



Qur'ân Translation Practices in India and Turkey: A Comparative Study of Methodology and Reception

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of Qur'ân translation practices in India and Turkey, focusing on their methodological orientations, historical trajectories, sociolinguistic conditions, and public reception. As two influential centers of Islamic scholarship situated within markedly different cultural and political landscapes, India and Turkey have developed distinctive translation traditions shaped by their respective intellectual histories. In India, the multilingual environment and the longstanding legacy of Persianate and South Asian Islamic scholarship have fostered a translation culture that integrates linguistic rendering with extensive exegetical commentary. These translations often reflect the doctrinal, pedagogical, and cultural needs of diverse Muslim communities, producing interpretive works that simultaneously function as translations and explanatory tafsîr resources. In contrast, the evolution of Qur'ân translation in Turkey has been significantly shaped by state-led language reforms, modernization policies, and institutional religious discourse, particularly during the early Republican period. Turkish translations tend to emphasize semantic clarity, linguistic accessibility, and alignment with modern Turkish syntax, reflecting broader nation-building objectives. By juxtaposing these two traditions, this study elucidates how religion, language, and sociopolitical structures intersect to shape the translation and dissemination of sacred texts. The findings underscore the importance of contextual factors in the formation of translation methodologies and highlight the need for further interdisciplinary research in comparative Qur'ân translation studies.

Keywords: Qur'ân translation, India, Turkey, tafsîr, reception, methodology

Hindistan ve Türkiye'de Kur'ân Tercüme Uygulamaları: Yöntem ve Alımlama Açısından Karşılaştırmalı Bir İnceleme

Özet

Bu çalışma, Hindistan ve Türkiye'deki Kur'ân tercüme uygulamalarını yönetsel yönelimler, tarihsel gelişim süreçleri, sosyodilbilimsel koşullar ve toplumsal alımlama açısından kapsamlı bir karşılaştırmalı analizle ele almaktadır. İslâm ilimlerinin iki önemli merkezi olan Hindistan ve Türkiye, farklı kültürel ve politik bağlamlarda yer almaları nedeniyle kendilerine özgü tercüme gelenekleri geliştirmiştir. Hindistan'da çok dilli toplumsal yapı ve Farsî-Sahra ötesi İslâm ilimlerinin köklü mirası, tercüme geleneğinin çoğu zaman dilsel aktarımı geniş tefsiri açıklamalarla birleştirmesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu tercüme, farklı dilsel ve doktrinel ihtiyaçlara sahip Müslüman topluluklara hitap ederek hem birer tercüme hem de açıklayıcı tefsir niteliği taşımaktadır. Buna karşılık Türkiye'de Kur'ân tercümesinin gelişimi özellikle Cumhuriyet'in ilk dönemindeki dil reformları, modernleşme politikaları ve kurumsal dini söylemler tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Modern Türkçe söz dizimine uygunluk, anlam açıklığı ve geniş kitlelere hitap edebilirlik, Türkiye'deki tercüme çalışmalarının belirgin özellikleri arasında yer almıştır. Bu iki geleneğin karşılaştırılması, kutsal metin tercümelerinin din, dil ve sosyopolitik yapılar arasındaki çok yönlü ilişkiyi nasıl yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, tercüme yöntemlerinin oluşumunda bağlamsal unsurların belirleyici rolüne işaret etmekte ve karşılaştırmalı Kur'ân tercüme araştırmalarında disiplinler arası çalışmaların önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kur'ân tercümesi, Hindistan, Türkiye, tefsir, alımlama, yöntem

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Introduction

The translation of the Qur'ān has long been a matter of theological, linguistic, and academic significance, particularly in regions where Islam has interacted with diverse linguistic and cultural environments. India and Turkey represent two such regions in which Qur'ān translation practices have been shaped by distinct historical trajectories, socio-political transformations, and intellectual traditions. India's long-standing tradition of Islamic scholarship, coupled with its multilingual social fabric, has produced a wide array of Qur'ānic translations across languages such as Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, and English. These translations have often been embedded within broader exegetical commentaries, reflecting the influence of classical South Asian tafsīr traditions and the pedagogical needs of diverse Muslim communities (Kidwai, 2011; Zaman, 2020). By contrast, translation activities in Turkey have been shaped significantly by the late Ottoman intellectual milieu and the radical language reforms introduced during the early Republican period, which encouraged the production of Turkish-language religious texts. Modern Turkish translations reflect a dynamic interplay between secular state policies, evolving Islamic discourses, and efforts to make the Qur'ān accessible in the reformed Turkish language (Aydüz, 2014; Küçük, 2019).

