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SEMANTIC BROADENING IN THE TRANSLATION OF ARABIC RELIGIOUS TERMS: EVIDENCE FROM *AL-RAḤĪQ AL-MAKHTŪM*

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ABSTRACT

Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm is a globally recognized and authoritative biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Translating its religious terms requires precise translation to avoid conceptual misunderstandings. While previous studies have extensively examined religious translation strategies, ideologies, and equivalence, research explicitly investigating micro-level mechanisms of semantic broadening through semantic decomposition remains scarce. This article examines the phenomenon of semantic broadening in the translation of *Arabic* religious terms in *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* and its Indonesian translated version, Sirah Nabawiyyah. The study aims to identify the forms of semantic broadening and to examine the factors underlying this phenomenon. It employs a descriptive qualitative method incorporating a comparative approach. The data are analyzed using semantic decomposition to compare terms between the source and target texts. Findings indicate that semantic broadening occurs consistently through the omission of diagnostic semantic features in the source language. Of the ten categories identified, five are examined in depth: eschatological terms, specialized religious activities, religious figures, religious morals and ethics, and revelatory terms. Four main factors underlie this phenomenon: the demand for natural collocational patterns in the target language, the translator's communicative strategies through generalization and modulation techniques, lexical gaps, and differences in cultural and religious contexts. The findings confirm that semantic broadening is not a translation error, but rather a natural consequence of cross-cultural translation aimed at maintaining textual acceptability and readability. Theoretically, this study demonstrates that semantic decomposition effectively traces meaning shifts in religious texts. Practically, it guides translators of Islamic history to prioritize general equivalents for readability over rigid literalism.

KEYWORDS

Semantic broadening,

Arabic translation,

Religious terms,

Semantic decomposition,

Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm

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INTRODUCTION

Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm by Shafiyyurrahman al-Mubarakfuri (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002) is widely recognized as an important and reliable reference in the study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sirah Nabawiyah*). Most notably, the work received first place in the international *Sirah Nabawiyah* competition organized by the Muslim World League in 1976 (AlGhamdi, 2016). Al-Mubarakfuri wrote within the Islamic scholarly tradition, and his work is therefore considered significant in religious studies for its perspective closely aligned with Islamic teachings. This differs from some orientalist works, which often approach religious concepts from an external perspective, where certain epistemological biases may influence (Kabir & Al-Shafi'i, 2025). Given its credibility and widespread popularity, the book has been translated into numerous languages, including Indonesian, and has become one of the primary references for Muslims (Maududin et al., 2021). However, despite extensive discussion in various academic studies, research specifically examining its translation aspects remains relatively limited.

As one of the important references in the study of *Sirah Nabawiyah*, the book *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* has been widely examined by various scholars. In general, studies on this work can be classified into three main areas. First, the most dominant area focuses on educational values and character formation embedded in the text. Several studies specifically analyze the Prophet's life stories to foster moral and prophetic character. (Arsyad et al., 2025; Syahid & Husni, 2018). Additionally, several studies examine the application of Islamic educational methods, such as the question-and-answer approach and *mau'iẓah* 'admonition', as reflected in the Prophet's method of conveying teachings (Hunainah et al., 2023; Ikhwansyah et al., 2024). Furthermore, this book has also been utilized to formulate concepts of educational management and to promote the values of religious moderation (Hartono & Yenuri, 2024; Maududin et al., 2021). Overall, these studies affirm the enduring relevance of the Prophet's moral example to contemporary Muslim life (Kurniati et al., 2025).

The second area examines this work from the perspective of historiography and social dynamics. Several scholars highlight al-Mubarakfuri's comparative approach in addressing the complexities of historical narratives, while also relating his approach to modern Islamic historiography (Amin et al., 2023; Riedho & Umam, 2026). In addition, studies in this area explore the social aspects of the Madinan community, the role of women in economic activities, and the potential tourism-related elements identifiable within the *Sirah Nabawiyah* (Ali et al., 2021). The third area focuses on textual and translation aspects. Research in this field includes an analysis of the explanatory style employed by al-Mubarakfuri in narrating historical events, a comparative evaluation of the book's translations into Malay and English (AlGhamdi, 2016; Shalash & Moh'd, 2020; Wan Omar & Mansor, 2019), as well as an analysis of translation errors at the syntactic level, such as those found in the structure of imperative sentences in the Indonesian version (Anis & al-Shidiqiyyah, 2021).

