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The Linguistic Problems in Indonesian–Arabic Translation among Postgraduate Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the linguistic difficulties encountered by postgraduate students at Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur in translating from Indonesian into Arabic and examines factors associated with these difficulties. It employs a descriptive mixed-methods approach involving 60 first-semester postgraduate students from four cohorts (2022–2025). Data were collected through written translation tests comprising ten short texts relevant to the participants' academic backgrounds and semi-structured interviews. Participants translated manually, with dictionaries permitted but machine translation and AI-based applications prohibited. Errors were identified, classified, and quantified across four linguistic domains, while interview responses were analyzed descriptively to contextualize participants' reported difficulties. The findings indicate recurring problems in morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexical selection. Morphological errors involved verb conjugation (30%), plural formation (25%), and ʿadad–maʿdūd constructions (20%). Syntactic difficulties concerned *jumlah ismiyyah and jumlah fiʿliyyah* (50%), naʿt–manʿūt agreement (50%), and iḍāfah constructions (60%). Semantic problems included difficulty selecting conventional equivalents (40%) and literal translation resulting in rigid or non-idiomatic sentence structures (60%). In the lexical domain, 60% of participants produced unnatural equivalents, while an equal proportion struggled to select contextually appropriate vocabulary. These patterns indicate that translation difficulties extend beyond grammatical form to meaning interpretation and the use of conventional Arabic expressions. Interview findings identified three factors reported by participants:

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negative transfer from Indonesian, challenges in applying Arabic grammatical rules, and limited experience in Indonesian–Arabic translation. The study highlights the need for instruction addressing the identified errors through targeted exercises in grammatical construction, contextual lexical selection, and idiomatic expression. It also recommends systematic corrective feedback and more opportunities to translate academic content into Arabic. The findings provide a context-specific account of Indonesian–Arabic translation difficulties among postgraduate students and a basis for developing instructional responses for subsequent evaluation in classroom-based research. The analysis offers a reference for diagnosing similar errors in postgraduate translation courses.

Keywords: Indonesian–Arabic translation; linguistic problems; postgraduate students

Introduction

Translation is a fundamental skill in both language studies and Islamic scholarship, serving as a vital bridge between texts and cross-cultural understanding. It involves far more than transferring words from a source language into a target language; it also requires sensitivity to semantic meaning, grammatical structure, cultural nuances, and the historical and ideological contexts in which a text is embedded. In the context of Indonesian–Arabic translation, these linguistic challenges become increasingly complex due to the substantial typological differences between the two languages, while the demand for preserving semantic equivalence with the highest degree of accuracy and scholarly responsibility remains paramount.

Within Indonesia's academic tradition, translation from Arabic into Indonesian has received considerably greater emphasis, largely because the majority of Islamic scholarly literature is written in Arabic (Sobari, 2018). Consequently, students are accustomed to understanding Arabic texts through Indonesian translation (Amalia et al., 2022; Anis, 2023). By contrast, the reverse skill --translating from Indonesian into Arabic-- has received relatively limited attention (Pink, 2020; Qassem & Thowaini, 2023). Yet this competence is equally indispensable, especially for postgraduate students who are expected to produce academic papers, publish scholarly articles, and engage in academic communication in Arabic.

Translation between Indonesian and Arabic presents distinctive challenges because of the substantial typological differences between the two languages. Arabic is characterized by a rich morphological system, complex inflectional patterns, and a highly regulated syntactic structure governed by the rules of *iʿrāb* (grammatical case marking). The form of virtually every Arabic word may change according to its grammatical function within a sentence. Indonesian, by contrast, is an analytic language with minimal inflection, relying

primarily on word order and grammatical particles to express syntactic relations (Abu-Rabia, 2021; Kholisin et al., 2020; Ouardi & Faroqi-Shah, 2025).

These typological differences create significant challenges in translation, particularly when translating from Indonesian into Arabic. Even postgraduate students with formal training in Arabic frequently encounter difficulties when asked to render Indonesian texts into Arabic (Yunaldi et al., 2025). One contributing factor is that their previous instruction has generally emphasized translation from Arabic into Indonesian rather than the reverse direction (Ilham et al., 2022). As a result, Indonesian–Arabic translation represents a comparatively unfamiliar task that demands a higher level of precision across multiple linguistic domains, including morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexical selection.

