



Beyond Literal Meaning: Translation Techniques and Functional Equivalence in the English Translation of Surah Al-Fatihah in the Mushaf Al Jamil

Adriansyah¹, Widya Syafitri¹, Veni Roza¹

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia

✉ Adriansyahbatar@gmail.com*

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Abstract

Quranic translation is a complex cross-linguistic and cross-cultural activity that must preserve theological content while retaining the rhetorical beauty of the source text. Surah Al-Fatihah, as the opening chapter recited repeatedly in prayer, poses particular challenges due to its dense meaning within a concise verse structure. This study aims to describe the translation techniques employed in the English translation of Surah Al-Fatihah in Mushaf Al Jamil, published by Cipta Bagus Segara, and to evaluate the extent of its functional equivalence to the Arabic source text. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis and contrastive analysis, drawing on Molina and Albir's (2002) translation technique typology and Nida's (1964) dynamic-functional equivalence together with Newmark's (1988) notion of functional equivalent. Data comprising the seven verses of the source and target texts were analyzed at the lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic-theological levels, then triangulated against two authoritative translations (Saheeh International and Abdel Haleem). The findings show that established equivalence (31.1%) and literal translation (24.4%) were the most dominant techniques, followed by transposition (15.6%), modulation (11.1%), amplification (8.9%), borrowing (4.4%), and reduction (4.4%). Overall, the translation in Mushaf Al Jamil achieves adequate functional equivalence: the referential and pragmatic-theological meanings of the source text are preserved despite grammatical shifts, supported by the paratextual apparatus of word-for-word translation, concise exegesis, and asbabun nuzul accompanying the mushaf. These findings reinforce the view that equivalence in sacred text translation is not necessarily formal but depends on the acceptability of the message to the target reader.

INTRODUCTION

The translation of religious texts, especially the Quran, occupies a unique position in translation studies because the source text is believed to be the miraculous kalam of Allah, so that any equivalent in the target language is always considered as

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an attempt to approach the meaning, not to replace the authority of the original text (Balla & Siddiek, 2017). This complexity is increasingly felt in Surah Al-Fatihah, the opening surah that must be read repeatedly in every rakaat of prayer, so that the theological density in its seven verses requires translators to balance fidelity to the Arabic structure and the acceptance of the message for English-speaking readers (Sukarno et al., 2020).

Various previous studies have examined translations of Surah Al-Fatihah from various versions of English translations, for example, the comparison between Saheeh International and Abdel Haleem which shows differences in translation ideologies in the form of a tendency to be oriented towards the source text and the target text (Sukarno et al., 2020). Other research highlights the complexity of translation at the word level due to differences in semantic structure between Arabic and English (Balla & Siddiek, 2017), as well as the strategy of translating cultural-religious elements in Quranic texts in general (AlZu'bi, 2021; Ayyad et al., 2021; Valipoor et al., 2019). On the other hand, studies on the application of translation techniques by Molina & Albir, (2002) to Arabic-Indonesian religious texts are also growing rapidly in the Indonesian academic environment, for example in the translation of classical books 'Afifah et al., (2024) and translated literary works (Rohmawati & Rahmawati, 2022).

However, research that specifically examines translation techniques and functional equivalence in Mushaf Al Jamil one of the mushaf published in Indonesia that is equipped with color tajwid, word-by-word translation, English translation, and asbabun nuzul is still very limited. In fact, this mushaf has distinctive paratextual characteristics and is widely used among English learners and Islamic education in Indonesia. This gap underlies the urgency of this research, which is to identify the translation techniques used in translating Surah Al-Fatihah into English in Mushaf Al Jamil, based on the direct documentation of the pages of the mushaf, and to evaluate the extent to which the translation achieves functional equivalence, both at the referential, textual, and pragmatic-theological levels.

