

## Biblio-Systematic Review of the Factors Affecting Selection of Religious Translation Strategies

CAMELLIA NAJEH KHALAF (Corresponding Author)  
*School of Languages, Literacies and Translation*  
*Universiti Sains Malaysia*  
*camelliakhalaf@student.usm.my*

ALAA J. KADI  
*School of Housing Building and Planning*  
*Universiti Sains Malaysia*  
*dr.ajkadi@gmail.com*

### ABSTRACT

*Religious translation is a very sensitive task since it deals with God's words and transcendental commandments; taking into consideration that religion is an integral part of culture puts more onus on translators to understand the target culture, inter alia, word's connotations and denotations, author's intention, context, and other factors in order to choose the most effective communication translation strategy. This study aims to conduct a bibliometric review of the most cited papers, authors and journals that are interested in religious translation, in addition to the content analysis of the papers to identify the most influential factors which affect religious terms' translation strategies. This biblio-systematic paper addresses all the articles published in Google Scholar and SCOPUS indexed database, that have "translation, religious" in the title, and "Arabic" as a keyword (anywhere in the article). SCOPUS and google scholar search resulted in 17 articles related to the paper's subject which is "the Factors Affecting Selection of Religious Translation Strategies between Arabic and English Languages. Bibliometric review results show that the top-cited journal is International Journal of English Linguistics. Top cited authors are ElShiekh, and M Saleh for their paper "Translation versus transliteration of religious terms in contemporary Islamic discourse in western communities". Regarding publications per year, the review shows that 2016 witnessed the highest production by six papers and that Indonesia was the most producing country. The study concluded that the most influential factor which affects religious translation is ideology and religious belief, and the most used religious translation strategy is literal translation.*

*Keywords: Factors, Religious, Strategies, Systematic Review, Translation*

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious translation is a sensitive area of translation since it deals with transcendental language and conveys Gods' commandments. Kaddoura (2009) categorizes any religious text such as Quran and Hadith as sensitive texts "since they constitute the concept underlying the way in which Muslim society think and operate their culture" (p.77). Bearing this sensitivity in mind, translation of religious text including the Islamic ones needs special attention, and the utmost care because the poor translation would be "disservice to Islam than a service" (Kaddoura, 2009, p.20). In addition, erroneous translation conveys erroneous ideas and concepts which could distort the original intentions of the original text. According to Dj (2014) when dealing with the religious text, translators have to be careful and to keep the purity of the meaning of the religious text especially if they deal with Quran and prophets' sayings.

As religion is an integral part of culture, religious terminology comes under the culture-specific terms which need culture-specific background knowledge in order to render the concepts from the source text into the target text correctly (Khalaf, Tengku, & Moindjie, 2016). Therefore, understanding the different international cultures helps the translators to comprehend the conceptual meaning, and facilitates the translator's mission to produce a natural and accepted translation that can be easily perceived by the target reader in the target culture (Dj, 2014).

Although religious translation is problematic and demanding, it is important in spreading the words of God; it is crucial for guiding people of different languages and cultures as well. As less than 20% of Muslims speak Arabic, there is a growing demand for translation since it is the way through which Muslims in non-Arabic speaking communities learn the Quran and Hadith (Hassan, 2016).

As far as intercultural communication is involved, several factors influence the translation strategy selected, such as ideology, addressee, words' connotations and denotations, context, existence vs. absence of established equivalence, and translation intentions (Khosravi & Pourmohammadi, 2016; J. A. Naudé & Miller-Naudé, 2011; J. Naude',2010; khalaf et al.,2016; Hackenburg, 2009). Those factors, as well as translation strategies, will form the core of this study as well as the basis of the following biblio-systematic review as detailed in the objectives below.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to conduct a biblio-systematic review which will mainly be divided into two streams; the first is a bibliometric study that will address numerally the publications that addressed the subject of translating the religious scripts and will result in identifying the most cited papers, authors and journals that are interested in religious translation. Second, the systematic review of the content of these selected documents, to analyze the content of the articles and identify the most influential factors which affect religious terms' translation in addition to the translation strategies used by translators in these studies.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, SCOPUS and Google Scholar databases were targeted to search for the words "translation, religious" in the title of the articles, in addition to the word "Arabic" in the keywords; without restricting the range of years. Instead, the range of years is left open to receive any relevant literature. On 26th July 2019, the search resulted in 59 papers in Google Scholar and 4 in SCOPUS. After reviewing these articles, only 17 articles were related to the subject which is "the factors affecting selection of religious translation strategies between Arabic and English languages".

