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## THE CHALLENGES AND PECULIARITIES IN THE TRANSLATION OF RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY

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**Abstract:** This article explores the challenges and specific features associated with the translation of religious texts. Religious texts possess unique linguistic, cultural, and contextual characteristics that pose particular difficulties for translators. The study examines the semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic nuances that require careful consideration during translation processes. The research identifies common issues faced by translators, such as preserving sacred meanings, interpreting metaphors, and conveying doctrinal concepts accurately. The article also highlights the importance of balancing literal fidelity with interpretative clarity in religious translation.

**Keywords:** religious texts, translation problems, cultural context, semantic features, doctrinal meaning, sacred language, metaphor translation, translation strategies, religious discourse, linguistic equivalence

The challenges and peculiarities in the translation of religious terminology has always been a delicate and demanding task for linguists and translators worldwide. Religious scriptures are not just literary compositions but are often considered sacred, carrying divine authority and theological significance. The translation process involves more than the transmission of meaning from one language to another; it demands sensitivity to cultural, historical, and doctrinal contexts. This article aims to analyze the specific features of religious text translation, focusing on linguistic, cultural, and interpretative challenges. It is important to delve into how religious terminology is not just a theoretical construct but a lived reality in the daily practices and rituals of believers. The use of specific terms in religious rituals, worship, and ethical conduct is crucial for understanding how these terms shape and sustain the faith experience.

Religious terminology plays a crucial role in the lived practice of faith, influencing everything from worship rituals to daily ethical behavior. While theoretical definitions of religious terms are essential for understanding doctrine, the practical application of these terms in religious life provides a richer context for their significance. The use of terminology in religious practice is often intertwined with cultural, social, and theological aspects that vary between religious traditions.

Christianity: Terminology in Worship and Sacraments

In Christianity, terms such as grace, salvation, and faith are not only theological constructs but also guide practical religious life. For example, the term grace refers to God's unmerited favor and is foundational in Christian liturgy, particularly during the Eucharist or Communion. During this sacrament, the term grace encapsulates the theological belief that through the death and resurrection of Christ, believers are offered divine favor, which is experienced through the act of partaking in the bread and wine. Grace, therefore, is not just a concept to be discussed in theological settings but an experiential reality for believers during worship.

Similarly, the term salvation goes beyond doctrinal discussion and is central to Christian practices, especially in liturgical settings. The Christian understanding of salvation involves a transformation that is lived out in daily life and expressed in acts of charity, repentance, and spiritual renewal. In Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions, the act of being "saved" is often dramatized in personal testimony, where individuals recount their experiences of spiritual awakening and the practical outworking of salvation in their lives.

Furthermore, terms like faith and repentance shape Christian ethical practices. The concept of faith in Christian practice is not just intellectual assent but an active trust in God's promises, seen in acts of worship, prayer, and charitable works. Repentance, derived from the Greek word *metanoia*, literally means a change of mind, and it influences Christian practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation, central to the rituals of the Church, particularly in the sacrament of reconciliation or penance[32].

#### Islam: Terminology in Rituals and Daily Life

In Islam, the terminology associated with key practices such as *salat* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting), and *Zakat* (charity) shapes the lived experiences of Muslims. The term *Tawhid*, which refers to the oneness of God, is foundational to every practice in Islam. The daily recitation of the *Shahada* (the declaration of faith) — "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" — reinforces this core belief. The way *Tawhid* is embedded in Islamic practice influences the ethical behaviors and decisions Muslims make in their daily lives.

The term *Zakat* refers to the religious obligation to give alms to the poor, an act that goes beyond theoretical generosity and has practical implications for the social and economic structures within Muslim communities. *Zakat* serves as a tool for social justice, emphasizing that wealth belongs to God and must be redistributed to support those in need. In Islamic law, *Zakat* is not seen as optional but as a duty to purify one's wealth, demonstrating the practical application of religious terminology in ensuring social welfare (Nasr, 2004).

