LEXICAL USAGE IN ENGLISH ISLAMIC DISCOURSE

D. Rashidova
Phd student in DIEP
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16732750

Abstract. *This study explores the lexical representation of Islamic concepts in English-language religious sermons. It examines how translation practices, semantic adaptation, and cultural contexts shape the use of Islamic terms such as taqwa, deen, and sabr. The research emphasizes religious sermons and prevalent Islamic preaching in English, illuminating the difficulties between translation and transliteration, the categorization of Islamic lexicon, and its ramifications for faith-based communication. The findings emphasize the importance of maintaining semantic integrity while ensuring clarity for diverse English-speaking Muslim audiences.*

Keywords: *islamic discourse, religious terms, islamic lexicon, transliteration, religious sermons.*

Introduction

The lexical features of English Islamic discourse, particularly in religious sermons, offer insight into how Islamic beliefs, values, and practices are linguistically conveyed to English-speaking audiences. In this kind of speech, Arabic words like *salah, zakat,* and *deen* are often used either in their transliterated form or as their English translations. The choice between these methods is not simple, though, because it affects both the accuracy of the theology and the understanding of the audience. When imams, scholars, or speakers give religious sermons in English, they often have to balance keeping the sacredness of the original Arabic words with making them easy for people who don't know Islamic terms to understand.

These lexical choices contribute to shaping religious identity and spiritual understanding among diverse audiences, while also influencing interfaith perception and cultural integration.

Methods

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, drawing data from English-language Islamic sermons and religious discourse available in digital archives, mosque khutbahs, and Islamic preaching platforms. Selected sermons were examined for the utilization of Arabic-origin phrases, their frequency, and contextual significances. The methodology included: 1) Identifying key Islamic lexical items used in English religious sermons. 2) Categorizing terms based on semantic function (ritual, ethical, theological). 3)Analyzing translation versus transliteration choices. 4) Comparing usage patterns across speakers and sermon types. The data were supported by references to Quranic verses and hadith citations commonly employed in these sermons, enabling a pragmatic analysis of how such lexis functions in real religious communication.

Results and Discussion

Translation and Transliteration of Islamic Terms

One of the core challenges in English Islamic discourse is the dilemma between translation and transliteration. Transliteration preserves phonetic fidelity (e.g., *salah, zakat, taqwa*), whereas translation seeks accessibility (e.g., *prayer, almsgiving, piety*). However, translation often fails to capture the full semantic depth.

For instance:

- *Deen* → translated as "religion", though it encompasses a comprehensive way of life.
- *Salah* → commonly translated as "prayer", though it refers to a structured ritual with specific movements and timings.

According to Hijazi, transliteration maintains theological integrity, but may alienate non-Muslim readers unfamiliar with Arabic terms. Conversely, translation may "domesticate" meanings, risking reductionism [Hijazi, 2021]. Al-Khatib and Sabry emphasize that the translation of religious terms must retain their sacred function; otherwise, "their reduction into secular synonyms erodes their doctrinal value [Sabry, 2015]."

In addition to the core terms discussed, other lexical items such as *"nifaq" (hypocrisy), "tawbah" (repentance), "dhikr" (remembrance),* and *"rahma" (mercy)* frequently occur in English Islamic sermons. These words carry deeply embedded theological and ethical meanings that extend beyond their surface-level translations.

For instance, "nifaq" is not merely "hypocrisy"; in Islamic theology, it represents a grave spiritual state that threatens the foundation of faith. Preachers often mention it to warn against internal inconsistency between belief and behavior, often referencing Quranic narratives (e.g., Surah Al-Munafiqun). Similarly, "tawbah" is not just "repentance"; it includes conditions such as sincere regret, ceasing the sin, and intention not to return to it.

The term "dhikr", often translated as "remembrance", implies ritual and spiritual engagement through phrases like "SubhanAllah", "Alhamdulillah", and "La ilaha illallah". These terms are used not only as acts of worship but also as identity reinforcers in discourse. According to Mahboob (2018), such lexical items serve as "performative utterances" that activate communal memory and align with divine command.

Furthermore, "rahma", typically translated as "mercy", extends to a broad discourse on divine attributes and human ethical behavior. Its use in sermons is tied to both Allah's attributes (Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem) and the Prophet's merciful conduct. Such usage allows preachers to interlace moral exhortation with emotional resonance, as emphasized by Sharif (2022).