Despite considerable scholarly attention to the work's content and pedagogical dimensions, its semantic dynamics in Indonesian translation have received little systematic analysis. Existing translation studies have prioritized grammatical and syntactic dimensions, leaving semantic shifts comparatively underexplored. In fact, translating religious terms is highly challenging. Arabic religious discourse often contains semantic untranslatability, making it difficult to transfer meanings into other languages accurately (Almjlad, 2025; Sameer & Majeed, 2019; al-Sharif & al-Abbas,

2025). To address this issue and bridge conceptual differences across languages, several recent global studies have emphasized the importance of applying analytical strategies, such as semantic decomposition and componential analysis, in the translation of Islamic texts (Durie, 2022; Elewa, 2020). This difficulty arises because religious terms convey abstract theological concepts deeply embedded in the source culture and belief system (Yuliani, 2020), often leaving the target language without fully equivalent lexical counterparts. This condition may lead to changes in meaning during the translation process, one of which is semantic broadening (Asri et al., 2024; Naimah & Nu'man, 2024). Semantic broadening refers to a condition in which the scope of meaning of a word in the target language becomes wider, allowing its usage to cover more diverse contexts compared to the source language (Ariani et al., 2020).

This phenomenon of semantic broadening is essentially a natural part of the translation process of religious texts. Studies on the translation of religious terms have also been widely conducted, examining a range of different aspects. Ekrema et al. (2020) explore translation ideology, while Syihabuddin & Aryanti (2023) specifically examine the relationship between translation ideology and the accuracy of Qur'anic vocabulary for women. Meanwhile, Mizher (2020) focuses on translation strategies. Yulianita (2017) also discusses the quality and accuracy of translation. In addition, Sameer & Majeed (2019) and Afrouz (2022) highlight the difficulties involved in translating religious terms. Across these studies, a consistent finding emerges: translators struggle to adapt religious terminology without compromising its core meaning. Sameer & Majeed (2019) found that differences in cultural concepts may lead to semantic changes, such as broadening or narrowing. Yet the specific mechanisms underlying semantic broadening during translation have not been systematically examined.

This study addresses two gaps in the existing literature: its analytical framework and its empirical focus. Although *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* has been widely studied, no research has specifically examined the dynamics of meaning in its Indonesian translation. Therefore, a precise understanding of how religious terms undergo semantic broadening is necessary to safeguard their theological integrity and prevent potential misunderstanding among readers. To achieve this, the study employs a semantic decomposition approach to analyze the broadening in meaning found in selected religious terms. Based on this, the study formulates two main research questions. First, how does semantic broadening occur in the translation of religious terms? Second, what factors lead to semantic broadening in the translation of religious terms? By addressing these questions, this study is expected not only to enrich the theoretical understanding of semantic phenomena in the translation of religious texts but also to provide practical insights for translators in dealing with the complexity of Arabic terms that carry rich theological meanings.

Differences in linguistic systems and cultural backgrounds between Arabic and Indonesian often result in religious terms lacking truly equivalent translations. Therefore, translators must employ careful strategies in selecting lexical items to ensure that theological meanings are preserved without altering the embedded religious values (Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025). In this process, semantic broadening frequently emerges as an unavoidable consequence. However, if not handled appropriately, it may lead to cultural dilution, causing theological meanings to become less profound and lose their original context (Nurmasyitah et al., 2025). This issue becomes increasingly significant given that even in primary reference texts, such as the Qur'an, instances of semantic non-equivalence are still commonly found and may generate ambiguity for readers (Nabil & Abdallah, 2023). Therefore, this study offers an approach that examines in

greater depth the mechanisms of semantic broadening in the translation of religious terms, as well as the factors that influence it. This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of translation studies, particularly in the domain of Arabic-Indonesian religious discourse.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive method, with comparative and interpretive approaches, to examine the phenomenon of semantic broadening in the translation of religious terms. The descriptive qualitative method is used to identify and analyze broadening in meaning in depth, which are then presented in a narrative form to provide a clear and comprehensive account of semantic broadening during the translation process. The comparative approach involves directly comparing meaning components between the source and target texts to identify differences or discrepancies in meaning. Meanwhile, the interpretative approach is used to understand how religious terms are interpreted, comprehended, and rendered in the translated text. This integration allows the study to move beyond lexical description toward an examination of the ideological and cultural pressures shaping translators' choices.

The data in this study consist of religious terms expressed as words and phrases. The primary data source is taken from sections discussing the beginning of prophethood and the period of the Prophet's da'wah in Mecca in *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* by Shaykh Shafiyyurrahman Al-Mubarakfuri (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002), published by Dar Al-Fikr, pp. 9-112, and its Indonesian translation, *Sirah Nabawiyah,* translated by Suchail Suyuti (al-Mubarakfuri, 2025), published by Gema Insani, pp. 2-181. The selection of *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* and its translation rests on two methodological considerations. First, as a relatively comprehensive work of *Sirah Nabawiyah* literature, this text encompasses a wide range of religious vocabulary — theological terms, legal concepts, and spiritual categories — embedded within a historical narrative (Hunainah et al., 2023). This makes it a rich data source well suited to a more detailed analysis of meaning. Second, the text also reflects real challenges in cross-cultural translation (AlGhamdi, 2016; Wan Omar & Mansor, 2019). The Arabic language used contains many specific semantic features that must be adjusted when translated into Indonesian to be understood by general readers (al-Jaber et al., 2025). In this process, the translator must carefully negotiate meaning. Therefore, this work serves as an appropriate object for observing how the reduction of certain semantic features and semantic broadening operate in translation practice.

