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AN ANALYTICAL MODEL FOR ISLAMIC CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS: FROM ITEM TO PROBLEM TO TECHNIQUE TO SHIFT TO REPRESENTATION

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Abstract: Studies of how Islamic terms are translated into English usually stop at naming the technique a translator used. This article proposes a model that goes further. It follows each Islamic culture-specific item (ICSI) through five linked questions: what the item is, why it is difficult for English, what the translator did, what changed in meaning, and what picture of the concept an English reader receives. The links draw on Aixelá's relational definition of culture-specific items, a five-part typology of problems (lexical, cultural, conceptual, theological, pragmatic), Molina and Hurtado Albir's techniques with extratextual and intratextual gloss, and a four-degree scale of shift (none, minimal, moderate, high) judged against a documented meaning baseline. Items are sorted into eight categories and coded in a matrix, and a second rater will code 25% of the tokens so that agreement can be tested with Cohen's kappa. The model was built for al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith (42 reports) and three English translations, but none of its components depends on that corpus. The article sets out the model, its decision rules and the coding instrument, and works through the Arabic side of one item, niyyah in Hadith 1. Application to the translators' renderings and the reliability figures are still to be reported. The article argues that tying diagnosis, choice, consequence and the reader's picture into one chain allows translators to be compared in a way that technique counts alone do not, and gives teachers of translation a vocabulary for explaining why a rendering works or fails.

Keywords: culture-specific items; Islamic terminology; translation shifts; hadith translation; Arabic–English translation; analytical model

1. Introduction

The first hadith in al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith opens with five Arabic words: innamā l-aʿmālu bi-l-niyyāt. The usual English equivalent of niyyāt is “intentions”, and the sentence looks settled. It is not. In ordinary English an intention is something a person plans, and one can hold good or bad ones without legal consequence. Niyyah, in the juristic tradition, is the inner determination that turns a bodily movement into an act of worship, so that washing without it is washing and not ablution; in works on ethics it becomes the ground on which deeds are weighed. The baseline for this item will be drawn from the classical commentaries on the hadith, among them Ibn Rajab's, which is available in English (Ibn Rajab, 2007). A translator who writes “intention” has used a perfectly respectable English word. Whether an English reader leaves with the Islamic concept depends on what else the page says. Published English versions already differ on this one word. One freely available version of the hadith gives “Actions are (judged) by motives (niyyah), so each man will have what he intended” (Sunnah.com,

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n.d.-a), and another gives “Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what was intended” (40HadithNawawi.com, n.d.). Neither version names its translator, so neither is treated here as T1, T2 or T3. In T2, the contents page of the first volume of Zarabozo's (1999) commentary heads the hadith “Surely, actions are but driven by intention and every man shall have but that which he intended” and lists a section titled “The Meaning of al-Niyyah”. So the commentary renders the term as “intention” and also explains it under its transliterated name. The printed renderings in T1 and T3 will be recorded in the matrix in the same way.

Most analyses of culture-specific items would label that choice and move on. In Molina and Hurtado Albir's (2002) inventory it would count as an established equivalent or a literal translation, and the label is accurate. It also tells the reader almost nothing. It does not say why the item was a problem in the first place, it does not say whether anything was lost, and it does not say what the reader now believes niyyah to be. A count of techniques across a whole text treats a harmless borrowing and a misleading one as the same event.

The existing literature supplies good tools for single links of this chain. Aixelá (1996) defines a culture-specific item as a problem that arises in a particular pair of texts, not as a type of word, and orders the available strategies from conservation to substitution. Newmark (1988) classifies cultural words and the procedures used on them. Baker (2018) catalogues the sources of non-equivalence at word level, and Izutsu (2002) shows that key terms in the Qur'an take their meaning from networks of related terms, which is exactly what English loses when it supplies a single word. Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) insist that a technique can only be judged in context. Catford (1965), Blum-Kulka (1986) and van Leuven-Zwart (1989, 1990) describe shifts between source and target. Davies (2003), Pedersen (2011) and Leppihalme (1997) built models for fiction, subtitling and allusion. Each of these answers one question well. None connects the questions, and none grades the consequence for a reader of a religious text. Subtitling research has dealt with culture-bound problems for some time (Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993), and Pym's (2007) distinction between natural and directional equivalence is useful here: few Islamic terms have a natural English counterpart, so almost every rendering of ṣalāh or niyyah is a directional creation that can be examined as one. Venuti (1991) traces domestication and foreignisation back to Schleiermacher, and Nord (1996) links the method chosen to the function of the text. Shifts have been tied to models of meaning (Osimo, 2021), to repetition (Károly, 2010) and to specialised terms (Weisshaupt, 2017). Al-Qinai (2000) proposed parameters for assessing translation quality, which is a different aim from describing shifts.