Based on this description, this research is formulated into two research questions: i) what translation techniques are used in translating Surah Al-Fatihah into English in Mushaf Al Jamil? and ii) the extent to which the translation achieves functional correspondence to the Arabic source text? This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of translation of sacred texts in Indonesia, as well as a practical contribution for *mushaf* publishers and English teachers based on religious content.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a content analysis method combined with a contrastive analysis of the target texts (Anidar et al., 2026; Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2025, 2026; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Ikhlas et al., 2025; Salih, 2020). The primary data of the study is in the form of four-page documentation of Mushaf Al Jamil published by Segara, (2022) which contains Surah Al-Fatihah in its entirety, consisting of: i) Arabic text with colored tajwid, ii) Latin transliteration, iii) word-by-word translation in Indonesian and English, (iv) complete translation of verses, and v) summary tafsir and *asbabun nuzul* text boxes. This documentation is the basis for the identification of translation techniques and the evaluation of functional equivalence carried out in the research.

The unit of analysis in this study is a lingual unit in the form of words, phrases, and clauses in each verse, as presented in the translation column by word in the *mushaf*. Data was collected through documentation techniques by recording the equivalent of each lingual unit of the source text and the target text in pairs (bilingual parallel corpus) based on the layout of the documented *mushaf* page. Data analysis

was carried out through three stages: i) identification of translation techniques in each lingual unit based on the classification of (Molina & Albir, 2002); ii) the calculation of the frequency and percentage of occurrence of each technique to obtain an overview of general trends; and iii) evaluation of functional equivalence at the referential, textual, and pragmatic-theological levels by referring to the dynamic equivalence of Nida & Taber, (2024) and the functional equivalence of (Newmark, 1988). The validity of the data is strengthened through theoretical triangulation and repeated reading of the documentation of the *mushaf* page to ensure the consistency of the researcher's interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the documentation of the translation column per word on the page of Mushaf Al Jamil, 42 lingual units were identified in the seven verses of Surah Al-Fatihah. Table 1 presents most of these units along with the identified translation techniques.

Table 1. Word-for-Word Analysis and Translation Techniques on Mushaf Al Jamil

Verse	Arabic Text	Word-for-Word Translation (Indonesian/Literal)	English Translation (Mushaf Al Jamil)	Technique
1	بِسْمِ	<i>dengan menyebut nama/ by saying the name</i>	<i>in the name of</i>	Literal Translation
2	اللَّهُ	<i>Allah</i>	<i>Allah</i>	Borrowing
3	الرَّحْمَنِ	<i>Yang Maha Pengasih</i>	<i>the Most Gracious</i>	Common Matches
4	الرَّحِيمِ	<i>Maha Penyayang</i>	<i>the Most Merciful</i>	Common Matches
5	الْحَمْدُ	<i>segala puji</i>	<i>all praise</i>	Literal Translation
6	لِلَّهِ	<i>bagi Allah/for Allah</i>	<i>is due to Allah</i>	Transposition
7	رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ	<i>Tuhan seluruh alam/ the god of universe</i>	<i>the Lord of the worlds</i>	Transposition
8	مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ	<i>Pemilik hari pembalasan</i>	<i>Master of the Day of Judgment</i>	Literal Translation + transposition
9	إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ	<i>hanya kepada-Mu kami menyembah</i>	<i>You alone we worship</i>	Modulation
10	وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ	<i>hanya kepada-Mu kami memohon pertolongan</i>	<i>and You alone we ask for help</i>	Modulation
11	اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ	<i>tunjukilah kami jalan yang lurus</i>	<i>guide us to the straight path</i>	Amplification
12	صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ	<i>jalan orang-orang yang Engkau beri nikmat</i>	<i>the path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor</i>	Amplification + transposisi
13	غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ	<i>bukan jalan mereka yang</i>	<i>not of those who</i>	Reduksition +

Verse	Arabic Text	Word-for-Word Translation (Indonesian/Literal)	English Translation (Mushaf Al Jamil)	Technique
	عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ	<i>dimurkai dan bukan pula jalan mereka yang sesat</i>	<i>have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray</i>	modulation

Table 1 shows that in the first verse, the word **اللَّهُ** (Allah) is translated through borrowing techniques, retained without translation to maintain the sacredness of the content, in line with Alturki, (2021) findings regarding the translation of Allah's asthma. As for **الرَّحْمَنُ** and **الرَّحِيمُ** translate to the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful through the customary equivalents that have been established in the tradition of translating the Quran into English. In the second verse, the genitive phrase (*idafah*) **رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ** is transferred to the prepositional phrase the Lord of the worlds through the transposition technique, considering that the structure of the idafah in Arabic does not have a direct equivalent in English.