The first stage of data collection involved identifying religious terms that undergo semantic broadening in sections discussing the beginning of prophethood and the period of the Prophet's da'wah in Mecca in *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* (pp. 9-112) and its Indonesian translation *Sirah Nabawiyah* (pp. 2-181). To obtain a more in-depth analysis, this study employed purposive sampling techniques to select five representative data items representing various categories of religious terms. The selection of these data was based on several criteria: (1) terms containing complex theological meanings, (2) terms representing important concepts within Islamic discourse, and (3) terms showing the most significant changes in meaning components, making them relevant for analysis using semantic decomposition techniques. Each identified term is recorded and transliterated to enable systematic comparison. After all data are collected, the study proceeds to the analysis stage to examine the mechanisms of semantic broadening within the translation process.

At the analysis stage, the terms are classified based on categories of religious terms proposed by AlGhamdi (2016). Although Al-Ghamdi's theory covers eleven categories of religious terms, the identification process yielded ten categories in the corpus examined. Of these, this study focuses on five categories selected on the basis of their theological depth and semantic complexity rather than frequency of occurrence: (1) eschatological terms, (2) specialized religious activity terms, (3) religious figure terms, (4) religious moral and ethical terms, and (5) revelation terms. Furthermore, the data are analyzed using the semantic decomposition technique, following Löbner's model (2013). This technique is employed to break down the meaning components of each term, allowing differences in semantic features between the ST and TT to be identified and enabling the identification of semantic broadening patterns. The identified differences are then further analyzed, taking into account linguistic and cultural factors, as well as the translation strategies employed. Identified patterns are categorized to reveal prevailing tendencies, forming the basis for the study's conclusions.

RESULT

Based on the identification results, 29 religious terms were found to exhibit this phenomenon across ten categories, as displayed in Table 1. Five representative data points were selected through purposive sampling and analyzed using semantic decomposition. The findings are organized into five sections, each focusing on a selected category of religious terms: eschatology, specialized religious activity, religious figure, religious moral and ethical, and revelation.

No.	Religious Terms	Frequency	Percentage
1	Religious group	6	20.69%
2	Specialized religious activity	5	17.24%
3	Religious figure	5	17.24%
4	Religious artifact	3	10.34%
5	Revelation	2	6.90%
6	Religious moral and ethical	2	6.90%
7	Religious construction	2	6.90%
8	Supernatural being	2	6.90%
9	Eschatology	1	3.45%
10	Religious event	1	3.45%
	Total	29	100%

Semantic Broadening in the Translation of Eschatological Terms

Eschatology refers to events related to the end of human life, as well as post-mortem realities beyond human control, such as the grave (barzakh), the day of judgment, and the life thereafter. The following presents examples of eschatological terms that undergo semantic broadening in translation.

Excerpt 1

وإما إلى عذاب خالد في سواء الجحيم (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002:125)

wa immā ilá 'adhābin khālidin fī sawā'i al-jaḥīm

'...or else to an eternal punishment in the worst of places'

...atau sebaliknya pada siksa yang kekal dalam seburuk-buruknya tempat (al-Mubarakfuri, 2025:173)

The word *al-jaḥīm* in Excerpt 1 is an eschatological term because it is related to life after death. In *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, it refers to one of the names of hell (Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyah, 2004). Lexically, it also means a place or fire characterized by intense heat and torment (Umar, 2008). Thus, *al-jaḥīm* contains the semantic features of [Location], [Fire/Torment], [High Intensity], and [Eschatological/Religious] features. In the target text, *al-jahīm* is translated as *tempat* (place), which denotes a space, container, or a particular area used for putting, storing, carrying out activities, inhabiting, or accommodating something, either in a physical sense or in terms of status or condition (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Thus, *tempat* can be used in various contexts, ranging from physical locations to abstract positions. Furthermore, there is a hyponymic relationship between *al-jaḥīm* and *tempat*. In this relation, *al-jaḥīm* functions as the subordinate (hyponym), while *tempat* serves as the superordinate (hypernym). Therefore, the translation of *al-jaḥīm* as *tempat* demonstrates semantic broadening. This broadening can be substantiated through semantic decomposition below.