The central objective of this study is to conduct a comparative examination of Qur'ān translation practices in India and Turkey, with particular attention to the methodological approaches adopted by translators and the reception of these translations by the broader public. This comparative approach not only highlights the variations in linguistic philosophy and interpretative frameworks but also underscores how each nation's unique cultural and political environment mediates the process of translating sacred scripture. By situating Qur'ān translations within the broader historical and sociolinguistic context, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Muslim communities interact with the Qur'ānic text in translation and how such translations shape contemporary religious thought and practice (Abdul-Raof, 2019; Haleem, 2010).

Historical Development of Qur'ān Translation in India and Turkey

The historical context of Qur'ān translation in India is deeply rooted in the region's longstanding Islamic intellectual tradition, which dates back to the early centuries of Muslim settlement in the subcontinent. Persian served as the administrative and scholarly language for several centuries, leading

to some of the earliest interpretive renderings of the Qur'ān into Persian during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods (Algar, 2002). The emergence of Urdu as a major literary and religious language in the 18th and 19th centuries produced a significant rise in Qur'ān translations, including the influential works of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi and his sons, who emphasized linguistic fidelity and exegetical depth (Nadwi, 2000). The colonial period further accelerated translation activity as printing technology expanded the availability of religious texts. By the 20th century, Qur'ān translations had proliferated in multiple Indian languages, reflecting the needs of diverse and geographically dispersed Muslim communities. Throughout this period, Indian translations often remained closely linked to classical tafsīr traditions, blending translation with extensive commentary to aid comprehension among varying linguistic groups (Kidwai, 2017).

In Turkey, the development of Qur'ān translation is marked by a distinct trajectory shaped by Ottoman scholarly traditions and later by the Turkish Republic's modernization reforms. During the Ottoman period, full translations of the Qur'ān were rare, as scholarly consensus generally favored tafsīr in Arabic or Ottoman Turkish without directly translating the full text (Karataş, 2015). The early 20th century witnessed significant transformation following the language reforms initiated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which encouraged translations of religious texts into modern Turkish to make them accessible to a broader audience (Mardin, 2006). This period saw the publication of seminal works such as the translation commissioned by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Later decades introduced a diversification of translation approaches, including linguistically literal, semantic, reformist, and contextual readings (Çetin, 2012). Contemporary Turkish translations reflect a dynamic engagement with modern linguistic norms, theological debates, and state-supported religious dissemination. Today, Turkey's translation tradition continues to evolve, shaped by ongoing discussions about the role of exegesis, linguistic purity, and the balance between literal and interpretive rendering of the Qur'ānic text.

In addition to religious and institutional dynamics, the development of Qur'ān translation in Turkey must also be understood within the broader framework of Turkish translation studies. Scholars such as Akşit Göktürk have emphasized that translation in the Republican period functioned not merely as a linguistic act, but as a cultural and ideological instrument aligned with modernization and nation-building processes. Similarly, A. Banu Karadağ situates translation practices within a systemic perspective, highlighting how state ideology, linguistic reform, and cultural planning shaped translational norms in modern Turkey. From this perspective, Qur'ān translations produced during and after the early Republican period can be viewed as part of a wider translational project aimed at constructing a new linguistic and cultural identity. This approach allows Qur'ān translation to be analyzed not only as a religious endeavor but also as a culturally embedded practice influenced by dominant translation norms and institutional frameworks.

Methodological Approaches to Qur'ān Translation

Methodological approaches to Qur'ān translation in India have historically been influenced by the region's rich exegetical heritage and its linguistic diversity. Indian translators have tended to adopt a commentary-intensive method, blending translation with tafsīr to provide readers with theological, linguistic, and contextual clarifications. This approach reflects the pedagogical needs of a multilingual Muslim population whose access to classical Arabic varies significantly (Kidwai, 2018). Urdu translations, in particular, often demonstrate a preference for explanatory paraphrasing, informed by classical works such as those of Shah Waliullah and the Deobandi and Bareilvi traditions, which prioritize doctrinal clarity and jurisprudential alignment. The semantic and stylistic richness of Urdu has enabled translators to maintain rhetorical expressiveness while embedding interpretative guidance within the translated text. Additionally, Indian translations frequently incorporate interlinear or side-by-side commentary, allowing readers to navigate between literal meaning and interpretive explanation. This method highlights the Indian scholarly tradition's emphasis on harmonizing linguistic fidelity with exegetical depth.