Studies of the Forty Hadith itself show the same pattern. Alkhomayes (2022) and Drid (2021) examine a single translation, and Drid analyses twenty terms. Zitouni et al. (2022) work from selected cultural items in translations found online. Musaad (2022) looks at one type of item, the Prophetic metaphor, in three translations. Hassan (2016) comes closest to the present material, since he examines Islamic terms in T1, but he asks only whether they were translated or transliterated, and in one translation. Studies of Islamic terms elsewhere ask similar questions. ElShiekh and Saleh (2011) discuss translation against transliteration in Islamic discourse addressed to Western readers, Elmarsafy and Bentaïbi (2015) follow one word, ḥijāb, through its translations, Althawbih and Rabadi (2016) report the hindrances Jordanian students meet with Islamic terms, and Gunawan et al. (2026) discuss readability and theological shifts in a Qur'an translation. Safi (2024) and Salih and Haji (2020) look at personification and collocation in Prophetic hadith as rendered in English, and Al-Quran (2011) shows that technical terms cause trouble in the other direction too. These studies establish that translators use a range of

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procedures and are often inconsistent. They do not allow a full comparison of several translators across all Islamic items, and the 2023 translation by Clarke is absent from the work reviewed for this article. The gap has three parts: coverage (no full inventory compared across translators), analysis (techniques are named but not linked to a prior diagnosis of difficulty or to a graded change in meaning), and interpretation (what the translators' choices do to the representation of Islamic concepts is noticed in passing but not analysed).

There are reasons to think that Islamic items need a treatment of their own and not simply the models built for fiction. Many are doctrinally defined and not merely culturally marked: jurists, theologians and commentators have fixed, debated and refined their meanings for centuries, so a reader of Arabic hears a defined concept where an English reader hears an ordinary word. They work as a system, since islām, īmān and iḥsān are defined against one another in the second hadith of the collection, and a decision about one changes how the others read. Many name practices and not ideas; ṣalāh is something millions of people perform daily in a prescribed form, and the English word either describes that practice or it does not. And the readership is split between Muslims who know the Arabic term and non-Muslims who do not, so a rendering that satisfies one group can mislead the other.

This article proposes a model intended to close the second and third parts of that gap and to make the first possible. The model treats the analysis of one Islamic culture-specific item as a chain of five links: item, problem, technique, shift and representation. It is the analytical core of a thesis on the translation of Islamic culture-specific items in al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith into English, and it is presented here separately because its components can be reused with other texts. The article asks three questions.

RQ1. Can Islamic culture-specific items be identified and classified by explicit criteria that a second analyst can apply? RQ2. Can the problem an item poses, the technique used, the shift in meaning and the representation offered to the reader be linked in a single analytical chain without the links collapsing into one another? RQ3. Does the chain work when applied to real renderings? RQ1 and RQ2 are answered by the model and its decision rules (Section 3). RQ3 can be answered here only in part, through a worked illustration of the Arabic side of one item. The coded renderings and the reliability figures belong to the next stage of the project and are marked where they are needed.

The article proceeds in the order of the IMRAD format. Section 2 describes how the model was assembled, the data on which it will be tested, the procedure, and the reliability checks. Section 3 presents the model, link by link, with its tables and decision rules, and ends with the worked illustration. Section 4 discusses what the model adds to earlier frameworks, how it handles items that raise several problems, how its results compare with research on Qur'an translation, what it could offer translator training, and where it is likely to fail. Section 5 concludes.