Semantic Features	ST (*al-jaḥīm*)	TT (*tempat*)
Location	+	+/-
Punishment	+	-
Fire/Torment	+	-
High Intensity	+	-
Eschatological/Religious	+	-

Based on the semantic decomposition presented above, there is a significant semantic shift between the eschatological term *al-jaḥīm* in the ST and its translation in the TT, namely *tempat*. The [Location] component serves as a common feature linking the two lexemes. However, the notion of location in *al-jaḥīm* is specific, whereas in *tempat* it is general. The word *al-jaḥīm* contains a series of diagnostic features, including [Punishment], [Fire/Torment], [High Intensity], and [Eschatological/Religious]. When translated as *tempat*, all of these diagnostic features are eliminated. The loss of these diagnostic features results in *tempat* functioning as a superordinate term with a broader, more generic semantic scope than *al-jaḥīm*, which occupies a subordinate position. Therefore, the use of *tempat* as an equivalent of *al-jaḥīm* constitutes a case of semantic broadening, as the TT rendering captures only the [Location] component, without preserving the theological and eschatological diagnostic features of the ST term.

The factor underlying the semantic broadening in the translation of *al-jaḥīm* into *tempat* 'place' is the collocational demand in the target language. In the TT, the lexeme appears in the superlative construction *seburuk-buruknya*… 'the worst…'. In Indonesian usage patterns, the superlative form *seburuk-buruknya* tends to co-occur with general and neutral nouns such as *tempat* 'place', *nasib* 'fate', or *keadaan* 'condition'. Meanwhile, the phrase "*seburuk-buruknya neraka*" 'the worst hell' may be considered less natural, as the lexeme *neraka* 'hell' already carries an inherently negative connotation. Therefore, selecting *tempat* as a hypernym can be understood as an adjustment strategy aimed at maintaining acceptability and naturalness in the target language. This decision reflects the translator's priority of ensuring that the sacred message remains accessible to Indonesian readers by aligning the text with prevailing stylistic norms. Rather than sacrificing the core theological essence of the source term, the translator employs semantic broadening as a deliberate mediation strategy that preserves meaning at the conceptual level while adapting its linguistic form to the target cultural context.

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Semantic Broadening in the Translation of Specialized Religious Activity Terms

Rituals prescribed within a religion, as well as activities associated with its teachings and governed by specific regulations, can be categorized as specialized religious activities. The following section presents examples of terms referring to such activities that experience semantic broadening in *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*.

Excerpt 2

روى ابن الأثير (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002:53)

Rawá Ibnu al-Athīr
'Ibn al-Athir narrated'
Ibnu Atsir menuturkan (al-Mubarakfuri, 2025:79)

The word *rawá* in the ST lexically denotes taking or providing water, giving drink or irrigating, carrying and transporting water, fastening or tightening with a rope, as well as narrating or transmitting hadith and poetry (Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyah, 2004). In Islamic terminology, *rawá* refers to the act of transmitting the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. However, within the Islamic scholarly tradition, particularly in the discipline of hadith studies, transmitting a hadith does not merely mean recounting what was heard from the Prophet; rather, it must fulfill specific criteria for the transmission to be deemed acceptable. Grammatically, *rawá* is a past-tense verb, thus encoding the temporal aspect [Past]. Accordingly, the word *rawá* in the ST contains the semantic features [Verbal Activity], [Transmission], and [Regulation]. The word *menuturkan* in the TT means to utter, pronounce, mention, say, narrate, or converse about something. In Indonesian, the word *menuturkan* does not inherently indicate a specific temporal aspect (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikdasmen, 2025). The following analysis presents a semantic decomposition to identify the broadening that occurs during translation.

Semantic Features	ST (*rawá*)	TT (*menuturkan*)
Verbal Activity	+	+
Transmission	+	-
Regulation	+	-
Past	+	-

Based on the table above, the word *rawá* in the ST and *menuturkan* in the TT share the common feature [Verbal Activity], as both denote the act of conveying information orally. However, *rawā* contains several diagnostic features that are not preserved in the TT. The feature [Transmission] in *rawā* indicates a process of transferring information from a prior source through a specific chain of narration, whereas *menuturkan* does not encode this element. The feature [Regulation] in *rawá* signifies that scholarly criteria govern activity within the hadith tradition, a component absent in menuturkan. Furthermore, *rawá* carries the grammatical feature [Past], as it appears in the past-tense form, while menuturkan does not lexically indicate a specific temporal aspect. The loss of these features demonstrates semantic broadening in the TT, as the resulting meaning becomes more general and no longer retains the specificity of the ST term.

The semantic broadening in translating *rawá* into *menuturkan* is motivated by the application of a generalization technique to achieve greater acceptability for the target audience, particularly general readers. In this context, the formal equivalent

meriwayatkan carries an academic nuance and has hadith-related scholarly connotations such as verification of *sanad*, making it sound heavy. In contrast, *menuturkan* presents a more narrative and accessible tone, making the text easier to read and understand as a historical account rather than a legal text or a formal hadith study. This semantic broadening reflects a strategic choice to prioritize the narrative flow of the *Sirah Nabawiyah* over the technical aspects of Islamic jurisprudence. By employing more communicative, natural verbs, the translator can bridge specialized religious terminology with language more accessible to contemporary readers.