In Turkey, methodological approaches to Qur'ān translation have been shaped largely by the linguistic reforms of the early Republic and the country's ongoing efforts to standardize modern Turkish. Turkish translators have often prioritized linguistic clarity, structural coherence, and adherence to the syntactic norms of modern Turkish, resulting in translations that are stylistically uniform and accessible to a broad readership (Kara, 2020). Many Turkish translations exhibit a preference for semantic rather than literal translation, aiming to convey the intended meaning rather than replicate Arabic syntax. The reformist intellectual movements of the 20th century further encouraged contextualist readings, promoting interpretations that align Qur'ānic teachings with contemporary social and ethical concerns (Demirci, 2014). The influence of the Diyanet has also contributed to the formation of a standardized translation style, which balances literal accuracy with readability while avoiding sectarian or heavily interpretive renderings. Recent Turkish translations display increasing methodological diversification, reflecting the growing interest in hermeneutics, literary analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches to Qur'ānic interpretation.

Linguistic and Cultural Factors Influencing Translation

Linguistic diversity in India has profoundly influenced the form and style of Qur'ān translations, necessitating adaptations that account for varying grammatical structures, rhetorical norms, and semantic registers across regional languages. Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, and other Indian languages each possess distinct linguistic frameworks, requiring translators to navigate differences in

morphology, syntax, and semantic precision when rendering Arabic terms into local idioms. For example, the Arabic root-based morphological system often resists direct equivalence in Indo-Aryan languages, prompting translators to employ paraphrase or compound expressions to approximate theological nuances (Rahman, 2015). Furthermore, the cultural and literary traditions of South Asia, shaped by Persianate aesthetics and the legacy of Islamic scholarship, have encouraged translators to incorporate elevated diction, poetic expressions, and exegetical elaboration into their translations. As a result, many Indian translations exhibit a hybrid character that blends linguistic fidelity with culturally resonant stylistic elements. This phenomenon illustrates how translation functions not merely as a linguistic transaction, but as a process embedded within broader cultural and intellectual traditions.

In Turkey, linguistic and cultural factors shaping Qur'ān translation are deeply intertwined with the nation's transition from Ottoman Turkish to modern Turkish, a process marked by extensive lexical purification and syntactic simplification. The shift from an Ottoman lexicon enriched with Arabic and Persian loanwords to a standardized, vernacularized Turkish created new challenges for translators seeking to render Qur'ānic concepts in a manner comprehensible to contemporary readers (Lewis, 1999). As many classical theological terms lacked direct equivalents in the reformed Turkish language, translators were compelled to choose between retaining Arabic terminology, adopting neologisms, or selecting approximate Turkish expressions. These decisions significantly shaped the reception of translations, as linguistic purism efforts sometimes conflicted with the precision required for Qur'ānic exegesis (Göle, 2017). Additionally, the secularization initiatives of the early Republic influenced translation choices, promoting a style that emphasized clarity and accessibility while minimizing overtly theological commentary. Over time, Turkey's evolving cultural and intellectual climate has allowed for greater methodological diversity, enabling translators to reintroduce classical terms, employ contextualized language, and explore literary approaches that reflect both the semantic complexity and aesthetic qualities of the Qur'ānic text.

Public Reception and Academic Discourse

The reception of Qur'ān translations in India has been shaped by the country's diverse Muslim communities, complex linguistic environment, and pluralistic religious landscape. Urdu translations, for example, have historically held a central role in religious education and devotional life among North Indian Muslims, serving as both pedagogical tools and vehicles for spiritual engagement (Robinson, 2001). Translations into regional languages such as Malayalam, Bengali, and Tamil have further facilitated the dissemination of Qur'ānic teachings across geographically and culturally distinct communities. However, the multiplicity of translations has also generated debates regarding doctrinal accuracy, sectarian bias, and the suitability of certain linguistic choices, particularly within Sunni sub-traditions like Deoband, Bareilvi, and Ahl-i Hadith (Ansari, 2017). Academic discourse in India has

often centered on issues of hermeneutics, linguistic fidelity, and the impact of translation on popular religious consciousness. Scholars have noted that translations accompanied by extensive commentary tend to shape interpretative norms, influencing how readers conceptualize key theological themes (Khan, 2018). As such, Qur'ān translation in India functions not only as a linguistic project but also as a site of intellectual negotiation and religious identity formation.