The methodology of data analysis will be split into main methods, the bibliometric study that will use the Social Network Analysis (SNA) technique to calculate the most cited papers, authors and journals. As well as, the systematic review analytical technique, that will be used to identify the factors which affect religious terms' translation as well as the translation strategies followed by translators in these studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation as any discipline of knowledge is not isolated from other sciences. Rather, it is liable to any potential influential factors. This study focuses on the factors affecting the translation of religious texts as well as the common strategies used in the process of translation. While reviewing the related literature, the following were identified as the most significant factors which affect religious texts translation: ideology and religious belief, context, cultural differences, denotation and connotations, cultural background knowledge, absence of equivalence, audience, contextual and intertextual relations, the intention of text or translator, and attitude of the translator.

To begin with "ideology" which Hatim and Mason (1997) define it as "a body of assumptions which reflect the beliefs and interests of an individual, a group of individuals, social institution, and which ultimately find expression in language (p.218), and Simpson (1993) defines it as "assumptions, beliefs, and value-system which are shared collectively by social groups" (p.5), it is the most dominant and influential factor which was tackled by many scholars.

According to Zhang and Liu (2016) as a first step, ideology influences the selection of text-type to be translated; the text which is chosen for translation depends on the ideology of the target language (i.e.) the information conveyed by the original text should conform to the ideology of the target language. For example, when China was a novel socialist country, a large number of Russian works were translated into Chinese making up 77.5% of the total number because both countries shared the same communist ideology at that time. Whereas, translation from English into Chinese made up only 18%.

Influence of ideology extends to the quality of translation as suggested by Yousefi (2017) who stressed the role of ideology in the translation of religious texts. In order to investigate the influence of religious belief on the quality of translation, Yousefi chose two religious texts and asked two groups of translators, Muslims and Non-Muslims, to translate the text to assess the quality of the product and the extent to which their religious belief affected the translation. She concluded that all the cases proved the strong role of the ideological factor. For example, using the feminine pronoun to refer to Allah in Quran

translation was not innocent; rather, it was ideologically motivated, and driven by Sufi doctrine and feminist agenda.

The inevitable influence of the translator's ideology on the translation leads to a sort of text manipulation. Fairclough (1995) states that "language is invested by ideology" (p.73) which means that translator's ideology plays a role in choosing text's word, grammar and style. He elaborated saying that in general, a translator transmits the message of the original text with no interference, however, when the original text contains ideological concepts, translators unintentionally interprets the text on basis of their belief. Another factor that comes under the umbrella of ideology is "patron's ideology" which appeared in Saffarzadeh and Al-Hilali Quran translations where they both "exerted their own interpretations, their patron's ideology, and their religious ideology" in the translation (P.162). El-Shiekh (2016) elaborates on the patron's ideology and attributes using or avoiding certain Arabic religious terms in the subtitling of some Arabic movies to the common policy of the channel. e.g in the series "supernatural" the words 'Jews and synagogue' were translated as "مكان عبادة" متدين، المتدينين، "religious and a worship place" as if it is not preferred to mention Jews or Judaism.