Semantic Broadening in the Translation of Religious Figure Terms

Religious figures are individuals who hold important roles within a religion. The terms denoting such figures may take the form of proper names or generic nouns. *Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* presents a narrative timeline from the pre-Islamic period to the death of the Prophet Muhammad, indicating that the religious figures mentioned in the book are not limited solely to Islamic figures. The following Excerpt 3 presents an example of semantic broadening in the translation of religious terms.

Excerpt 3 (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002:32) وجاء بحبرين من بني قريظة إلى اليمن

wa jā'a bi<u>ḥabrayni</u> min Banī Qurayẓati ilá al-Yamani
'He brought with him two Jewish leaders from Bani Qurayzah to Yemen'
dia membawa serta dua pemuka Yahudi dari Bani Quraizhah ke Yaman (al-Mubarakfuri, 2025:41)

The word *ḥabr* in Excerpt 3 is a religious figure term functioning as a generic noun. The term *ḥabr* refers to a learned person, such as a religious scholar or intellectual, from either the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) or Muslims, who possesses the ability to explain, refine, and systematize knowledge (Manzur, 1994). In Excerpt 3, the ST context discusses the introduction of Judaism into Yemen; therefore, the term *ḥabr* in this instance refers specifically to a Jewish religious scholar or rabbi. Accordingly, the word *ḥabr* carries the semantic features [Human], [High Social Status/Respected], and [Religious Authority]. In the target text, the word *ḥabr* is translated as *pemuka Yahudi* 'Jewish leader'. In Indonesian, the word *pemuka* refers to a person who acts as a leader or advocate (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikdasmen, 2025). In the target text, a *pemuka* does not necessarily possess expertise in a particular religion; rather, they hold the authority to lead a group. Therefore, the word *pemuka* contains the semantic features [Human] and [High Social Status/Respected]. The following decomposition analysis compares the semantic features of the Arabic word *ḥabr* and the Indonesian word *pemuka*.

Semantic Features	ST (*ḥabr*)	TT (*pemuka*)
Human	+	+
High Social Status/Respected	+	+
Religious Authority	+	-

Based on the analysis above, the words *ḥabr* in the ST and *pemuka* in the TT share the same features, namely [Human] and [High Social Status/Respected], as both refer to individuals who are respected and hold a certain position within society. However, *ḥabr*

contains an additional diagnostic feature, namely [Religious Authority], which indicates authority in religious matters, such as interpreting teachings and serving as a spiritual reference for the community. The absence of this specific diagnostic feature in the Indonesian translation demonstrates how specialized theological nuances are often neutralized into broader social categories during cross-cultural adaptation. This diagnostic feature is not retained in the TT, as the word pemuka merely denotes a general leadership role without necessarily implying scholarly authority or religious competence. The loss of this feature indicates semantic broadening in the TT, resulting in a more general meaning than in the ST.

The semantic broadening of *ḥabr* into *pemuka* is motivated by modulation, shifting the perspective from a theological domain to a sociological one. In the ST, *ḥabr* highlights an individual's intellectual capacity and religious authority as an expert of the *Torah* (the sacred scripture of Judaism), thus emphasizing scholarly competence. Conversely, the TT term *pemuka* foregrounds the figure's social role as an influential member of the community. Through this shift, the translator moves the focus from religious scholarship to social role. Although Indonesian provides a closer equivalent, such as *rabi* (*rabbi* in English), the translator avoids it for pragmatic and communicative reasons. As a Hebrew loanword, *rabi* is highly specific to Jewish tradition and may be unfamiliar to general readers, potentially requiring additional explanation. Therefore, the translator selects the more general term *pemuka*, which is immediately understood as referring to a socially influential figure. Consequently, semantic broadening emerges from a deliberate translational strategy that shifts the conceptual perspective to ensure acceptability in the target language.

Semantic Broadening in the Translation of Religious Moral and Ethical Terms

The book *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* is rich in moral teaching and religious ethical values that form the foundation of the personality of Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim community. These terms carry complex, context-bound meanings; therefore, in their translation into Indonesian, they often undergo semantic broadening due to differences in value systems, cultural perceptions, and the semantic richness of Arabic and Indonesian. The following excerpt (Excerpt 4) presents examples of moral and religious ethical terms that undergo semantic broadening in translation.