One of the primary challenges lies in morphology. Arabic employs a derivational system (*ishtiqāq*) that generates a wide range of lexical forms from a single triliteral root through established morphological patterns. For example, the root *k–t–b* gives rise to forms such as *kataba* ("to write"), *kitāb* ("book"), *maktab* ("office"), and *maktūb* ("written") (Al-Sughaiyer & Al-Kharashi, 2004; Maesaroh et al., 2026). This derivational system is highly productive and constitutes a defining feature of Arabic vocabulary formation. Indonesian, in contrast, relies on a comparatively simpler system of affixation involving prefixes, infixes, suffixes, and circumfixes (Murefit et al., 2025). Consequently, when translating Indonesian lexical items into Arabic, students often struggle to identify the most appropriate derived form, since each communicative context requires a specific morphological pattern.

Syntactic differences present another major challenge. Indonesian permits relatively flexible sentence structures. For instance, the sentence *Buku itu sudah saya baca* ("I have already read that book") can be reformulated as *Saya sudah membaca buku itu* without altering its essential meaning. Arabic, however, is far more sensitive to word order, as syntactic arrangement directly influences grammatical relationships and, in some cases, semantic interpretation. Arabic distinguishes between *jumlah ismiyyah* (nominal sentences) and *jumlah fiʿliyyah* (verbal sentences), each governed by well-defined rules concerning the relationship between the subject, predicate, and object. An inappropriate arrangement of sentence constituents may result in altered meaning or even render the sentence grammatically unacceptable (Assaiqeli et al., 2021; Huang & Phillips, 2021).

Semantic differences further complicate the translation process. Many Indonesian lexical items are polysemous and derive their intended meaning primarily from context (Pratiwi & Setiawan, 2022). For example, the word *kepala* may refer to a body part, the head of an institution, or the front or upper part of an object (Pusat Bahasa, n.d.). In Arabic, these distinct meanings are generally

expressed through different lexical items, such as *raʾs* for the anatomical head and *mudīr* for the head or director of an institution (Munawwir, n.d.). Students who are insufficiently familiar with these semantic distinctions frequently select Arabic equivalents that are contextually inappropriate, thereby compromising the accuracy and intended meaning of the translated text.

The lexical dimension is equally critical. Translation does not merely involve transferring words from one language to another; it also requires the selection of contextually appropriate equivalents (Hermawan, 2026). The use of words, phrases, and sentences in Indonesian and Arabic differs considerably because each language is embedded within distinct social and cultural contexts. Consequently, translating from Indonesian into Arabic, or vice versa, inevitably entails a process of cross-cultural mediation that must be carefully considered to ensure that the intended message of the source text is conveyed comprehensively to the target audience. As emphasized by Nida, establishing translation equivalence requires profound linguistic and cultural understanding, since cross-cultural differences may lead to semantic distortion (Nida, 1964). In this regard, the selection of lexical equivalents is directly related to the preservation of semantic accuracy.

Through repeated observation, it has been established that within the academic environment of Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur, this phenomenon constitutes a particularly significant area of scholarly inquiry. Although postgraduate students generally possess a solid foundation in Arabic, a considerable number continue to encounter substantial challenges when translating from Indonesian into Arabic. This suggests the existence of a pedagogical gap, as translation instruction has predominantly emphasized Arabic-to-Indonesian translation. Repeated classroom observations and preliminary examination of students' Indonesian–Arabic translation exercises at Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur provide a basis for investigating the specific linguistic difficulties encountered by postgraduate students. Rather than treating translation problems as a general weakness in Arabic proficiency, this study focuses on identifiable linguistic units at the morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical levels. These include verb conjugation and subject–verb agreement, plural formation, *ʿadad–maʿdūd* constructions, the formation of *jumlah ismiyyah* and *jumlah fiʿliyyah*, *naʿt–manʿūt* agreement, *iḍāfah* constructions, contextual lexical selection, and the production of idiomatic Arabic expressions. These features are particularly relevant to Indonesian–Arabic translation because differences between the grammatical systems of Indonesian and Arabic require translators to restructure meaning rather than transfer Indonesian forms directly into Arabic.

