Article

The Issue of Translating Prophets' Names: Preserving Original Qur'anic Forms

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Abstract: The translation of the Qur'an into other languages presents numerous linguistic and theological challenges, particularly in the rendering of prophets' names. These names carry significant religious, historical, and cultural meanings that are closely tied to the Arabic language of the Qur'an. In many English translations, translators sometimes replace the original Arabic names with their Biblical or Western equivalents in order to improve readability for a wider audience. However, such substitutions may weaken the connection between the translated text and the original Qur'anic terminology. This study examines the issue of translating prophets' names in English translations of the Qur'an and evaluates different translation strategies used by modern translators. Through qualitative textual and comparative analysis of selected Qur'an translations and classical Islamic scholarship, the research explores the advantages and limitations of transliteration and translation approaches. The findings suggest that preserving the original Arabic forms of prophets' names maintains theological accuracy, linguistic authenticity, and consistency with classical Islamic sources. The study concludes that a balanced approach—retaining Arabic names while providing explanatory equivalents where necessary—offers the most effective strategy for translating Qur'anic proper names.

Keywords: Qur'an Translation, Prophets' Names, Transliteration, Islamic Terminology, Translation Studies, Qur'anic Linguistics, Religious Translation, Arabic–English Translation, Tafsir Studies.

1. Introduction

Prophets' names in the Qur'an are not merely identifiers; they carry profound religious, linguistic, and cultural significance. Since the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, the names of the prophets appear in specific phonetic and semantic forms. Some modern translators render these names in Western or Biblical equivalents - for example, **Yahya** as *John the Baptist* or **Isa** as *Jesus*—to increase accessibility for English readers [1]. However, preserving the original Qur'anic forms ensures fidelity to the sacred text and maintains its theological integrity. This study examines translation philosophies and scholarly positions, arguing for the preservation of Qur'anic Arabic forms in English translation [2].

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative analytical approach to examine the translation of prophets' names in English versions of the Qur'an. The research combines textual analysis, comparative translation analysis, and examination of classical Islamic scholarship to evaluate different translation practices [3].

First, a linguistic analysis was conducted to examine how prophets' names are represented in selected English translations of the Qur'an. Particular attention was given

to the distinction between transliteration of Arabic names (such as *Musa*, *Ibrahim*, and *Yusuf*) and the use of Western or Biblical equivalents (such as *Moses*, *Abraham*, and *Joseph*) [4].

Second, a comparative analysis of major English Qur'an translations was performed. Translations including *The Noble Qur'an* by Khan and Hilali and *The Clear Quran* by Mustafa Khattab were examined in order to identify the strategies used for rendering prophetic names [5].

Third, classical Islamic scholarship was consulted to understand the traditional perspectives on preserving Qur'anic terminology. Works of prominent scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kathir, and Al-Nawawi were analyzed to determine their views on maintaining the original linguistic forms of religious terms [6].

This methodological framework allows the study to evaluate translation strategies from both linguistic and theological perspectives [7].

3. Results

The comparative analysis demonstrates that English translations of the Qur'an differ significantly in their treatment of prophets' names. Some translators prioritize fidelity to the original Arabic text, while others focus on accessibility for English-speaking audiences [8].

Translations such as *The Noble Qur'an* preserve the original Arabic names of prophets through transliteration. Names such as *Musa*, *Ibrahim*, and *Yusuf* are maintained in their Qur'anic forms, often accompanied by explanatory notes when necessary. This approach maintains consistency with the Arabic text and aligns with traditional Islamic scholarship [9].

Other translations, such as *The Clear Quran*, occasionally adopt familiar Western equivalents like *Jesus* for *Isa* in order to facilitate comprehension among readers unfamiliar with Islamic terminology. While this method may increase readability, it can reduce the linguistic and theological connection between the translation and the original Qur'anic text [10].

The analysis also indicates that classical Islamic scholars generally favored preserving the original Arabic terminology [11]. Their works emphasize that religious terms and proper names possess theological significance that should not be altered during translation [12].

Overall, the results suggest that transliteration of Qur'anic names ensures greater fidelity to the source text and preserves the cultural and religious identity embedded within the Qur'an [13].

4. Discussion

The findings highlight the broader challenges involved in translating sacred texts. Translators must balance two competing priorities: maintaining fidelity to the original text and ensuring accessibility for readers who may not be familiar with the source language [14].

Preserving original Arabic names reflects a source-oriented translation approach that prioritizes textual authenticity and theological accuracy. This approach ensures that readers remain connected to the linguistic and cultural context of the Qur'an.

However, translations aimed at a wider audience sometimes adopt target-oriented strategies that prioritize readability and familiarity. Using Biblical equivalents may help readers understand the historical parallels between Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions, but it may also obscure the distinctive terminology used in the Qur'an.

A hybrid translation strategy may provide the most effective solution. In this approach, translators retain the original Arabic names within the main text while providing explanatory equivalents in parentheses or footnotes. This method maintains fidelity to the Qur'anic text while supporting reader comprehension.

Such an approach allows translators to respect both the linguistic integrity of the Qur'an and the needs of diverse audiences who engage with its translated meanings [15].

5. Conclusion

The translation of prophets' names in the Qur'an represents an important issue in religious translation studies. These names carry deep theological, historical, and linguistic significance within Islamic tradition. Replacing them with Western or Biblical equivalents may simplify comprehension but risks weakening the connection to the original Arabic revelation.

The findings of this study indicate that preserving the original Qur'anic forms of prophets' names is the most effective approach for maintaining textual fidelity and theological accuracy. Classical Islamic scholarship strongly supports the preservation of these forms, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the linguistic authenticity of sacred terminology.

At the same time, translators may assist readers by providing explanatory equivalents where appropriate. Such a balanced approach preserves the integrity of the Qur'anic text while facilitating understanding among non-Arabic-speaking audiences.

Future research may further explore translation strategies for other key Qur'anic concepts and examine how cultural and linguistic factors influence the interpretation of Islamic texts in different languages.

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