Excerpt 4

وكان من العفة والأمانة والصدق (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002:106)

wa kāna min al-'iffah wa al-amānah wa al-ṣidq
Likewise, in terms of purity, trustworthiness, and honesty.
Demikian pula dari sisi kesucian diri, amanah, kejujuran (al-Mubarakfuri, 2025:169)

In Excerpt 4, the term *al-'iffah* means refraining from various forms of desire in all matters and is more specifically understood as safeguarding one's honor from what is unlawful '*harām*' (Majma' Al-Lughah Al-'Arabiyah, 2004). It is categorized as a religious, moral, and ethical concept grounded in the Qur'an as a normative foundation for shaping the behavior and character of Muslims. Therefore, *al-'iffah* possesses the semantic features of [State], [Positive], [Inner], [Self-control], and [Religious]. Meanwhile, the term *al-'iffah* is translated as *kesucian diri* 'self-purity'. In Indonesian, the word *suci* denotes a state of being religiously clean, free from sin and blemish, and pure both inwardly and outwardly (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa

Kemendikdasmen, 2025). A person free from inner impurity or sin can be described as *suci*, just as a person free from physical impurity can be described as *suci*. Therefore, the phrase *kesucian diri* in the TT contains the semantic feature [state] and [positive]. However, *kesucian diri* is not limited to the inner dimension but also encompasses the outward or physical aspect. The following decomposition analysis compares the semantic features of *al-'iffah* and *kesucian diri* to identify the occurrence of semantic broadening in the translation.

Semantic Features	ST (*al-'iffah*)	TT (*kesucian diri*)
State	+	+
Positive	+	+
Inner	+	+/-
Self-control	+	-
Religious	+	+/-

Based on the analysis above, both *al-'iffah* and *kesucian diri* share the semantic features [State] and [Positive], as both denote a condition associated with virtue. However, regarding the [Inner] feature, *al-'iffah* explicitly refers to inner restraint over desires. In contrast, *kesucian* diri is not necessarily limited to the inner dimension, as it may also encompass outward or physical aspects. A more significant difference appears in the [Self-control] feature, which constitutes the core meaning of *al-'iffah* but is not explicitly embedded in *kesucian diri*, leading to its loss in the TT. With respect to the [Religious] feature, *al-'iffah* is clearly grounded in the norms of what is lawful and unlawful in Islamic teachings. In contrast, *kesucian diri* may be understood in either a religious or a general moral context, thereby reflecting only partially the religious dimension. This comparison indicates that the translation involves semantic broadening from a concept of inner and religious self-restraint to a broader notion of purity that may also include outward aspects.

The factor underlying the semantic broadening in the translation *al-'iffah* into *kesucian diri* is a lexical gap. The concept of *al-'iffah* in Arabic does not merely refer to a state of purity, but also encompasses an active process of inner restraint over desires and material temptations to preserve one's honor in accordance with Islamic norms. Indonesian lacks a single lexical item that can fully encapsulate all these dimensions. Consequently, the translator selects the term *kesucian diri* as the closest available equivalent, even though this expression emphasizes the resulting state rather than the process of self-control that constitutes the core of the original concept. This choice renders the meaning in the TT broader and less specific, leading to semantic broadening due to the lexical gap between Arabic and Indonesian.

Semantic Broadening in the Translation of Revelation Term

The term revelation refers to divine guidance or communication from God to human beings in various forms. In Arabic religious discourse, this concept encompasses a broad semantic field, ranging from direct prophetic inspiration (*waḥy*) to more general forms of divine instruction. The following section presents an example of a revelation term that undergoes semantic broadening in its translation.

Excerpt 5

قرآن أنزله الله تعالى علي، هو هدى ونور (al-Mubarakfuri, 2002:118)

Qur'ān anzalahu Allāh ta'ālā `alayya, huwa hudan wa nūrun

> 'It is the Qur'an revealed tome by Allah. It is guidance and light.'
> Yaitu Al-Qur'an yang diturunkan oleh Allah kepadaku. Ia adalah petunjuk dan cahaya. (al-Mubarakfuri, 2025:193)

The term *hudan* in Arabic denotes guidance or direction that leads, points out the way, and directs a person toward truth or a righteous goal (Umar, 2008). In Excerpt 5, *hudan* specifically refers to the Qur'an as a guiding authority whose function is to clarify the truth, distinguish between what is right '*ḥaqq*' and false '*bāṭil*', and provide a straight path so that human beings do not go astray. Originating from Allah, this guidance possesses divine authority and an absolute nature. Consequently, *hudan* carries several semantic features [Guidance], [Goal-oriented], [Positive Value], and [Divine Source]. In the TT, *hudan* is translated as *petunjuk*, which denotes a sign, signal, regulation, advice, teaching, or guidance that functions to indicate, direct, and assist someone in understanding or carrying out something (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikdasmen, 2025). The word *petunjuk* is general and neutral, potentially referring to physical directions or non-religious instructional contexts. Therefore, its semantic features include [Guidance] as the core feature and [Goal-oriented], as it implies a specific destination or outcome. The following analysis compares *hudan* and *petunjuk* to identify the semantic broadening in the translation.