2. Methods

The article is conceptual and methodological: its contribution is a model and an instrument for applying it, not findings about particular translators. It follows the descriptive tradition in translation studies, which asks that translations be described as facts of the target culture before they are explained or evaluated (Toury, 2012; Lambert & van Gorp, 1985) and treats observed norms and strategies as tendencies, not laws (Chesterman, 1993); the model does not rank translators or declare a rendering correct. The design is qualitative-dominant, comparative and descriptive, because the same technique can be harmless in one place and misleading in another. Frequencies and cross-tabulations play a supporting role (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and the coding is directed, with categories taken from theory and extended where the data require it (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The

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model was assembled in three steps: the account that best explained each link was chosen from the literature, adapted to Islamic material, and turned into decision rules and a coding instrument. The item is defined relationally, after Aixelá (1996), as a word or phrase that becomes a problem in a given pair of texts, and items are sorted into eight categories adapted from Newmark (1988). The five problem types draw on Baker (2018), Izutsu (2002), Abdul-Raof (2001), Naudé (2010) and Thomas (1983). Techniques are coded with Molina and Hurtado Albir's (2002) eighteen techniques plus Aixelá's (1996) extratextual and intratextual gloss, and orientation with Venuti's (2008) foreignisation and domestication, read against each translator's stated purpose (Nord, 1997; Reiss & Vermeer, 2014). Shift follows Catford (1965), Blum-Kulka (1986) and van Leuven-Zwart (1989, 1990), applied to meaning and used descriptively (Munday, 2016), with three types (semantic, cultural, theological) and four degrees (none, minimal, moderate, high). Representation follows Faiq (2004) in treating translation as a means by which one culture becomes known to another.

The model will be tested on the Arabic text of al-Arbaʿūn al-Nawawiyyah (42 reports) and three printed English translations: Ibrahim and Johnson-Davies (1997), T1, a bilingual edition (Islamic Texts Society, n.d.); Zarabozo (1999), T2, embedded in a commentary from which only the passages that explain a translation choice are used; and Clarke (2023), T3. Each is complete, in print and from an Islamic publisher, while they differ in date, translator background and presentation. Printed editions are used because notes, glossaries and prefaces count as evidence. The unit of analysis is the item in context, counted as types for classification and as tokens for technique and consistency. An item counts as an ICSI if it (a) names a belief, practice, institution, person, place, time, text or legal category derived from Islamic tradition; (b) is a technical term of law, theology, ethics or hadith science; (c) is a formula with a devotional or social function; or (d) is an ordinary Arabic word used in a specialised Islamic sense, as dīn is. Narrators' names are excluded, but the formulas attached to them are not. Each type is placed in a category (Table 1). Each token is aligned by hand with its rendering and any note in each translation, omission being recorded as a result, and AntConc (Anthony, n.d.) is used afterwards to check that no occurrence has been missed. Each token receives one entry per translation in the ICSI Translation Analysis Matrix (Table 4). A pilot on reports 1–5 will test the criteria, categories and codebook before the whole text is coded.

For each item, a meaning baseline is written before the renderings are read, drawing on an Arabic dictionary (Wehr, 1976), the classical commentaries of Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd (2014) and Ibn Rajab (2007), and English reference works (Esposito, 2003). A codebook defines every code and its decision rules, and a decision log records difficult judgements. A second rater with training in Arabic, English and Islamic studies will code a random 25% of the tokens. Agreement will be calculated for each dimension with Cohen's (1960) kappa, and a value of at least 0.61, “substantial” in Landis and Koch's (1977) terms, will be required; if it is not reached, the rules will be clarified and the sample recoded. Because kappa can be low when one category dominates, as the “none” degree of shift may (Feinstein & Cicchetti, 1990; Byrt et al., 1993), percentage agreement and Gwet's (2008) AC1 will be reported beside it, together with Krippendorff's alpha for the ordinal degrees (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007), following the guidelines of Kottner et al. (2011). At the time of writing, the second-rater coding has not been carried out, so no agreement figures are reported in this article. The study uses published texts and no human participants. It describes changes in meaning and makes no judgement on the faith of any translator or the religious correctness of any translation. The analyst's background will be stated, and the matrix and

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decision log will be kept as an audit trail (Krippendorff, 2018) to meet the usual criteria of trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

3. Results: the model

The result of this article is the model itself. It is presented in the order of its links, followed by the coding instrument and a worked illustration.

3.1 The chain and its two levels

The model treats the analysis of an item as five questions asked in order (Figure 1). What is the item, and to which category does it belong? Why is it difficult for English? What did the translator do? What changed in meaning, and by how much? What picture of the concept does an English reader receive? Each question corresponds to a link, and each link has its own vocabulary and its own evidence.