The second group of influential factors comprises textual-related factors, such as register. It is defined by Hatim and Munday (2004) as the features which distinguish a language from another, in terms of context, which relates to language users and their dialect. Register includes field, which is the theme or subject of the text, tenor which reflects the level of formality, and the mode of the language (whether oral or written). The significance of field, tenor and mode stems from the fact that without understanding those elements, efforts of the translator to convey the meaning of the original text would come to no avail, or at least would be obscured. While, tenor represents the relation between text producer and receiver that could be either formal such as an article on cloning, or personal as in the gossip column, or ultra-formal such as a government statement informing people about a new law, it also unveils the producer's tendency in showing solidarity either with the receiver, or the audience (Kaddoura, 2009). Regarding the inter-textual factors, they are relevant somehow to the intentions of the author; comprehending and reviewing the work written by the author would provide a clear concept of his/her intentions, and his/her intended message. For example, interpretations of "Ridwan al-Iqrar" "paradise of certitude" by Bahau'llah relied intensively on his son's "abdu'lBaha's interpretations. Moreover, the choice of the terminology was based on the English translations by Shogli Effendi (who was the authorized guardian and expounder of Bahau'llah texts. Relying on such translation preserves the harmony of thoughts between those who consider his translation sacred. More importantly, understanding the inter-textual relationship helps the translator to convey the message with its cultural and religious context (Hemmat, 2017).

Concerning the context as an influential factor, Wong and Shen (1999) state that an English word can vary significantly in meaning depending on the context in which it is used. In Shakespearean times, for example, deer was referred to an animal of any sort, while in modern English, deer explicitly refers to a kind of quick four-foot animal with large branching horns for males. If the translator does not understand the precise significance of a specific context, he/ she would probably fail to correctly represent the expression. Newmark (1988) suggests that we don't translate words in vague; instead, we translate it bound by their "syntactic, collocational, situational, cultural and individual idiolectal context" (p.73). However, context influences neologism and technical words less than general words since they have well-defined meanings. From another side, context is

more or less related to the readership. A translator sometimes under-translates the text (i.e) uses the more general word in favour of clarity, especially in the informative text. For example, when translating a tourist brochure, the translator may add a local colour of a transferred word in order to hide any interference of the source language. So, the less context-bound the words are, the more likely is the literal translation, while the more standard is the collocations and idioms, the less likely is the literal translation.

Arabic and English descend from two different language families with various linguistic communities and cultures. Therefore, during the interlingual translation process, the difficulty in translating culture-specific expressions arises. Thus, it is important to translate sacred and sensitive texts by considering their surrounding environment in order to understand what beliefs and cultural backgrounds lie behind the verbal utterances that could cause cultural translation problems (Mahmoud, 2008). Taking into consideration the incongruity between English and Arabic culture, the absence of a direct equivalent for religious terms is unavoidable. Equivalence as a term is defined as "a relation of identity established by a translator between two translation units whose function is identical or almost identical in their respective languages (Delisle, Lee-Jahnke & Cormier, 1999). Baker (1992) addressed the concept of equivalence defining it as "the specific value it has in a particular linguistic system and the personality it acquires through the usage within that system" (p.12). consequently, religious and sacred texts are liable to the absence of equivalence at word-level. God, prayer, pilgrimage, for example, fail to convey the word's original Islamic connotation-loaded meaning of the original "Allah, Salat and Hajj". Alms doesn't reflect the distinction between the zakat which is obligatory and sadaqat which is voluntary; pilgrimage doesn't necessarily reflect the journey to Makka, rather, it could refer to the journey to Bethlehem (Hassan, 2016).

To make the influence of word's connotation and denotation clear, we have to refer to the rendering of "Fath Makka". This term is usually translated as "the conquest of Makkah". Al-Halawani (2016) suggests that the English equivalent is not only inaccurate but also misleading". When analyzing the meaning of conquest, it means entering the foreign territory with bad intention, which is the opposite of the connotations embedded in the word "fath". This problem arose due to the fact that this concept is derived from the Islamic civilization which did not exist as a practice in Europe and foreign countries. This caused an absence of equivalent for the word in English language and their dictionaries. On the basis of analyzing the word semantically and connotationally, Al-Halawani (2016) suggests that the most suitable strategy is Baker's compensation strategy which is used for translating idioms. He rendered it as "Islamic liberation campaign".