Semantic Features	ST (*hudan*)	TT (*petunjuk*)
Guidance	+	+
Goal-oriented	+	+
Positive Value	+	+/-
Divine Source	+	-

Based on the comparative table, it can be observed that *hudan* and *petunjuk* share the semantic features [Guidance] and [Goal-oriented], indicating that both convey the basic meaning of guidance directed toward a particular goal. However, differences arise in the features [Positive Value] and [Divine Source]. In *hudan,* the feature [Positive Value] is conceptually embedded as it consistently refers to truth and goodness. In contrast, in *petunjuk*, this value is relative since it may be used in neutral contexts. The reduction of these specific theological components in the translation process reflects a shift toward a more general linguistic representation. Furthermore, *hudan* carries the feature [Divine Source] because it refers to guidance originating from Allah, while *petunjuk* does not inherently contain a divine source. These differences indicate that a semantic expansion occurs in the TT, as *petunjuk* has a broader range of usage and is not restricted to a divine context, unlike *hudan* in the ST.

The semantic broadening in translating *hudan* into *petunjuk* is motivated by an asymmetry in the cultural and religious registers between the source and target languages. *Hudan* developed within the context of Arab culture, which is deeply rooted in the tradition of Islamic sacred texts, thereby possessing an established and specific religious register. In contrast, *petunjuk* evolved in a more secular, functional linguistic environment and is widely used in everyday contexts, such as directional signs, technical instructions, and operational guidelines. When a term situated within a specific theological domain is rendered by a term with broader and more practical usage, a shift in semantic domain occurs, leading to generalization. This shift is evidenced in the loss of the [Divine Source] feature, which constitutes the most diagnostically significant component distinguishing *hudan* from *petunjuk*, as it encodes the exclusively divine

origin of the guidance conveyed in the source text. Consequently, *petunjuk* operates within a wider semantic range than *hudan*, covering both religious and non-religious contexts, whereas *hudan* remains semantically bound to its theological domain.

DISCUSSION

Semantic broadening in the translation of religious terms occurs systematically by preserving a term's core meaning while reducing more specific theological diagnostic features. This process arises when translators encounter religious terms whose meanings cannot be fully transferred into Indonesian due to linguistic differences and cultural asymmetry between the source and target languages (al-Tamari & Eddin, 2021). In such cases, translators preserve the term's core meaning while neutralizing its more specific theological elements, such as religious authority, eschatological nuances, or religious specificity, to produce translations that sound more natural and conform to common collocational patterns in Indonesian (Metwally & Hamad, 2023). In addition, translators employ generalization or reframe meaning through modulation, making the text easier for target readers to understand (Molina & Albir, 2004). This process is also shaped by the absence in Indonesian of lexical items capable of fully representing the semantic richness of Arabic religious terms (Dazdarevic et al., 2016). The recurring nature of this pattern indicates that semantic broadening does not occur randomly, but rather functions as part of a translation strategy aimed at achieving acceptability and readability for target readers.

This study indicates that some theological meanings are lost due to linguistic and cultural differences between the original text of *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* and its Indonesian translation. This confirms that equivalence in religious translation is relative, shaped as much by cultural asymmetry as by linguistic structure (Afrouz, 2022; Sameer & Majeed, 2019). In the wider field of religious translation studies, these findings are consistent with previous research on the dilemma between domestication and foreignization (Ekrema et al., 2020; Mizher, 2020; Syihabuddin & Aryanti, 2023), which suggests that cultural adaptation is often unavoidable in translating religious texts. Moreover, as Yulianita (2017) observed, semantic broadening often serves as a strategy to bridge lexical gaps in religious discourse. However, while previous studies generally discuss the translation of religious texts from the perspective of translation ideology or translation strategies in general, this study offers a more specific approach by examining cultural adaptation as a form of semantic shift that can be analyzed semantically.

To map these semantic shifts more precisely, it is important to relate them to discussions of lexical inequivalence in translation studies. Almjlad (2025), Alharazi et al. (2024), and Abdelkarim & Alhaj (2023) explain that religious texts often contain semantic voids, namely situations in which a concept in the source language lacks a fully equivalent counterpart in the target language, leading to the reduction of certain theological meanings. To address this, scholars like Elewa (2020) and Durie (2022) emphasize the importance of componential analysis and semantic decomposition for systematically comparing semantic features. Yet, these studies generally discuss inequivalence at a broader level, offering only a limited explanation of how it operates at the micro level. The present study moves beyond this general level by tracing the systematic omission of specific diagnostic features, such as eschatological nuance or religious authority. In doing so, this research contributes to scholarship on semantic shift by demonstrating that semantic broadening in religious translation is not an

arbitrary loss of meaning but a deliberate, structurally traceable negotiation to resolve lexical inequivalence.

