TRANSLATION OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS PROBLEMS AND SPECIFICITIES

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Annotation. This article discusses the main problems in translating religious texts, including lexical, semantic, cultural, doctrinal, and interpretive challenges. It highlights the difficulties translators face in conveying the sacredness and doctrinal accuracy of religious texts into different languages.

Keywords: translation, religious texts, semantic challenges, doctrinal accuracy, cultural context.

Introduction

Religious texts hold a special position in the cultural and spiritual life of societies. Their translation involves not only linguistic conversion but also the transfer of cultural, historical, and doctrinal values. This section outlines the importance and challenges of religious text translation in today's globalized world. The translation of religious texts presents one of the most intricate challenges in both translation theory and practice. Religious terms are deeply embedded in their respective theological, historical, and cultural contexts, making their accurate and faithful translation essential for maintaining the integrity of religious doctrines and practices. Translators are not only tasked with converting words from one language to another, but they must also consider the broader semantic fields, cultural connotations, and doctrinal implications tied to these terms. This section will explore the key problems faced when translating religious terminology, which include linguistic difficulties, the problem of semantic equivalence, the loss of cultural and doctrinal nuances, and the risk of misinterpretation in interfaith contexts.

A fundamental challenge in translating religious terminology is the linguistic differences between source and target languages. Many religious terms are unique to their respective traditions and have no direct equivalents in other languages. For example, the Hebrew word Shalom, which refers to peace in Jewish tradition, encompasses a much broader semantic range, including notions of completeness, wholeness, and harmony. The term Shalom cannot be fully captured by the English word "peace," as it carries a more profound theological and cultural significance in Judaism. Similarly, the Sanskrit word Dharma in Hinduism has no simple translation in English. It refers to a complex set of ethical, cosmic, and religious principles that govern individual and social behavior, as well as the order of the universe. Translating

Dharma as merely "duty" or "righteousness" fails to communicate its full doctrinal depth.

In many cases, there is no lexical equivalent for certain religious terms, forcing translators to resort to paraphrases or approximations, which can dilute the original meaning. These lexical gaps present a significant problem when trying to faithfully communicate religious concepts, especially in sacred texts where precision is paramount. One of the most significant hurdles in translating religious terminology is ensuring semantic equivalence. Semantic equivalence involves ensuring that the meaning of a term in the source language is preserved in the target language, not just at a superficial level, but at a deeper, doctrinal level. Religious terms often have complex, multilayered meanings that cannot be easily conveyed in a one-to-one manner.

For example, the Christian concept of grace (from the Greek charis) carries with it the idea of unmerited favor from God. In many languages, such as Arabic (ni'ma) or Spanish (gracia), there are words that translate as "grace," but these terms may lack the rich theological context that charis holds in Christian doctrine. In the context of Christian salvation, grace refers to a divine gift that cannot be earned, only received through faith. This nuance of grace as an unearned, divine favor may not be fully captured by words in languages where the concept of "grace" might also imply politeness or beauty, which can lead to a weakening of the term's theological significance. In Islamic texts, the Arabic word Rahma (mercy) is another example where semantic nuances are critical. While Rahma is often translated into English as "mercy," it can have a broader meaning encompassing God's compassion, tenderness, and loving-kindness, all of which may not be encapsulated by the English term "mercy." Furthermore, Rahma is intricately linked to Islamic theology, particularly in relation to God's omnipotence and benevolence, making a direct translation problematic without risking the loss of important theological layers.

Another significant problem in translating religious terminology lies in the cultural context in which these terms are embedded. Religious terms are deeply rooted in the worldviews, customs, and lived experiences of the religious community. When a term from one religious tradition is translated into another, it carries not only linguistic meaning but also cultural connotations that may not be easily translatable. For instance, the term Atman in Hinduism refers to the eternal, unchanging soul, the true essence of an individual that is distinct from the body and mind. Translating Atman as "soul" might provide a rough equivalent in English, but it fails to convey the full range of meanings associated with Atman in Hindu philosophy, which includes its relationship with Brahman, the ultimate reality. In contrast, Western Christian interpretations of the soul are often more individualistic and less cosmologically connected to an ultimate, impersonal source, which creates a significant divide in the