In the fifth verse, the clause **إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ** which in Arabic places the object (You) at the beginning of the clause for emphasis, is changed to You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help through the modulation technique, which is a change in grammatical viewpoint without changing the meaning of emphasis on the detection of worship. Meanwhile, in the sixth and seventh verses, the translator adds explanatory words such as to and of those through amplification techniques so that the logical relationships between the prayer phrases remain coherent in English, even though they are not entirely expressed in the Arabic text.

Translation Technique Distribution

A comprehensive recapitulation of the 42 lingual units shows seven translation techniques as presented in table 2.

Table 2. Translation Technique Distribution

Translation Techniques	f	%	Examples of findings on Mushaf Al Jamil
Common matches (Established Equivalence)	13	31,0%	<i>Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, the Day of Judgment</i>
Literal Translation	10	23,8%	<i>All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds</i>
Transposition	7	16,7%	<i>Arabic genitive structure (idafah) → English prepositional phrases</i>
Modulation	5	11,9%	<i>Shifting viewpoints in verses 6 and 7</i>
Amplification	4	9,5%	<i>Addition of explanatory words to verses 7</i>
Borrowing	2	4,8%	<i>Allah id defended without translation</i>
Reduction	1	2,4%	<i>Affirming particles are not explicitly diverted</i>

Table 2 shows that the established equivalence technique is the most dominant technique (31.0%), mainly used to transfer sacred terms that already have a standard equivalent in the tradition of translating the Quran into English. Literal translation techniques (23.8%) are widely used in sentence structures that have syntactic parallels between Arabic and English, such as in the second verse. Transposition (16.7%) and modulation (11.9%) were used to overcome differences in grammatical structure and point of view, especially in the fifth to seventh verses in the form of supplication (prayer), while amplification (9.5%) was used to maintain the coherence of the discourse at the conclusion of the surah.

The Role of Paratextual Apparatus in Supporting Functional Equity

One of the important findings of this study is that functional equivalence in Mushaf Al Jamil is not solely built through complete translated texts, but is also supported by paratextual apparatus in the form of translation columns per word and *asbabun nuzul* caption boxes that accompany the pages of the *mushaf*. The per-word translation column allows readers to search the equivalence of each lexical element transparently, so that the potential for loss of meaning due to transposition techniques and modulation at the sentence level can be compensated at the word level. The description of *asbabun nuzul* and the concise interpretation also provide a pragmatic-theological context that cannot be fully represented by a single translated text, in line with Nord, (2018) view that the success of the translation of the text functions ritually depends on the entire communicative apparatus that accompanies it, not just on the unit of sentence that is translated.

In general, these findings reinforce the argument of Balla & Siddiek, (2017) that the translation of the Quran cannot completely avoid complexity at the word level, but that complexity can be mitigated through a combination of appropriate translation techniques and the support of paratextual apparatus such as those found in the Mushaf Al Jamil. This finding is also relevant to the research of Ayyad et al., (2021); Valipoor et al., (2019) who emphasized that the strategy of translating cultural-religious elements needs to consider the acceptance of the target reader without removing the original theological content, and is consistent with the findings of Sukarno et al., (2020) that Al-Fatihah translators tend to combine the orientation of the source text and the target text selectively according to the communicative needs of each verse.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the translation of Surah Al-Fatihah into English in Mushaf Al Jamil is dominated by prevalent equivalent techniques and literal translation, followed by transposition, modulation, amplification, borrowing, and reduction. The combination of these techniques suggests that the translator seeks to balance fidelity to the structure of the source text with the acceptance of the message for the target reader. Overall, this translation has succeeded in achieving adequate functional equivalence at the referential, textual, and pragmatic-theological levels, which is also supported by the paratextual apparatus in the form of word-by-word translations and *asbabun nuzul* that accompany the *mushaf*. This study has limitations because it only focuses on one surah and one edition of the *mushaf* based on four pages of documentation, so the generalization of the findings needs to be done carefully. Further research is suggested to expand the scope of data on other surahs or different editions of the Indonesian translation *mushaf*, as well as to combine textual analysis with reader-response studies to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of functional equivalence in the translation of Quranic texts.

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