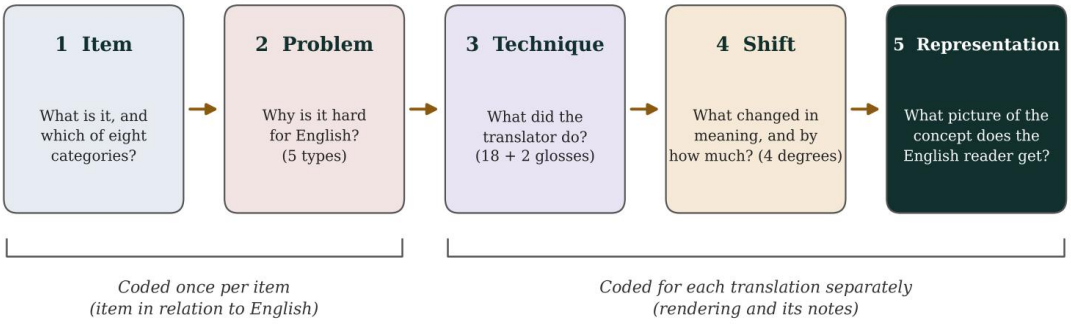

Figure 1. The five links of the model and the level at which each is coded.

The links sit at two levels, and the distinction prevents a common confusion. The first two links describe the item in relation to English. The problem is a property of the Arabic item and of the English language and culture it must enter, so it is coded once per token and is the same for all translators. The last three links describe a rendering. Technique, shift and representation are coded separately for T1, T2 and T3, because three translators facing one problem may respond in three ways. Keeping the levels apart means that the difficulty of an item is never charged to a translator, and that a translator's response is never mistaken for a feature of the item.

3.2 Link 1: item and category

Types are assigned to one of eight categories (Table 1). Where a type could fit two, it goes to the category that describes its function in the particular report, and the alternative is recorded in a note. The categories are provisional until the pilot has been run.

Table 1. Categories of Islamic culture-specific items

Category	Description	Illustrative items in the Arabic text
1. Beliefs and doctrine	Articles of faith, the unseen, the afterlife	īmān, islām, qadar, malāʾikah, al-yawm al-ākhir
2. Worship and ritual	Obligatory and voluntary acts and their elements	ṣalāh, zakāh, ṣawm, ḥajj, shahādah, ṣadaqah
3. Law and jurisprudence	Legal categories, penalties, rulings	ḥalāl, ḥarām, mushtabihāt, ḥudūd, qiṣāṣ

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Category	Description	Illustrative items in the Arabic text
4. Ethics and character	Moral and spiritual qualities and states	niyyah, iḥsān, taqwā, ḥayāʾ, ṣabr, zuhd, birr
5. Persons, titles and roles	Titles, social roles, communal terms	rasūl Allāh, ummah, walī, muslim, muʾmin
6. Formulaic expressions	Blessings, invocations, supplications, praise	ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam, raḍiya llāhu ʿanhu, subḥān Allāh
7. Scriptural and hadith-science terms	Qur'anic references, terms of transmission and grading	ḥadīth qudsī, rawāhu, ḥasan, ṣaḥīḥ
8. Places, times and sacred realities	Sacred places, times, eschatological realities	al-Kaʿbah, Ramaḍān, al-jannah, al-nār

Note. Categories adapted from Newmark (1988). Illustrative items are drawn from the candidate list of the project and are not yet a final inventory.

3.3 Link 2: problem

Five types of problem are distinguished (Table 2). They are not mutually exclusive. Each is identified by a diagnostic question that the analyst answers about the item before looking at any translation. This order is deliberate: the diagnosis comes first so that it cannot be bent to fit what the translators happened to do.

Table 2. Problem types and diagnostic questions

Problem	Diagnostic question	Illustrative item
Lexical	Does English lack a single word covering the Arabic sense, or lose the root-based relation to neighbouring words?	islām, muslim, salām: a root family that English cannot show
Cultural	Is the referent (institution, practice, object) absent from, or different in, English-speaking cultures?	ritual purity (ṭahārah) governing worship
Conceptual	Does the nearest English word belong to a different network of concepts and so suggest a different idea?	īmān as “faith”, which brings a faith–works contrast from Christian usage
Theological	Does the English word imply a doctrinal position or a judgement about belief or practice?	bidʿah as “innovation” or as “heresy”
Pragmatic	Is the item mainly a formula whose function (respect, supplication, politeness) matters more than its content?	the formula that follows each Companion's name

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Note. Typology adapted from Baker (2018), Izutsu (2002), Abdul-Raof (2001), Naudé (2010) and Thomas (1983).