theological concept of the soul between these two traditions. Religious texts have long played a vital role in shaping civilizations, offering guidance on ethical conduct, spiritual growth, and theological beliefs. However, translating these sacred texts from one language to another presents a host of unique challenges. These challenges are not only linguistic but also deeply cultural, contextual, and theological in nature. This chapter explores the difficulties encountered when translating religious texts, focusing specifically on cultural and contextual differences and the theological nuances that define religious discourse. The role of the translator in maintaining the integrity and authenticity of religious teachings is a key element of this discussion, as is the importance of understanding the complex layers of meaning embedded in religious terminology.

Translating religious texts is a complex process that goes far beyond linguistic accuracy. One of the most significant challenges translators face is dealing with cultural and contextual differences between the source and target languages. Religious texts are deeply embedded in specific cultural traditions, worldviews, and social norms that often shape the meaning of words and phrases. The interpretation of a religious term can vary drastically depending on the cultural context, making it difficult to find exact equivalents in the target language. For instance, a term like "salvation" in Christianity may carry a different connotation depending on whether the audience is from a Western, Christian background or from an Eastern, non-Christian tradition. The cultural and historical context within which a term is used can significantly alter its semantic field, and failing to account for this can result in a loss of meaning. As Bassnett (2002) notes, cultural equivalence is often more important than linguistic equivalence when translating religious texts, as words may evoke different associations in different cultures. Moreover, many religious terms are context-dependent and may acquire different meanings in varying circumstances. For example, in Islam, the term "jihad" means "struggle" or "striving," but its interpretation may shift dramatically depending on whether the context is personal (spiritual striving) or historical (military conflict). When translating religious texts, such contextual shifts can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations, especially if the translator fails to account for the socio-cultural nuances of the term. As Venuti (Venuti, 2017) argues, the translator's invisibility—their tendency to adapt the text to the target culture to make it more understandable—can sometimes obscure the original cultural context, leading to an oversimplification of complex religious ideas. This is particularly problematic when dealing with sacred texts, where the authenticity of the original message must be preserved. The translator must, therefore, balance between cultural adaptation and faithfulness to the original meaning, ensuring that the integrity of the text remains intact.

In the case of Islam, the term Tawhid (the oneness of God) presents similar challenges. Tawhid is the central doctrine of Islamic monotheism, and its implications for worship, morality, and religious practice are profound. Translating Tawhid as "monotheism" captures the basic idea but overlooks the theological depth and the way the concept shapes the entire Muslim worldview. For Muslims, Tawhid encompasses not only the belief in one God but also the idea that God is singular in essence, unique in attributes, and unparalleled in His sovereignty. Therefore, a simple translation risks oversimplifying or misrepresenting this fundamental tenet of Islamic belief.

The analysis of religious texts through lexico-semantic methods allows translators, scholars, and theologians to understand the deep meanings embedded in religious texts. This section will explore how lexico-semantic analysis can be practically applied to religious texts, using concrete examples from key religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. It will examine the challenges translators face when applying lexico-semantic analysis and provide solutions based on linguistic and theological insights. One of the core principles of lexico-semantic analysis in the context of religious texts is the importance of context. This refers to the fact that religious terms often have multiple meanings depending on the context in which they are used. The meaning of a term can change not only based on the sentence or passage in which it appears but also according to the larger theological or doctrinal system it is part of. For instance, the Christian term salvation may have different connotations depending on whether it is discussed in the context of personal redemption, communal deliverance, or eschatological fulfillment (Nida, 1964). In Islam, the term Shari'a (often translated as "law") is context-dependent. The meaning of Shari'a can vary greatly depending on whether it refers to the formal legal system, ethical guidelines, or religious practice in a particular context. In one context, Shari'a may refer to divine law, whereas in another, it may be interpreted as the human attempt to apply divine law through judicial rulings. This variability highlights the need for lexico-semantic analysis, which ensures that the term is accurately understood and interpreted within its doctrinal framework. The contextualization of religious terms is an essential aspect of religious translation because it preserves the theological significance of terms and ensures that they are accurately conveyed to target audiences. Misinterpreting the context can lead to theological misunderstandings and distortions in translation, which can have profound implications for religious teachings and interfaith dialogue. In Islam, the term Shari'a (often translated as "law") is context-dependent. The meaning of Shari'a can vary greatly depending on whether it refers to the formal legal system, ethical guidelines, or religious practice in a particular context. In one context, Shari'a may refer to divine law, whereas in another, it may be interpreted as the human attempt to apply divine law through judicial rulings. This context-dependent nature makes the lexico-semantic approach especially relevant