Another group of influential factors is related to the translator's knowledge and attitude. Naude (2010) states that in the case of translating a sacred text into a foreign culture, lack of culture-specific background knowledge creates a cultural gap and impede coherence in the reception of sacred texts. A good example on this is the example given by Muta'ali (2014) on the translation of "Qatil Almushrikin" as "kill the polytheists" which is a result of lack of sufficient knowledge in the Arabic language, rather, it should be translated as "to wage war" against them. (P.60). In addition, ElShiekh and Saleh (2011) correlated the choice of translation strategy to the attitude of the translator, (i.e.) choosing transliteration (use of Salat, and hajj) instead of translation (praying, pilgrimage) reflects exclusive rather than inclusive attitude on the part of language users. They suppose that the translator, in this case, shows an estimation of transliterated Islamic concepts at the expense of their counterparts in other religions.

According to Wong and Shen (1999), a good translator should be competent and well-equipped with a wide range of knowledge in TL to understand its various conceptual and thematic meanings. Lack of this knowledge especially in technical texts would result in unsatisfactory work. Many cases of mistranslation have resulted from the incorrect understanding of the translator, which is attributed to a poor competence in SL language. For instance, Mahmoud (2008) reviewed the translations of *istiatha* (seeking refuge from Allah, *al-waswas* (the whisperer) a cultural image of the devil, and *Sudur* ‘hearts’ in *Annas Sura* ‘Sura of people’ in the Holy Quran in three translated versions, *istiatha* and *whisperer* were soundly translated as “take refuge, betake refuge and slinking whisperer, whisperer”, whereas, ‘*sudur*’ was translated literally as ‘breasts’ by the non-Arabic speaker translators which resulted in erroneous translation. On the contrary, the Arab translator rendered it as ‘hearts’ making use of his cultural and lingual knowledge which enabled him to assess the intended meaning and to achieve its pragmatic effect on the readers.

One of the translation concerns is proposing the correct translation strategy in order to address the encountered problems and difficulties that need to be tracked, identified and solved. The translation decision-making process involves finding the correct approach for solving the above-mentioned problems.

Newmark (1988) argues that literal translation is correct and must not be avoided if it secures referential and pragmatic equivalence of the original. Based on the systematic review in this study, literal translation is the leading strategy for religious translation. He also distinguishes between the literal translation, word-for-word translation, and one to one translation. He suggests that word for word translation transfers source language grammar and word order as well as the primacy meaning of all the source language words into the translation. While, in one-to-one translation, each source language word has a corresponding target language word, but their primacy meanings may differ. The literal translation goes beyond one-to-one translation as it ranges from word to word through group to group, collocation to collocation, and sentence to sentence. According to Newmark, literal translation above word level is the only correct procedure if the source language and target language meanings correspond more closely; in other words, pragmatic and referent effect are equivalents and have similar associations. However, literal translation should be avoided when it is inexact, badly written, or when it reads unnaturally.

Nida (1964) suggests that translation difficulties between two languages are connected to more serious reasons than differences between two language systems, it is related to cultures to which both languages belong this considered to be the second evident option of translation strategies is the dynamic equivalent. To overcome this problem, Nida suggested the dynamic equivalence which mainly depends on referring the reader to modes of behaviour relevant within their culture.

Another translation strategy used is ‘transliteration’ or ‘transference’ which is “the process of transferring a source language word to a target language text”. (Newmark 1988, p.50). A good example of this strategy is the word ‘Islam’.