One item can raise more than one problem, and the model handles this with a primary and, where needed, a secondary type. The primary problem is the one that, if left unsolved, would cause the larger change in what the reader understands. A theological problem is a conceptual problem with a further property: the English word commits the translator to a doctrinal position, so that a reader inside the tradition may regard the result as an error of belief and not only of style. When both apply, the theological type is primary.

3.4 Link 3: technique and orientation

Techniques are coded with the twenty-code inventory described in Section 2 (Molina and Hurtado Albir's eighteen plus the two glosses). Two rules govern its use. When a translator applies two techniques at once, as in a transliterated term followed by a bracketed explanation, the main one is coded as primary and the other as secondary. When a footnote or a passage of commentary refers to the item, the extratextual gloss is coded separately from the technique used in the running text, because the two do different work for the reader.

Each rendering is also marked for orientation. A rendering that keeps the Arabic term, or a close calque, with or without a gloss, is coded as foreignising. One that replaces the term with an English word or phrase meant to be familiar is coded as domesticating. A rendering that combines the two, for example an English word in the running text with the transliterated term in a heading, bracket or note, is coded as mixed, and a note records which element points each way. Mixed renderings are counted as a third group, so that they do not inflate either of the other two. The proportions of the three codes are calculated for each translator and compared with what the translator's preface says about purpose. A translation designed to teach readers the vocabulary of Islam may reasonably keep many terms, and the comparison keeps the analyst from reading that choice as a fault.

3.5 Link 4: shift

A shift is a difference in meaning between the baseline and what the reader receives. The baseline is a short statement of the item's sense in the report, written before the renderings are read and supported by the three kinds of source named in Section 2. Three types of shift are distinguished. A semantic shift changes the core content: a narrowing, a broadening, the loss or addition of a component, or a change of connotation. A cultural shift replaces an Islamic referent with a target-culture analogue that has different features. A theological shift changes the doctrinal implication, so that the reader may form a different belief about what Islam teaches. Each shift is graded on the four-degree scale in Table 3.

Table 3. Degrees of shift and their criteria

Degree	Criterion	Test question about the reader
None	The rendering, with or without a gloss, conveys the full sense of the baseline.	Could the reader state the baseline sense?
Minimal	The core sense holds; only a peripheral nuance, register or connotation changes.	Does the reader miss only a shade of meaning?

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Degree	Criterion	Test question about the reader
Moderate	One major component of the sense is lost, added or narrowed, but the main referent is still identifiable.	Does the reader know what is meant, but hold a narrower or broader idea of it?
High	The core concept is misrepresented, replaced by an analogue with different content, omitted, or given a different doctrinal implication.	Would the reader form a different idea of what Islam teaches or requires?

Note. Grading is ordinal. Degrees are not averaged.

Four rules govern the judgement. First, the unit judged is the rendering together with whatever explains it in the same edition, so a footnote that restores a lost component lowers the grade. Second, the judgement concerns what an English reader would take from the text as a whole, and not the isolated word. Third, the baseline is fixed before the renderings are read. Fourth, when two adjacent degrees seem equally defensible, both are recorded with reasons and the case goes to the second rater. A rendering that shifts meaning in two ways receives the type that carries more weight, and the other is noted.

3.6 Link 5: representation

Representation is the interpretive link. It asks what concept an English reader can assemble from a rendering and its notes, and how that concept differs from the baseline. It is not coded for every token. It is written as a short account for a set of exemplar cases, chosen because the three translators diverge sharply or because the shift is high. The accounts will then be examined for recurring themes by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to find out whether patterns of representation run across translators and across categories. The model does not claim to measure what readers actually understand, since no reader data are collected. It describes what the text makes available to a reader.

3.7 The coding instrument

The links are brought together in the ICSI Translation Analysis Matrix (Table 4), a spreadsheet with locked drop-down lists so that codes are applied uniformly. Each token occupies one row. Fields for links 3 to 5 are repeated for each translation, and a final field records convergence or divergence among the three and the internal consistency of each translator with repeated items.

