveying deeper contextual meanings.

Strategies for Qur'anic Translation

The Qur'an's linguistic richness and rhetorical complexity make its translation particularly challenging. Saad and Rouyan (2024) examined semantic–communicative approaches to render Qur'anic euphemisms accurately. Mahmoud and Almahasees (2024) argued that functional equivalents and paraphrasing ensure theological clarity. Mat, Ismail Yaakub, and Muhammad (2019) showed that literal renderings often weaken rhetorical force. Similarly, Alhaj and Alwadai (2024) studied omission and reduction strategies, concluding that translation must balance domestication and foreignization to preserve meaning integrity.

Machine Translation and AI-Assisted Approaches

Technology-assisted translation has become a significant trend. Alsaket and Ab Aziz (2014) evaluated a rule-based Arabic–Malay MT system, noting structural and cultural limitations. Almeshrky and Ab Aziz (2012) assessed transfer-based MT models, while Alharazi et al. (2024) introduced a hybrid NMT system with post-editing, which improved accuracy but still required expert oversight. These studies confirm that while MT tools enhance efficiency, human expertise remains indispensable in theological translation.

Pedagogical and Practical Dimensions

Translation also plays a role in pedagogy and cultural continuity. Wahiyudin and Romli (2021) proposed restructuring Malay compounds for Arabic translation using dynamic theory and Arabization. Shekar (2025) linked translation training to English pedagogy and translator competence. Metwally and Asiri (2025) examined cultural expression translation on institutional websites, emphasizing cultural sensitivity. Burdah (2011) analyzed hanging translation as a means of preserving classical Islamic scholarship traditions.

Emerging Trends and Research Gaps

This synthesis shows a clear shift from traditional strategies, such as explicitation and interlinear methods, toward hybrid approaches integrating AI tools with human expertise (Alharazi et al., 2024; Metwally & Asiri, 2025). However, empirical evaluations of computational tools in religious translation remain scarce, and most studies focus primarily on Qur'anic texts. Future research should prioritize experimental validation of MT models, explore cross-linguistic comparisons, and investigate cognitive and reader-response dimensions in Arabic–Malay translation to broaden scholarly and practical insights.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, guided by the PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009), to ensure rigor, transparency, and replicability. The design focused on identifying, screening, and analyzing relevant Scopus-indexed studies on Arabic–Malay religious translation, providing a structured synthesis of translation strategies across the selected works.

A systematic review was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. Scopus-indexed studies published between 2011 and 2025 were considered. The inclusion criteria required that studies:

1. Focus on Arabic–Malay translation of religious or culturally significant texts.
2. Employ identifiable translation strategies.
3. Be published as peer-reviewed journal articles.

From each eligible study, key information was extracted, including author(s) and year of publication, text type, translation strategies applied, and main findings. This ensured comparability and consistency across the dataset.

A narrative synthesis was then employed to describe the characteristics and findings of the selected studies. In addition, a frequency analysis was conducted to quantify the occurrence of translation strategies across the 15 studies. Where multiple strategies were used in the same study, each was counted separately to capture its contribution to overall trends. This dual approach provided both qualitative insights and quantitative mapping of strategy use.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this review reveal diverse translation strategies employed in Arabic–Malay religious texts, with notable trends and patterns across the selected studies. This section presents the results in line with the research objectives, followed by a critical discussion that situates them within the broader scholarly discourse on translation studies.

Study Selection

A systematic search of the Scopus database identified 48 articles on the translation of Arabic religious texts into Malay. After removing six duplicates, 42 unique articles remained for initial screening. Based on titles and abstracts, 25 articles were selected for full-text assessment. To meet the inclusion criteria, studies had to: (i) focus on Arabic–Malay translations of religious or culturally significant texts, (ii) employ identifiable translation strategies, and (iii) be published in Scopus-indexed journals. Following this process, 15 articles were included in the final review. The PRISMA diagram below illustrates the selection process.

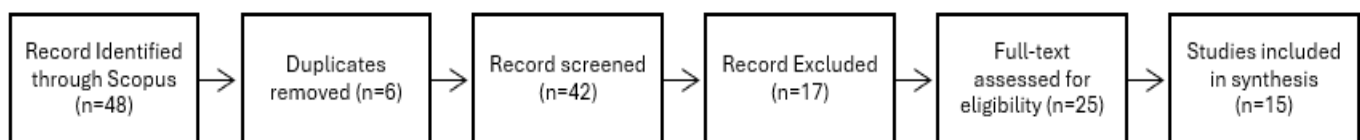


Figure 1: The PRISMA diagram

Translation Strategies Identified

The 15 studies reviewed show that explication and functional equivalents are the most frequently used strategies to ensure clarity and acceptability. Other strategies, such as machine-assisted translation, transference, calque, and reduction/omission, were applied in specific contexts including Qur’anic euphemisms, dialogues, and

historical texts. Together, these strategies help preserve both meaning and cultural fidelity. Table 1 summarizes the selected studies and translation strategies.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Studies and Translation Strategies