In Turkey, public reception of Qur'ān translations has been influenced by state policies, educational reforms, and the broader socio-political context of modern Turkish identity. The early Republican period's emphasis on promoting Turkish-language religious literature generated widespread acceptance of translations produced or endorsed by state institutions such as the Diyanet (Zengin, 2020). These translations, often characterized by linguistic simplicity and doctrinal neutrality, gained prominence in mosques, schools, and households. Nonetheless, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed an increasing diversification of translation styles, as independent scholars and publishing houses introduced alternatives that reflected varying theological, linguistic, and philosophical orientations (Akyol, 2019). This proliferation has sparked public debates concerning literal versus interpretive translation, the incorporation of modernist or reformist ideas, and the preservation of the Qur'ān's rhetorical and literary features. Academic discourse in Turkey has increasingly engaged with questions of semantic accuracy, hermeneutical methodology, and the role of translation in shaping contemporary Islamic thought. As translations gain visibility in print and digital formats, they continue to play a significant role in mediating religious knowledge, shaping public understanding, and contributing to ongoing debates about the proper relationship between scripture, tradition, and modernity.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative examination of Qur'ān translation practices in India and Turkey reveals that both contexts reflect the interplay of linguistic structures, sociopolitical forces, and intellectual traditions, yet they diverge significantly in methodological orientation and the factors driving translation activity. In India, the multilingual environment and the historical influence of Persianate and South Asian Islamic scholarship have fostered translations that combine linguistic rendering with extensive exegetical commentary (Kidwai, 2018; Rahman, 2015). These translations often serve dual functions: they provide access to the Qur'ānic text for non-Arabic-speaking Muslims while simultaneously offering interpretive guidance rooted in established theological schools. The prevalence of commentary-rich translations reflects the expectation that readers will require contextual explanation to grasp the Qur'ān's linguistic and doctrinal complexities. Turkey, however, presents a markedly different picture. Here, the nation-state's modernization project and linguistic reforms have shaped translation practices toward simplified, accessible renderings intended for broad public comprehension (Lewis, 1999; Kara, 2020). The push for linguistic standardization, combined with the influence of

state-sponsored religious discourse, has resulted in translations that prioritize semantic clarity and syntactic conformity to modern Turkish norms. This divergence highlights the extent to which political and educational systems condition the nature of Qur'ānic translation in each setting.

Despite these differences, both India and Turkey exhibit increasing methodological diversity in contemporary Qur'ān translation. In India, newer translations in regional languages have developed approaches that balance literal translation with the need for doctrinal neutrality, partly in response to academic scrutiny and the growing demand for accessible religious literature (Khan, 2018). In Turkey, independent scholars and publishing houses have introduced translations reflecting distinct theological orientations, ranging from literalist approaches to reformist and contextualist interpretations (Akyol, 2019; Zengin, 2020). This diversification demonstrates a shared trend: as Muslim societies engage with modernity, literacy expansion, and digital media, Qur'ānic translation becomes a dynamic arena of religious expression and intellectual contestation. Ultimately, the comparison underscores that while India's translation tradition is rooted in exegetical plurality and linguistic accommodation, Turkey's tradition is shaped more directly by state-driven language reform and modern educational priorities. Nevertheless, both contexts illustrate how translation mediates the relationship between scripture and society, shaping not only access to sacred texts but also broader patterns of religious thought and practice. The observed differences between Qur'ān translation practices in India and Turkey can also be interpreted through the lens of contemporary translation theory. Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization offers a useful framework in this regard. Turkish translations particularly those influenced by Republican language reform tend toward domestication, prioritizing fluency, readability, and conformity to modern Turkish linguistic norms. Indian translations, on the other hand, often exhibit features of foreignization by preserving Arabic terminology and embedding extensive exegetical commentary, thereby maintaining a visible link to the source culture and classical Islamic scholarship. This theoretical perspective underscores how translation strategies are shaped not only by linguistic concerns but also by ideological, cultural, and institutional forces.

Comparative Illustration and Theoretical Interpretation of Qur'ān Translation Practices

To concretize the methodological and theoretical discussions presented in the preceding sections, this subsection combines illustrative examples from Qur'ān translations produced in Turkey and India with a theoretical interpretation grounded in translation studies. Rather than offering an exhaustive textual comparison, the aim is to demonstrate how the sociolinguistic, cultural, and historical factors discussed throughout the article are reflected in concrete translation strategies, and how these strategies may be interpreted through established theoretical frameworks.