Furthermore, compared with previous studies examining *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, this study offers a new contribution by extending existing approaches. Previous research has mainly focused on pedagogical aspects, viewing the text as a medium for character education (Arsyad et al., 2025; Maududin et al., 2021; Syahid & Husni, 2018). Other studies emphasized its historiographical methodology (Amin et al., 2023; Riedho & Umam, 2026), while earlier linguistic analyses of its Indonesian translation primarily focused on grammatical and syntactic errors (Anis & al-Shidiqiyyah, 2021). Unlike previous studies that treated translation as a static grammatical object, this research positions translation as a dynamic cross-cultural product by exploring its semantic dimension. More than merely highlighting methodological differences, this study also provides substantive value to the academic understanding of the text. Its main contribution lies in emphasizing that a comprehensive reading of translated Islamic historiography requires critical awareness of semantic shifts. By revealing how certain theological terms undergo semantic broadening, this study helps scholars understand how the Prophet's biography is culturally adapted and made more accessible to Indonesian readers without losing its core historical narrative.

Theoretically, these findings reframe scholarly debates on the untranslatability of religious texts. Previous studies have explained that translating sacred texts is often considered a difficult task, as captured in Hemmat's (2017) dictum "translate me, but don't translate me", due to cross-cultural communication barriers that are regarded as difficult to overcome (Hassanein & Moustafa, 2024). As a result, translation is frequently perceived as unable to fully capture the essence and theological nuances of the original text (al-Tarawneh, 2025). However, by identifying micro-level diagnostic-feature reduction, this study demonstrates that translators employ particular strategies to manage lexical inequivalence. In this regard, untranslatability functions not as a fixed barrier but as a site of productive semantic negotiation. Through a semantic decomposition approach, the present investigation further demonstrates that semantic broadening does not occur randomly or merely as a result of meaning loss. Instead, it serves as a systematic strategy for bridging cultural differences while preserving the message's core meaning. Therefore, this study offers an analytical framework for understanding how translated Islamic historiography can serve as a cross-cultural bridge for diverse readerships without losing the integrity of the conveyed message.

Practically, this study may serve as a guideline for translators of Islamic historical texts in Indonesia when translating Arabic terms with complex theological meanings. Translators should not rely solely on literal translation; they should also consider semantic broadening to ensure the message remains accurate and understandable to readers. However, to minimize the risk of cultural dilution or loss of theological depth, this study also recommends using paratextual elements, such as annotations and footnotes, to reintroduce specific diagnostic features that may be neutralized in the main translation. Through this approach, translators can maintain a balance between text readability and the preservation of the technical specificity embedded in Arabic religious discourse. This study is important because the translation of Islamic texts influences public religious understanding. Therefore, any shift in meaning should be carried out carefully to avoid conceptual distortion. Furthermore, since religious texts can shape readers' perspectives, the application of translation methods based on semantic analysis is essential to maintain a balance between meaning accuracy and text readability. Therefore, this study emphasizes that the use of systematic translation

methods is not merely a technical matter, but also an ethical responsibility in providing accurate, credible, and communicative Islamic references.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the mechanisms of semantic broadening in the Indonesian translation of *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, addressing two research questions concerning the mechanisms of this phenomenon and the factors underlying it. Regarding the first research question, the results of the semantic decomposition analysis indicate that semantic broadening occurs systematically through the removal of specific semantic or diagnostic features, such as eschatological aspects, religious authority, and deeper spiritual dimensions, while maintaining the core meaning. As a result, religious terms that are highly specific within their theological domain are generalized in the target-language rendering. This pattern was consistently observed across the five categories examined, which were selected from ten broad semantic categories identified in the corpus. Regarding the second research question, the analysis identifies four contributing factors: the need to produce natural collocations in the target language, the deployment of communicative strategies — notably generalization and modulation — to accommodate target readers' cultural and linguistic expectations, the presence of lexical gaps, and differences in cultural and religious contexts that encourage domestication.

Although this study has addressed the research questions, several limitations should be acknowledged to provide a balanced perspective. First, the scope of analysis is confined to semantic broadening; other types of semantic shift, such as semantic narrowing and distortion, fall outside its parameters and therefore remain unexamined. Second, the analysis is purely textual in nature and draws exclusively from a single translation, which means it cannot yet demonstrate how Indonesian readers actually perceive or interpret these semantic shifts in practice. The absence of empirical reader data constitutes a significant gap that future research should address. Therefore, subsequent studies are recommended to investigate the mechanisms of semantic narrowing or distortion within the same text, in order to provide a more comprehensive account of meaning shifts in Arabic-Indonesian religious discourse. Furthermore, comparative analyses across multiple translations of *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* published by different publishers would yield valuable insights into translator variability and decision-making patterns. A reader-response approach would also be a productive avenue for assessing how semantic broadening concretely shapes readers' comprehension of theological concepts.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author conceived and designed the analysis, collected the data, performed the analysis, and wrote the paper. The second author supervised the research and provided critical feedback.

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