Table 4. Structure of the ICSI Translation Analysis Matrix

Field	Content
Item identifiers	Token number; hadith number; vocalised Arabic; transliteration
Classification	Category (1–8); type or token flag; alternative category, if any
Meaning baseline	Short statement of the sense in context, with sources
Problem (once per token)	Primary type; secondary type; justification
Rendering (T1, T2, T3)	English as printed; technique (primary, secondary)

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Field	Content
Gloss (T1, T2, T3)	Intratextual gloss: present or absent, with its wording (bracketed phrase or apposition in the running text). Extratextual gloss: present or absent, with location (footnote, endnote, glossary or commentary) and content
Shift (T1, T2, T3)	Type (semantic, cultural, theological, none); degree; justification
Orientation (T1, T2, T3)	Foreignising, domesticating or mixed; for a mixed rendering, a note on which element points each way
Representation	Short interpretive account, for exemplar cases only
Cross-translator notes	Convergence or divergence among T1, T2, T3; consistency for repeated items

3.8 Worked illustration: niyyah in Hadith 1

Table 5 shows how the Arabic side of one item is entered before any translation is read. The item is niyyah in the first report. The entries for links 1 and 2 and for the baseline can be completed now. The entries for links 3 to 5 depend on the renderings. They are filled in only as far as the sources checked so far allow, and the rest will follow the coding of the pilot.

Table 5. Matrix entry for niyyah (Hadith 1)

Link or field	Entry
Item and category	niyyah (pl. niyyāt); category 4, Ethics and character. Alternative category 2, Worship and ritual, recorded in the note.
Meaning baseline	The inner determination to do an act for a stated purpose; in the juristic tradition a condition for the validity of acts of worship; in moral writing the ground on which deeds are judged. Sources: the classical commentaries, including Ibn Rajab (2007), checked against the reference works named in Section 2.
Problem (once)	Primary: conceptual. English “intention” is available and close, but belongs to a network of planning and purpose and lacks the doctrinal weight of the Arabic term. Secondary: lexical, since the nearest alternatives (“motive”, “purpose”, “resolve”) each pull the sense in another direction.
Technique (T1 / T2 / T3)	T1 and T3: to be coded from the printed editions. T2: “intention”, coded as established equivalent (provisional, taken from the contents page of Zarabozo, 1999, vol. 1); extratextual gloss present, a section titled “The Meaning of al-Niyyah”.

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Link or field	Entry
Shift (T1 / T2 / T3)	T1 and T3: to be graded after coding. T2: not graded until the section on niyyah has been read. By rule 1 of Section 3.5 the section can only lower the grade that "intention" would receive alone.
Orientation (T1 / T2 / T3)	T1 and T3: to be coded. T2: mixed, with an English word in the heading and the transliterated term in the section title.
Representation	Written after coding, if the case is selected as an exemplar.

The Arabic-side entries already show what the later links will ask. Suppose a translator writes "intention" and adds nothing. The technique would be coded as an established equivalent, and the shift would depend on whether the report's own context makes the doctrinal weight recoverable. The report goes on to speak of a migration undertaken for God and one undertaken for a worldly gain or a woman, which does carry part of the weight. The grade could fall at minimal or moderate, and the reasons would be recorded for the second rater. If another translator adds a footnote on the role of niyyah in the validity of worship, the footnote would be coded as an extratextual gloss, and by the first rule of Section 3.5 it would lower the grade. The same English word can earn different grades in different editions, and a count of techniques would never show it.

Two further items show how the same entry looks for other categories. The blessing ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam belongs to category 6. Its primary problem is pragmatic, because the formula performs an act of respect and blessing that a literal gloss does not reproduce, and its secondary problem is lexical, since the Arabic verb forms have no compact English counterpart. The baseline would state the function (invoking blessing and peace on the Prophet) and not only the words, and the shift grade would then ask whether the function survives in the English, by whatever means: a full formula, an abbreviation, a symbol, or silence. The second item is bidʿah, which appears in the collection in Hadith 28, in the sentence wa-iyyākum wa-muḥdathāti l-umūr, fa-inna kulla bidʿatin ḍalālah (Sunnah.com, n.d.-b). It belongs to category 3 or 7 depending on how the report uses it, and its primary problem is theological. Both "innovation" and "heresy" are available, they carry different degrees of disapproval, so choosing one commits the translator to a view the Arabic term does not state on its own. For this item the shift type would be theological and the grade could reach high if a rendering makes the term sound like an accusation of unbelief. Both entries are Arabic-side only. They describe what the later links will have to judge, and say nothing yet about what T1, T2 and T3 did.