Lexical Categories in English Islamic Discourse

Three major lexical categories can be used to group English terms related to Islam:

Category	Examples	Characteristics
Core religious terms	*salah, zakat, hajj, taqwa*	Require explanation; deep theological connotation
Common expressions	*InshaAllah, Alhamdulillah, Allahu Akbar*	Widespread usage among Muslims; reflect worldview
Socio-cultural terms	*hijab, ummah, halal, jihad*	Often misrepresented in media; culturally sensitive

These lexical items frequently appear as noun phrases or collocations in discourse, forming fixed expressions that convey complex meanings. As Khan argues, such collocations in religious speech serve as "moral intensifiers," which emotionally anchor the sermon's core message [Khan, 2020].

Lexical Influence on Identity and Representation

The choice of lexis in Islamic discourse influences both identity formation and external representation. Words like *ummah* signify communal solidarity, while *sabr* (patience) and *shukr* (gratitude) reflect internal spiritual states.

Exemplary phrases include:

- "We ask Allah for *sabr* in difficult times."
- "*Shukr* is a form of worship in itself."

These terms shape discourse by reinforcing Islamic ethical and metaphysical perspectives. As Mahboob notes, "Islamic discourse relies heavily on lexis that embodies moral values and religious obligations [Mahboob, 2018]." Furthermore, Sharif notes that a "lexical rituality" that upholds societal religious memory and identity is produced when faith-specific phrases are frequently used in sermons [Sharif, 2022].

Implications for Religious Discourse Analysis

Lexical choice is a potent instrument for expressing spiritual meaning when examining English-language Islamic sermons and religious discourse. Terms such as *fitrah* (innate disposition), *tawheed* (monotheism), and *akhirah* (afterlife) are frequently employed to articulate complex theological concepts. Their inclusion not only serves didactic functions but also maintains coherence with original Arabic scriptural meanings.

An example table of vocabulary terms commonly seen in sermons:

Term	Meaning	Typical Context in Sermons
Taqwa	God-consciousness	Moral exhortation and spiritual reminders
Fitrah	Innate human nature	Themes of return to purity and guidance
Tawheed	Divine oneness	Foundation of belief; refutation of polytheism
Akhirah	The Hereafter	Death, judgment, and accountability

These terms are often supported by Quranic references and are embedded within rhetorical strategies such as repetition, parallelism, and metaphor to enhance emotional and spiritual impact. Yasin and Al-Nassir [Al-Nassir, 2019] assert that these terms are essential to sermons because of their theological relevance as well as their discursive role as unifying markers that unify listeners around shared doctrinal values. Moreover, rhetorical tools like repetition and metaphor intensify the impact of these lexical choices, heightening both spiritual reflection and emotional engagement.

Conclusion

Lexical usage in English Islamic discourse serves as a critical site for cultural transmission, identity expression, and interreligious understanding. Accurate representation of Islamic terms—through balanced translation and transliteration—is essential to mitigate semantic loss and counteract stereotypes. The study underscores the importance of inclusive pedagogical practices and lexicographic reforms to support the faithful and intelligible expression of Islamic concepts in English. As global communication continues to evolve, so must the strategies for representing faith-based knowledge across linguistic boundaries.

REFERENCES

1. Hijazi, N. (2021). Translation and transliteration in Islamic discourse: Preserving meaning across languages.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356179922_Features_of_Translating_Religious_Texts

2. Al-Khatib, M. & Sabry, R. (2015). Semantic loss in translating Islamic terminology. https://researchers.westernsydney.edu.au/en/studentTheses/investigating-the-translation-of-islamic-terms-into-english-in-an
3. Khan, M. (2020). Moral intensifiers in Islamic rhetoric: A discourse analysis of Friday sermons. https://journals.rudn.ru/linguistics/article/view/40914
4. Mahboob, A. (2018). Lexical patterns in Muslim discourse: Between doctrine and delivery.https://traversingtradition.com/2018/10/01/could-english-be-an-islamic-language
5. Sharif, M. (2022). Lexical rituality and memory in Islamic oral traditions. https://zenodo.org/records/13912566
6. Yasin, H. & Al-Nassir, A. (2019). Cohesion and coherence in English Islamic sermons: A lexical analysis. https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/journals/10.1075/forum.20019.hij