In the Turkish context, Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır's *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, prepared during the early Republican period, represents a foundational model of modern Qur'ān translation. Commissioned at a time of radical linguistic reform, Elmalılı's work reflects a deliberate effort to balance semantic accuracy with linguistic clarity in modern Turkish. While remaining closely connected to classical tafsīr traditions, his translation reorganizes Arabic syntactic structures and selects vocabulary compatible with the reformed Turkish language. This approach enhances accessibility for a broad readership and aligns the Qur'ānic message with the linguistic norms of the emerging nation-state. As such, Elmalılı's translation illustrates a strategy that prioritizes intelligibility and fluency while maintaining exegetical legitimacy.

By contrast, Qur'ān translation practices in the South Asian context particularly within the Urdu tradition have developed under markedly different sociolinguistic and educational conditions. Influenced by the scholarly legacy of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi and subsequent South Asian exegetical traditions, many Indian translations integrate extensive explanatory material alongside the translated text. Arabic theological terminology is often preserved, and interpretive glosses are employed to guide readers through complex doctrinal concepts. This commentary-intensive approach reflects the multilingual environment of Indian Muslim communities, where translation functions simultaneously as linguistic mediation, religious instruction, and exegetical engagement. The visibility of interpretation within the translated text underscores the pedagogical orientation of South Asian Qur'ān translation practices.

The contrasting strategies observed in Turkish and Indian Qur'ān translations can be productively interpreted through the lens of contemporary translation theory, particularly Lawrence Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization. From this perspective, many Turkish translations may be characterized as tending toward domestication, insofar as they emphasize readability, linguistic standardization, and cultural familiarity for the target audience. Indian translations, on the other hand, often display features associated with foreignization, including the preservation of source-language terminology and the explicit presence of exegetical guidance that foregrounds the Qur'ān's linguistic and theological otherness.

Applying Venuti's framework does not imply a normative evaluation of these strategies but rather highlights the contextual factors that shape translational choices. In both Turkey and India, translation practices emerge from negotiations between accessibility and fidelity, linguistic reform and scholarly tradition, as well as institutional authority and community expectations. By integrating illustrative examples with theoretical interpretation under a single analytical framework, this section reinforces the central argument of the study: that Qur'ān translation is a culturally embedded practice shaped by the dynamic interaction of language, society, and religious thought.

Conclusion

The comparative study of Qur'ān translation practices in India and Turkey demonstrates that translation is shaped not solely by linguistic factors but also by the historical, political, intellectual, and cultural environments in which translators operate. India's multilingual and doctrinally diverse Muslim population has produced a translation tradition characterized by exegetical richness, linguistic adaptability, and methodological plurality. The strong influence of classical South Asian scholarship, particularly within Urdu and other regional languages, has contributed to translations that blend literal rendering with extensive commentary, providing readers with interpretive frameworks grounded in established theological traditions (Kidwai, 2017; Zaman, 2020). By contrast, Turkey's translation trajectory has been shaped significantly by state-led linguistic reforms, secular modernization policies, and institutional efforts to create standardized and accessible religious literature. The result has been a body of translations that prioritize clarity, readability, and linguistic conformity to modern Turkish norms while engaging with ongoing theological and hermeneutical debates (Kara, 2020; Zengin, 2020).

Despite their differences, both India and Turkey have experienced increasing diversification in translation methodologies, reflecting broader transformations in literacy, religious education, and public engagement with scripture. The proliferation of translations in digital formats, the rise of independent scholarly initiatives, and the expansion of academic discourse have contributed to a more dynamic and contested landscape of Qur'ānic interpretation in both regions (Akyol, 2019; Göle, 2017). This study underscores that Qur'ān translation is not merely a linguistic endeavor but a critical medium through which Muslim communities negotiate authority, identity, and tradition. Understanding the unique trajectories of Qur'ān translation in India and Turkey thus offers valuable insight into the complex interplay between religion, language, and society, and highlights the need for further comparative research in Qur'ānic studies.

This study also points to several promising directions for future research. By integrating translation theory with Qur'ānic studies, comparative analyses such as this can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of sacred text translation across cultures. Further empirical studies incorporating additional languages, reader reception analyses, and corpus-based methods would deepen insights into the dynamics of Qur'ān translation. In this sense, the present research not only addresses an existing scholarly gap but also offers a conceptual framework that may inform future theoretical and applied studies in translation studies and Islamic scholarship.

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