4. Discussion

4.1 What the model adds

The model does not replace the frameworks it draws on. It keeps the part of each that does the best work and adds the connections that are missing. Aixelá (1996) gives a scale of strategies but leaves the reason for the difficulty and the effect of the choice outside the analysis. Newmark (1988) provides categories and procedures without a grade for the result. Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) rightly insist that a technique be judged in context, and the model takes that seriously, but a technique judged in context still needs a measure of what it did to the meaning. The shift literature supplies the idea of difference between source and target, in Catford's (1965) linguistic terms or in van Leuven-Zwart's

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(1989, 1990) segment-level comparison, but it was not designed for terms whose meaning is fixed by a religious tradition. Baker (2018) and Izutsu (2002) diagnose why words fail to travel and stop there.

Placing these accounts in sequence changes what can be asked. A study that counts techniques can report that a translator borrowed, glossed or substituted. The model allows the further statement that a translator glossed items of one problem type and substituted for items of another, and that the substitutions are those with the larger shifts. It also separates the difficulty of an item from the quality of a response to it, which is a distinction that tends to get lost when a translator is criticised for rendering a term that no English word could carry.

Two measures that earlier studies treat separately are brought into the same frame. The first is consistency. Because the matrix is kept at token level, the proportion of repeated types that a translator renders by the same equivalent in every occurrence can be computed and then set beside the shift grades. A translator who is consistent with a poor equivalent and one who varies between good ones present different cases, and a count of techniques would put them together. Zitouni et al. (2022) report inconsistency with difficult items as a finding; the model makes it measurable and ties it to the problem type that provoked it. The second is orientation. Toury's (2012) distinction between adequacy, which holds to the norms of the source, and acceptability, which follows those of the target, offers a way to read the foreignising, domesticating and mixed codes. A translator who is mostly foreignising across categories and mostly domesticating in the category of formulas may be following a norm for one kind of item and a different norm for another, which is a more precise finding than a general label.

4.2 Items that raise more than one problem

Real items seldom fall neatly into one type. Īmān tests the rule. English “faith” is conceptually close but brings a contrast between faith and works that has a long history in Christian theology and little in Islamic thought (Izutsu, 2002). The problem is conceptual first, with a theological one behind it, because a reader who takes in that contrast may form a wrong idea of what the tradition holds about belief and action. The primary and secondary codes record both, and the rule that a theological problem outranks a conceptual one when both apply tells the analyst which to put first. A formula such as the blessing after the Prophet's name is primarily pragmatic, with a lexical problem behind it. The types work better as questions put to each item than as exclusive boxes.

The same holds for shifts. A rendering can narrow the meaning and also change its doctrinal implication. The model asks the analyst to assign the type that carries more weight and to note the other. This loses some information on purpose, because a grid with a code for every combination would be too fine to apply reliably.

4.3 Comparison with research on Qur'an translation

The Qur'an and the hadith share much of their religious vocabulary, so studies of English Qur'an translation are the nearest point of comparison for the results of this article. Because those results are a model and an Arabic-side illustration, not coded renderings, the comparison here concerns what the model predicts and explains; the comparison of the three translators' actual choices with the Qur'anic findings will follow the coding. Three recent studies are especially relevant. Ayyad et al. (2021) examined the culture-specific items in Yusuf Ali's translation of Sūrat al-Māʾidah and identified ten procedures, of which definition was the most frequent and generalisation and explicitation the least frequent. Albahiri and Alhaj (2025) compared the translations of Pickthall, Hilali and Khan, and Abdel Haleem, and found that word-for-word translation was the commonest approach to Qur'anic cultural items and caused considerable loss of meaning; Pickthall's literal renderings were often obscure, while

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the other translators added descriptive information in brackets, footnotes or paraphrase. AlKahtani (2024), studying seven English translations of Qur'anic words that express fear, such as khawf and khashyah, found that the translators did not consistently keep the distinctions between them and rendered the same word differently in different verses.