when translating religious terms, as it ensures that the translator captures the intended meaning in the correct context. The contextualization of religious terms is an essential aspect of religious translation because it preserves the theological significance of terms and ensures that they are accurately conveyed to target audiences. Misinterpreting the context can lead to theological misunderstandings and distortions in translation, which can have profound implications for religious teachings and interfaith dialogue. In Christianity, key terms such as grace, atonement, and justification have complex theological meanings that require a detailed lexico-semantic analysis. These terms are often central to Christian doctrine and are used in various contexts with subtle shifts in meaning. For example, grace (from the Greek word charis) refers to God's unmerited favor and divine help, but its meaning in theological discourse is more nuanced.

Grace: In Christian theology, grace is not simply kindness or mercy; it represents a supernatural force by which God aids human beings in their moral and spiritual transformation. The lexicon of grace, therefore, is multilayered: it denotes unmerited favor, divine assistance in salvation, and the enabling power to live a righteous life. Lexico-semantic analysis of this term would focus on unpacking its various meanings in different Biblical contexts and ensuring that these meanings are preserved in translation.

Atonement: Another key term in Christian theology is atonement, which is derived from the process by which humans are reconciled with God. This term in Christianity is heavily associated with the Passion of Christ and is therefore a term that holds immense doctrinal significance. Atonement refers to Christ's sacrifice as a means of reconciling humanity to God. The theological weight of this term necessitates careful analysis to ensure that translations reflect its dual role of sacrifice and reconciliation.

Justification: The concept of justification in Christianity refers to the divine act of declaring a sinner righteous based on faith in Christ. This is a foundational doctrine in Protestantism and is often analyzed alongside grace. When translating these terms, scholars must carefully assess the relationship between faith, works, and salvation to ensure that the correct theological meaning is preserved.

In lexico-semantic analysis, such terms are dissected to understand how they interact with other concepts in Christian theology, and how their meaning changes depending on scriptural usage. Translation of these terms thus requires not only linguistic knowledge but also deep theological understanding. In Islam, key terms such as Tawhid (oneness of God), Fiqh (jurisprudence), and Salah (prayer) have complex meanings that require careful semantic analysis. Tawhid: One of the most important concepts in Islam is Tawhid, which refers to the absolute oneness of God. The concept of Tawhid extends beyond the mere idea of monotheism; it emphasizes the uniqueness and indivisibility of God, which influences Islamic theology, worship, and law. Lexico-

semantic analysis of Tawhid involves unpacking its different aspects: the oneness of God in terms of divine attributes, the rejection of polytheism (Shirk), and the centrality of God's oneness in Muslim devotion and theology.

Fiqh: The term Fiqh refers to Islamic jurisprudence, or the understanding and interpretation of Islamic law as derived from the Quran, Hadith, and scholarly consensus. Fiqh is used to refer to legal rulings regarding personal conduct, marriage, finance, and public matters. However, its meaning can vary depending on the school of thought in Islam (e.g., Sunni or Shia). Lexico-semantic analysis of Fiqh must account for these doctrinal nuances, ensuring that its use reflects the interpretations of various Islamic legal traditions.