Author(s) & Year	Text Type	Translation Strategies
Mansor (2012)	Rihlat Ibn Battutah	Explicitation, Functional Equivalents
Mansor (2021)	Rihlat Ibn Battutah	Explicitation (intra/paratextual)
Mat et al. (2019)	Qur'anic dialogues	Literal & Communicative Equivalents
Saad & Rouyan (2024)	Quranic euphemisms	Semantic & Communicative Translation
Mahmoud & Almahasees (2024)	Quranic human-rights verses	Functional Equivalents, Foreignization
Alsaket & Ab Aziz (2014)	Machine translation	Rule-based MT
Almeshrky & Ab Aziz (2012)	Dialogue system	Transfer Approach
Alharazi et al. (2024)	Arabic Islamic terms	NMT with post-editing
Alhaj & Alwadaï (2024)	Qur'anic glad tidings	Reduction, Omission
Metwally & Asiri (2025)	MHUw website	Transference, Calque, Literal
Wahiyudin & Romli (2021)	Malay compounds	Dynamic theory, Arabization
Abuisaac et al. (2023)	Qur'an expressions	Lexicosemantic Decipherability
Shekar (2025)	English pedagogy	Practical workshops
Burdah (2011)	Classical texts	Hanging translation (MTG)
Mansor et al. (2012)	Rihlat Ibn Battutah	Explicitation, Functional Equivalents

Thematic Patterns

Several thematic patterns emerge from the reviewed studies:

1. Explicitation is the most frequent strategy, particularly in translating *Rihlat Ibn Battutah*, as it clarifies culturally bound elements (Mansor, 2012; 2021).
2. Qur'anic translation studies show that literal renderings are often inadequate. Communicative and functional equivalents are more effective in preserving meaning and rhetorical force, though issues of ambiguity, rhetorical loss, and the balance between domestication and foreignization remain critical (Mat et al., 2019; Saad & Rouyan, 2024; Mahmoud & Almahasees, 2024; Alhaj & Aleada, 2024).
3. Machine translation and computational approaches demonstrate improved accuracy through rule-based, transfer, and hybrid methods, yet human judgment remains indispensable for culturally nuanced texts (Alsaket & Ab Aziz, 2014; Almeshrky & Ab Aziz, 2012; Alharazi et al., 2024).
4. Pedagogical and cultural functions of translation are also emphasized, such as ensuring cultural coherence in digital platforms (Metwally & Asiri, 2025), restructuring Malay compounds to align with Arabic stylistics (Wahiyudin & Romli, 2021), improving translator competence through training (Shekar, 2025), and preserving Islamic scholarship through hanging translation (Burdah, 2011).

Collectively, these findings affirm that translation requires balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural fidelity, achieved through strategic use of multiple approaches.

Frequency of Translation Strategies

Analysis of the 15 studies shows that explicitation is the most frequently applied strategy, followed by functional equivalents. Transference, calque, literal translation, and machine translation/NMT appear less frequently, while reduction/omission is used only in a few cases. This distribution reflects a strong emphasis on clarity, cultural acceptability, and textual coherence in Arabic–Malay religious translations. Table 2 presents the frequency of strategies across studies.

Table 2: Frequency of Translation Strategies Across Studies

Translation Strategy	Frequency (Number of Studies)
Explicitation	7
Functional Equivalents	6
Transference	4
Calque	3
Literal Translation	4
Machine Translation/NMT	4

Critical Insights

The synthesis highlights several key insights:

1. Explicitation is particularly effective for translating culturally bound terms, ensuring acceptability and understanding in Malay (Mansor, 2012; 2021).
2. Functional equivalents enhance readability while retaining meaning, especially in human-rights-related Qur’anic verses and dialogues (Mahmoud & Almahasees, 2024; Mat et al., 2019).
3. Machine translation, including rule-based and neural systems, requires human post-editing to maintain theological and cultural accuracy (Alsaket & Ab Aziz, 2014; Alharazi et al., 2024).
4. Transference and calque preserve cultural identity and coherence across source and target texts (Metwally & Asiri, 2025).
5. Qur’anic translation poses unique challenges, demanding strategies such as semantic and communicative translation, reduction or omission, and lexicosemantic analysis to retain meaning and context (Saad & Rouyan, 2024; Alhaj & Alwadai, 2024; Abuisaac et al., 2023).
6. Practical training, hanging translation, and hybrid approaches strengthen translators’ capacity to manage complex texts while respecting both linguistic and cultural norms (Shekar, 2025; Burdah, 2011).

In sum, the most effective strategy set for Arabic–Malay religious translation combines explicitation, functional equivalents, transference, and human post-editing. Together, these approaches balance accuracy, readability, and cultural appropriateness.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review consolidated findings from 15 Scopus-indexed studies on the translation of Arabic–Malay religious and culturally significant texts. It provides a comprehensive synthesis of translation strategies across diverse genres.

The main contribution of this study lies in mapping the trajectory of strategies from explication, functional equivalence, and transference to emerging AI-assisted methods. This mapping offers a clearer understanding of how linguistic, cultural, and theological challenges have been addressed over time.

The novelty of this review is its integration of studies across multiple text types, highlighting commonalities and divergences that individual works did not capture. It also underscores the growing importance of hybrid models, where neural machine translation is combined with human post-editing to balance efficiency with theological fidelity. Such models, however, have not yet been systematically evaluated in the Arabic–Malay context.

Future research should extend this synthesis into experimental and applied domains, particularly in translator training, pedagogical interventions, and cross-linguistic comparisons within Southeast Asia. There is also scope for developing AI-based translation tools tailored to religious discourse, ensuring cultural sensitivity while maintaining semantic precision. These directions would enhance both scholarly understanding and practical application in Arabic–Malay translation studies.

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