Set beside these studies, the results of this article agree on where the difficulty lies and differ in what they can say about it. Albahiri and Alhaj's (2025) finding that literal renderings lose meaning while bracketed and footnoted renderings keep more of it is what the first rule of Section 3.5 formalises: the unit judged is the rendering together with its gloss, so a footnote lowers the grade of shift. The illustration in Section 3.8 shows the same pattern for a single item, since one English word, “intention”, can earn a minimal or a moderate grade for niyyah depending on what the edition adds. Their study, however, reports loss of meaning as an overall tendency of each translator; the model records it item by item, with a type and a degree, and ties it to the problem that caused it. Ayyad et al. (2021) show that definition, a form of explanation, dominates in at least one Qur'an translation. In the model, definition corresponds to description, amplification or intratextual gloss, and a frequency count of this kind answers only Link 3. The model adds the two questions such a count leaves open: whether the items explained were those with conceptual or theological problems, and whether the explanation removed the shift or brought in an interpretation of its own.

AlKahtani's (2024) results come closest to the model's account of lexical and conceptual problems. The fear words she studied form a network of the kind Izutsu (2002) describes, and her finding that their distinctions collapse in English is what the model classifies as a lexical problem, the loss of relations between neighbouring terms (Table 2). The same risk is present in the Forty Hadith, where taqwā is often rendered with words of fear and where islām, īmān and iḥsān are defined against one another in Hadith 2. Her observation that one word is rendered differently in different verses also corresponds to the consistency measure proposed in Section 4.1, which the token-level matrix makes computable for each translator. Two differences should be kept in view. The wording of the Qur'an is regarded as revealed and is recited, while hadith reports were often transmitted with variation in wording, so hadith translators may allow themselves more freedom and more domesticating choices; whether they do is one of the questions the coding will answer. And the Qur'anic studies classify techniques without a prior diagnosis of the problem, so their results cannot show whether an inconsistency arises from the item or from the translator. The model's separation of the two levels (Section 3.1) is meant to make that distinction, and the comparison with these studies will be one of its first tests.

4.4 Implications

The matrix is also a teaching device. Students in Uzbekistan meet Islamic texts through English as well as through Arabic, and Islamic terms in translation have already attracted research from the Uzbek–English side (Khodjakulova, 2023). A class could code a short passage with the five questions, compare its codes with those of another group, and discuss where the groups disagree. The disagreements teach most. They show that “faithful” has no single meaning, and that a choice has to be defended by naming the problem, the technique and the consequence. This use of the model has not been tested, and the claim here is only that the instrument makes such an exercise possible.

4.5 Limitations

The judgements are interpretive. The baseline depends on the sources chosen, and a different set of commentaries could shift a grade. The scale of shift is ordinal and does not support arithmetic, so the model can say that one translator has more high shifts than another but not that one is twice as accurate.

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The data are one text and three translations, in printed editions, and the categories were shaped by that text, so a collection with different content may need new categories. Representation is inferred from the page and not from readers, so the model describes what a reader could take from the text and cannot report what any actual reader did. Finally, the model has not yet been tested for reliability. If kappa for the shift grades falls below 0.61 after training, the grading rules have failed and must be rewritten. If many items fit none of the eight categories or all of them equally, the categories need rebuilding. These are the outcomes that would count against the model.

4.6 Further research

The next step is to code the full corpus and report the agreement figures. After that, the model could be applied to other hadith collections and to Qur'an translations, where the status of the source text changes what a shift means (Abdel Haleem, 2004; Abdul-Raof, 2001). It could be adapted for Uzbek or other target languages, where the problems may differ because the vocabulary of Islam entered those languages in other ways. A reader-response study, using the exemplar cases as stimulus material, would test the representation link directly.

5. Conclusion

The model asks that every analysis of an Islamic culture-specific item answer five questions in order and keep the first two apart from the last three. The practical result is a discipline: diagnose the difficulty before reading the translation, grade the change against a baseline written in advance, and describe what the reader receives only after both are fixed. For a translator, it suggests a sequence of decisions, starting from the problem and not from the preferred equivalent. For a teacher, it provides a way to turn an argument about a single word into a discussion of reasons.

The model is complete as a design, but it is not yet a result about any translator. Its decision rules have been written and not yet tested, and the reliability of its categories and grades remains to be shown. The coded renderings of the three translations of the Forty Hadith will show whether the chain holds and where it has to be changed. Until then, the claim is that the model makes a specific comparison possible, and that the comparison can be checked by anyone who reads the codebook and codes the same items.

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Data availability. The study uses published texts. The coding matrix, codebook and decision log will be available from the author on request once coding is complete.

Use of AI tools. An AI assistant (Claude, Anthropic) was used for language editing and formatting of the manuscript. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article.

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