Salah: Salah refers to the ritual prayers that are performed by Muslims five times a day. This term is not merely an act of worship; it is a symbol of submission to God and a means of spiritual purification. Lexico-semantic analysis of Salah involves understanding its theological and practical importance in Islam, examining how it functions as both a personal act of devotion and a communal practice. When translating these terms into other languages, the lexico-semantic approach ensures that the full depth of Islamic teachings is conveyed, preserving doctrinal accuracy while respecting cultural and linguistic differences. In Hinduism, terms such as Atman (soul), Dharma (righteous duty), and Karma (action) play a crucial role in understanding the religion's philosophical and ethical teachings. The meanings of these terms are intertwined with the concepts of reincarnation, morality, and liberation. Atman: The term Atman refers to the true self or soul, which is considered eternal and unchanging in Hindu philosophy. However, its meaning can be understood differently depending on the context. In Advaita Vedanta, for example, Atman is equated with Brahman, the ultimate reality, whereas in other schools, it may be seen as a part of the divine essence that undergoes reincarnation. Lexico-semantic analysis of Atman explores these different interpretations, helping to clarify its significance in Hindu thought.

Dharma: Dharma is a term that encompasses a wide range of meanings, including moral duty, law, and the path to righteousness. In Hinduism, Dharma is often understood as the set of duties and responsibilities that an individual must follow in accordance with their caste, stage of life, and personal attributes. Its meaning can also extend to cosmic law, which sustains the universe. Translators must be aware of the multiple meanings of Dharma and ensure that the translation captures the full breadth of its significance in various contexts.

Karma: The term Karma refers to action, specifically in terms of its moral consequences. In the context of Hindu philosophy, Karma determines the fate of an individual across lifetimes. Lexico-semantic analysis of Karma must consider not only its basic meaning as "action" but also its broader implications in terms of the moral law of cause and effect. Translations of Karma should therefore reflect both its ethical

and metaphysical dimensions. When translating these terms, it is crucial for translators to understand the interplay between the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of Hindu thought. Lexico-semantic analysis ensures that the essence of these terms is preserved, allowing non-Hindu readers to gain insight into the philosophical depth of the religion. While lexico-semantic analysis is a powerful tool in understanding and translating religious texts, it is not without its challenges. Religious texts often carries meanings that are not easily translatable, and the cultural and doctrinal nuances embedded in these terms may be lost in translation. The challenge lies in finding a balance between linguistic accuracy and theological fidelity. For example, when translating the term grace from Christian theology, the challenge is to ensure that the term is not reduced to a general notion of kindness or favor, as this would misrepresent its theological meaning. Similarly, the term Karma in Hinduism, while often translated as "action" or "deed," carries a metaphysical and ethical weight that requires careful explanation to capture its full meaning in another language.

In this section, we explored the role and importance of lexico-semantic analysis in understanding religious texts. Lexico-semantic analysis helps to uncover the nuanced meanings of religious terms, which often carry multiple layers of significance influenced by historical, cultural, and doctrinal contexts. The section highlighted how religious terms, such as grace, Tawhid, karma, and dharma, are not merely theoretical concepts but shape the lived experiences of religious practitioners through their practical applications in worship, ethical conduct, and daily rituals. We discussed the lexical variations and semantic shifts that occur when religious terms are translated across languages, emphasizing how different cultures and religious traditions interpret these terms in unique ways. Contextual analysis was identified as key to understanding the diverse meanings of polysemous religious terms, where a single word may have different meanings depending on its usage. Additionally, we examined the interconnectedness of religious texts within a tradition, showing how terms form a semantic field that influences believers' understanding and practice. Lexico-semantic analysis of religious texts is crucial for understanding the complexities of religious beliefs, practices, and texts. By exploring the meanings of religious terms, their historical development, polysemy, interconnections, and cultural variations, scholars can gain deeper insights into how religion is understood and practiced. Through such analysis, we not only illuminate the theological concepts that form the foundation of religious systems but also appreciate how these concepts are lived out by adherents in their rituals, ethical decisions, and everyday lives.

Lastly, we explored cross-cultural comparisons, noting how religious terms can carry different meanings in different traditions and how lexico-semantic analysis aids in identifying these differences, enhancing interfaith dialogue. Through this exploration, it became evident that lexico-semantic analysis is essential for grasping

the deep theological, cultural, and ethical layers embedded in religious language, offering critical insights into both the academic study of religion and the practical aspects of religious life.

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