Venuti’s domestication/ foreignization approach is widely used in religious term translation. According to Venuti (1995) domestication means “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home” while foreignization means “an ethno-deviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad”. (p.20)

Translation by cultural substitution/ alteration: This strategy as explained by Baker (1992) involves swapping a culture-specific item or word with a target-language object that

does not have the same propositional significance but is expected to have a similar impact on the intended audience. The main benefit of this approach is that it offers the user a term to recognize, to grasp and to draw. At the individual level, the decision of the translator to use this strategy will largely depend on (a) how much license is granted to him/her by the translator and (b) the aim of the translation. At a more general level, the decision will also, to some extent, reflect the norms of translation that prevail in a given community. Linguistic communities differ in the degree to which they accept approaches that entail a significant difference from the text's proposals. For example, “a well-known scientist some say it was Bertrand Russell once gave a public lecture on astronomy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: what you have told us is rubbish” When the text was translated into Greek, the translator substituted a well-known scientist with Alice in Wonderland and the young lady with the Queen. So, the back-translated text from the Greek was as follows: “Alice in Wonderland was once giving a lecture about astronomy. At the end of the lecture, the Queen looked at her angrily and disapprovingly. ‘what you say is nonsense’”. (Baker, 1992, pp.31-32)

Furthermore, addition is a strategy used to explain the word if there is no exact corresponding equivalent for it in the target language. For example, ‘idda’ is translated by adding an explanation of the concept since it is absent from the English-speaking community’s practices. Hence, idda is translated as the shar’i prescribed waiting period for the woman who is divorced or whose husband passed away (Wikipedia, 2019).

The last translation strategy is the communicative translation which produces a close effect on its readers as the effect that obtained on the readers of the original and stresses the force of the message rather than the content, thus, an equivalent effect is secured. Generally, a communicative translation is clearer, smoother, simpler, more conventional, more direct, and conforming to a particular language register (Newmark, 1981).

After reviewing the influential factors and the strategies used in religious text translation, a biblio-systematic review will be carried out as explained below.

## BIBLIO-SYSTEMATIC REVIEW STUDY

Bibliometrics is a tool commonly used in a literature review to describe the broad picture of selected articles based on the keywords studied by them (Porter, Kongthon, & Lu, 2002). It starts with specifying the questions to be addressed, including several queries such as Who, When, Where, With Whom (Börner and Polley, 2014). Who refers to writers, what to keywords, which countries or other geographical locations, when to specified years or dates, and whom to the study partnership, which may mean writers or affiliations.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a technique that is commonly used in Bibliometrics to assess the value of keywords, writers and quotes in networks created by these node styles. Eigenvector centrality and betweenness are among the measurements used in the process of SNA to evaluate the most appropriate nodes.

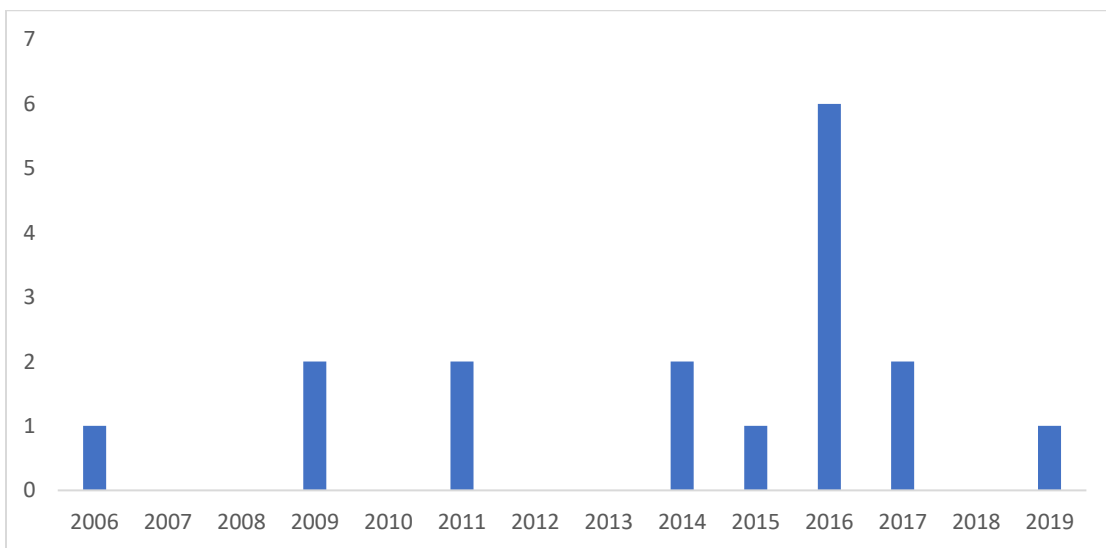
Eigenvector centrality signifies essential nodes linked to other nodes that are also relevant (Newman, 2010), whereas betweenness suggests that literature in that direction may not have been established had there not been one node. The outcome of this bibliometric study is identifying the most cited papers, authors and journals that are interested in the subject. Whereas, the outcome of the systematic review will be lists on the



common factors affecting religious translation and the translation strategies used by the translators.

### BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW RESULTS

This section presents five main bibliometric results: publication number per year, top- cited papers, authors and journals, most productive countries and finally top frequent keywords used. Figure 1 shows the ratio of publications between 2006-2019 on the topic of religious text translation. The chart shows that 2016, during which 6 papers were produced and took the lead in publication in this particular area.



*Figure 1: Publication Per Year*

Regarding the top-cited articles, the article entitled "Translation versus Transliteration of Religious Terms in Contemporary Islamic Discourse in Western Communities" gained 10 citations and gave its authors "Ahmed Abdel Azim ElShiekh and Mona Ahmed Saleh" the lead of the 17 articles selected. Whereas Rachid Agliz comes in fifth place as his article gained four citations. Table 1 illustrates the top-cited articles, authors, and journals.



Figure2: weighted Keywords Cloud

## SYSTEMATIC REVIEW RESULTS

The systematic review of these 17 articles resulted in two main tables; Table 3 which illustrates the main influential factors, and Table 4 which shows the most common strategies used for religious term translation in these articles.

Table 3  
*Influential Factors in the selected 17 articles*

No	Influential Factors
1.	Ideology and religious belief
2.	Context
3.	Cultural differences
4.	Word's connotation and denotations
5.	Cultural background knowledge
4.	Absence of equivalence
5.	Audience
6.	Contextual and inter-textual relationship
7.	Intention of the text and the translator
8.	Attitude of the translator

Table 4  
*Strategies of Translation used in the selected 17 articles*

No	Translation strategy
1.	Literal translation
2.	Nida's formal/dynamic approach
3.	Transliteration
4.	Venuti's Domestication/foreignization approach
5.	Alteration
6.	Substitution
7.	Addition
8.	Communicative

## STUDY LIMITATION AND FUTURE WORK

Limitations of this study include the choice of Arabic-English language pair, targeting only the Islamic terms, as well as targeting only Google Scholar and SCOPUS data bases. For future studies, tackling other language pairs, other religions and other data bases are recommended.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The systematic review conducted above shows some gaps which could be addressed by other researchers in the future. For example, table 3, which tackles the influential factors shows that “the attitude of the translator” was studied the least by the researchers as a factor which affects the choice of translation strategy, consequently, it could be tackled by other researchers to pinpoint its influence in the process of translation. In addition, table 4, shows that communicative translation was used the least in religious/ Islamic texts and terms translation, thus, future researches could investigate the possibility of using communicative translation more in religious especially Islamic texts translation. Moreover, other studies on bibliometric review and the significance of this type of researches in the world of translation could be good future research topics.

## CONCLUSION

This biblio-systematic paper covers all papers published in Google Scholar and SCOPUS, with the words “translation, religious” in their titles, and the word “Arabic” as a keyword. The main two objectives that have been addressed by this paper are: first, to present a bibliometric examination of the most cited papers, authors and journals which tackled this subject. Secondly, to assess systematically the content of the paper in order to identify the factors which affected translation strategies in these papers.

This study identifies the most influential factors that affect translation strategy as following: ideology and religious belief, context, cultural differences, denotation and connotations, cultural background knowledge, absence of equivalence, audience, contextual and inter-textual relations, intention of text or translator, and attitude of the translator. Furthermore, it identifies the main strategies which were applied in response to the influencing factors, as follows: Literal translation, Nida’s formal/dynamic approach, transliteration, Venuti’s domestication/foreignization approach, alteration, substitution, addition, and communicative translation.

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