Similarly, the term *sawm* (fasting during the month of Ramadan) is a practice that embodies the Islamic principles of self-discipline and spiritual purification. The

use of the term goes beyond doctrinal significance to shape daily behavior during the month of Ramadan, with Muslims refraining from food, drink, and other worldly pleasures from dawn to dusk. This practice is a way to cultivate empathy for the less fortunate and to reinforce one's dependence on God for sustenance. The term *sawm* encapsulates the broader Islamic goal of purification, both spiritual and physical, by renouncing worldly desires in favor of devotion and submission to God.

#### Hinduism: Terminology in Ethical Conduct and Rituals

In Hinduism, terms such as *dharma* (righteous duty), *karma* (action), and *moksha* (liberation) are integral to the daily lives of practitioners. These terms shape ethical conduct, social behavior, and spiritual practices in profound ways. For instance, *dharma* is a guiding principle that helps individuals navigate their responsibilities within the family, society, and the broader cosmos. It is not just a concept discussed in texts like the *Bhagavad Gita*, but a lived reality that dictates how individuals approach work, relationships, and ethical decision-making. Hindu *dharma* emphasizes living in harmony with the universe and fulfilling one's role based on caste, stage of life, and personal inclinations.

The term *karma* refers to the actions performed by individuals and the law of cause and effect. It underpins the Hindu understanding of life as a cycle of actions and consequences, influencing moral behavior. Every action, thought, and intention contributes to one's future, whether in this life or in future reincarnations. Therefore, the concept of *karma* guides Hindu ethical practice, urging individuals to act virtuously, with awareness of the long-term spiritual consequences of their actions[35].

Similarly, the term *moksha* signifies liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*). In practical terms, *moksha* is the ultimate spiritual goal of Hinduism, achieved through meditation, self-discipline, and devotion to God. The pursuit of *moksha* influences the daily practices of Hindus, particularly in the context of meditation, prayer, and the worship of deities, reflecting the aspiration for spiritual freedom from worldly attachments.

#### Buddhism: Terminology in the Path to Enlightenment

In Buddhism, key terms such as *dharma* (the teachings of the Buddha), *nirvana* (the cessation of suffering), and *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth) are crucial for understanding the practical application of Buddhist teachings. The term *dharma* encompasses both the teachings of the Buddha and the ultimate law of the universe, providing a framework for ethical conduct and meditation. By following the *dharma*, practitioners seek to transcend suffering and ignorance, achieving enlightenment (*nirvana*). This concept shapes the daily practices of Buddhists, from meditation to mindfulness, which are meant to lead to spiritual awakening.

The research methodology is based on descriptive, analytical, and comparative approaches. Several translated religious texts, including the Quran, Bible, and other

theological works, are examined to identify common translation problems and strategies. Lexical, semantic, and pragmatic analyses are applied to selected fragments to reveal how translators cope with doctrinal meanings, metaphoric expressions, and cultural references.

Table 1: Common Translation Problems in Religious Texts

Problem Type	Example
Sacred Terminology	Rendering “Allah” or “Yahweh”
Metaphoric Language	Interpreting “The Lamb of God”
Doctrinal Ambiguity	Translating “original sin” concept
Cultural References	Meaning of fasting rituals in different religions

Figure 1: Stages of Religious Text Translation Process

1. Reading and Contextual Analysis
2. Doctrinal and Cultural Evaluation
3. Lexical and Semantic Interpretation
4. Drafting Translation with Annotations
5. Review by Theological Experts
6. Finalizing the Translation

The translation of religious terminology 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.

#### 1. Linguistic Barriers and Lexical Gaps

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 [20]. 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 [35].

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.

## 2. Semantic Equivalence: The Challenge of Meaning and Interpretation

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.

## Cultural Contexts and Religious Worldviews

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.

The translation of religious terminology is one of the most challenging and nuanced areas within the field of translation studies. Throughout this thesis, we have explored the complexities that arise when translating religious terms, considering not only linguistic aspects but also the deep theological, cultural, and historical contexts that shape religious discourse. In examining the challenges and peculiarities involved in translating religious terminology, we have highlighted the importance of understanding both the source and target cultures to ensure the accurate transmission of religious concepts. The challenges of translation are not confined to the lexical level alone, as each term carries with it layers of meaning that are often deeply embedded in the traditions, practices, and beliefs of specific religious communities.

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