

Translating Intercourse Taboos in the Qur'an into Sundanese

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INTRODUCTION

❑ **The Nature of Taboo and Its Cultural Roots**

The term taboo originates from Polynesian, meaning “prohibition,” often linked to religious and cultural values (Freud, 1950; Oxford Dictionary, 2005). Taboo language practices reflect social norms that restrict direct reference to sensitive topics.

❑ **Taboo Speech Acts in Global and Sacred Contexts**

Taboo expressions appear in many languages and even in sacred texts like the Qur'an, including references to sperm (QS 86:6), genitals (QS 24:31), and intercourse (QS 2:187) (Hashamdar & Rafi, 2018).

❑ **Cultural Strategies for Expressing Taboos**

Speakers from different cultures—e.g., Banjarese and Acehnese communities in Indonesia—employ euphemisms, metaphors, and nonverbal cues to handle taboo topics while maintaining cultural and religious propriety (Mardikantoro, 2016; Yayuk, 2019; Syahputri et al., 2019).

INTRODUCTION

❑ **Educational and Social Influences on Taboo Usage**

There is a negative correlation between education level and the use of taboo language: the higher the education, the less frequent the use of taboo expressions (Rahimi, 2019; Hashamdar & Rafi, 2018).

❑ **Translating Taboos: Lexical and Cultural Challenges**

Due to differences in lexicon, grammar, and style, direct translation of taboo speech acts—especially related to intercourse—is problematic. Translators often use euphemism, omission, and paraphrasing to mitigate cultural offensiveness (Nasery & Pishkar, 2015; Modarresi & Forutan, 2018; Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019).

❑ **Intercourse Taboos: Between Sacredness and Vulgarity**

Speech acts related to intercourse are culturally sensitive and considered sacred or vulgar depending on the context. Although mentioned in the Qur'an, these topics pose serious challenges in translation due to cultural norms of decency and reverence (Amenorvi & Grumah, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

❑ Cognitive-Oriented Translation Research

This study investigates translation as a cognitive product, applying a descriptive-evaluative approach with content analysis and an embedded case study. Data were purposively selected Qur'anic verses involving intercourse taboo speech acts, based on encyclopedic knowledge and supported by Maktabah Syamilah 4.0.

❑ Data Source and Language Focus

The main data source is Al-Amin: Al-Quran Tarjamah Sunda (AQTS)—a Sundanese translation of the Qur'an. Sundanese was chosen due to its status as the most spoken regional language in Indonesia and the reprint history of AQTS, ensuring relevance and reliability.

❑ Analytical Dimensions and Framework

Data analysis involved meaning, context, interpretation, politeness, and translation techniques. The meanings of taboo expressions were interpreted through classical tafsir and lexicons, and classified into euphemism, dysphemism, or orthophemism using Allan & Burridge's (2009) X-phemism framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

❑ **Strategic Use of Kinayah in Qur'anic Discourse**

The Qur'an employs kinayah—indirect and metaphorical language—to address intimate topics like sexual relations. This aligns with principles of politeness and avoids vulgarity while preserving semantic depth and cultural decorum.

❑ **Lexical Precision and Semantic Layers in the Source Text**

Qur'anic expressions such as al-ityān, al-qurb, and al-rafaṣ reflect a structured, nuanced progression of intimacy. These lexemes offer both denotative and connotative meanings, contributing to a conceptual roadmap of human sexuality.

❑ **Translation Loss in AQTS: Generalization vs. Specificity**

The AQTS translation reduces multiple distinct terms into a single euphemism (campur), which, while polite, lacks semantic precision. This results in the loss of the original connotative richness and undermines the Qur'an's intentional linguistic refinement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

❑ **Dominance of Euphemism and Denotative Translation**

90% of the AQTS translations employ euphemistic strategies, with 80% using denotative meanings—indicating a strong preference for polite, socially neutral language aligned with religious sensitivity.

❑ **Literal Yet Suggestive Rendering of Kinayah Terms**

Words like al-ityān and al-qurb are translated literally (e.g., datang, ngadareukeutan) in Sundanese, maintaining surface meanings while hinting at deeper connotations, thereby balancing clarity with modesty.

❑ **Orthophemism and Borrowing: Balancing Respect and Comprehension**

Some translations use neutral expressions (e.g., sapatemon) to convey sexual acts respectfully, while others rely on untranslated Arabic borrowings (e.g., rafats), risking semantic opacity without explanatory support.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

❑ **Semantic Flattening and Loss of Phased Intimacy**

General terms like *campur* simplify complex *kinayah*, failing to reflect the sequential, nuanced depiction of sexual relations in the Qur'an—thus flattening the intended narrative arc.

❑ **Need for Glosses and Annotations to Preserve Meaning**

While the AQTS strategy prioritizes reverence and cultural sensitivity, supplementary tools like footnotes or contextual commentary are recommended to recover lost semantic richness and clarify connotative meanings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

❑ Euphemistic Preference and Its Consequences

AQTS prioritizes euphemism (90%) to maintain politeness, reflecting cultural norms (Ndhlovu & Botha, 2017), but overuse of generic terms like *campur* dilutes semantic depth and disrupts the Qur'an's lexical precision in sexual discourse.

❑ Loss of Kināyah's Semantic Layers

The relationship between denotative and connotative meaning—central to Qur'anic kināyah—is often obscured. Connotative renderings appear in only 20% of cases, compromising the interpretive richness of the original.

❑ Lack of Strategic Consistency

Inconsistent translation of identical Arabic terms across verses leads to confusion, particularly in legal or ritual contexts where semantic clarity is essential.

❑ Need for Balanced Translation Approaches

The minimal use of orthophemism (10%) and rare preservation of nuanced terms like *al-ṭamṣ* highlight the challenge of balancing politeness with precision. Future translations should apply strategies more consistently and include explanatory footnotes for dense cultural concepts (e.g., *al-rafats*).

CONCLUSION

❑ **Euphemistic Strategy vs. Lexical Richness**

The AQTS translation adopts euphemistic and neutral wording to maintain politeness, but this often comes at the cost of reducing the lexical and rhetorical richness found in the original Qur'anic kinayah expressions.

❑ **Obscured Connotative Meaning**

By generalizing stylistic sexual references, AQTS weakens the semantic bridge between denotation and connotation, potentially limiting readers' ability to grasp the intended communicative subtleties.

❑ **Need for Balanced Translation Approach**

Translators should strive for a careful balance between euphemism and lexical precision to preserve both the decorum and the semantic depth of the Qur'anic message.