Several previous studies have examined Indonesian–Arabic translation from different perspectives. First, Istiqomah *et al.* investigated translation

strategies and their influence on translation quality in *Strategi Penerjemahan Bahasa Indonesia–Arab terhadap Kualitas Penerjemahan* (Istiqomah et al., 2025). Their study focused on the translation strategies employed in Indonesian-to-Arabic translation and their impact on translation quality. Second, Azwir, in *Lexical Problems in Indonesian-Arabic Translation at the Undergraduate Arabic Department*, identified lexical equivalence problems encountered in Indonesian–Arabic translation (Azwir, 2023). Third, Sujefri *et al.* analyzed syntactic errors produced by *Google Translate* in translating Indonesian texts into Arabic in *Analisis Sintaksis Kesalahan Penerjemahan Teks Bahasa Indonesia ke Bahasa Arab Melalui Google Translate* (Sujefri et al., 2022). Fourth, Mukminin *et al.* explored lexical interpretation strategies and the cultural ideology embedded in the translation of Indonesian culinary terminology into Arabic in *Strategy and Quality of Translation of Nusantara Culinary Terms from Indonesian into Arabic* (Mukminin et al., 2022).

Collectively, these studies have concentrated on translation strategies and equivalence techniques, morphological and syntactic errors generated by the automated translation system *Google Translate*, and the translation of culturally and ideologically loaded culinary vocabulary. Although these investigations contribute to understanding Indonesian–Arabic translation, their primary focus does not fully explain how learners integrate multiple linguistic resources when producing academic Arabic. At the postgraduate level, academic writing requires the simultaneous coordination of morphological accuracy, syntactic coherence, semantic precision, and contextually appropriate lexical selection to convey complex arguments clearly and accurately. Weakness in any one of these domains may compromise not only grammatical correctness but also the clarity, precision, and academic credibility of the resulting text. This integrated demand distinguishes the present study from research focusing primarily on translation strategies or machine-generated errors, as it examines the specific linguistic difficulties postgraduate students encounter across all four domains. Accordingly, the present study addresses this research gap through a systematic analysis of morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical difficulties in Indonesian–Arabic translation among postgraduate students.

Against this background, the present study seeks to map the linguistic difficulties encountered by postgraduate students in Indonesian–Arabic translation. Such a mapping is expected to provide a clearer understanding of which linguistic domains constitute the primary sources of translation errors, whether morphology, syntax, semantics, or lexical choice. The findings are anticipated to offer valuable pedagogical insights for curriculum development, instructional design, and the development of more effective teaching resources, thereby enhancing the quality of Indonesian–Arabic translation instruction at the postgraduate level.

Based on the foregoing background, this study aims to identify and classify the linguistic difficulties encountered by postgraduate students at Institut

Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur in translating from Indonesian into Arabic, with particular attention to their mastery of grammatical rules, including verb conjugation, plural formation, *ʿadad–maʿdūd* constructions, sentence structure, *naʿt–manʿūt* agreement, and *iḍāfah* constructions. It also examines semantic and lexical difficulties and explores the factors associated with these translation errors, particularly first-language interference, limited mastery of Arabic grammatical rules, and insufficient experience in Indonesian–Arabic translation, as reported by the participants.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is expected to enrich the field of Indonesian–Arabic translation studies by providing empirical evidence drawn from the experiences of postgraduate students. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to inform the evaluation and development of translation pedagogy, including curriculum design, instructional methods, and learning resources, thereby enabling students to develop more balanced competencies in bidirectional translation.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. Descriptive research, in turn, seeks to present phenomena in a factual and objective manner. According to Duloc, its primary objective is to provide a systematic and accurate description of the characteristics of a phenomenon, population, or field of inquiry without manipulating the variables under investigation (Dulock, 1993).

The selection of this research design is consistent with the primary objective of the study, namely, to explore and describe the linguistic problems experienced by postgraduate students during the translation of Indonesian texts into Arabic. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate because the study emphasizes an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon rather than quantitative measurement. A detailed description of the linguistic errors produced by the participants is expected to provide a comprehensive account of the patterns, underlying causes, and pedagogical implications of the translation difficulties they encounter.

The study was conducted at the postgraduate program in Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* [PAI]) at Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur. The participants consisted of 60 first-semester postgraduate students drawn from four different cohorts. Specifically, the sample included 18 students from the 2022 cohort (data collected in September 2022), 15 students from the 2023 cohort (September 2023), 17 students from the 2024 cohort (September 2024), and 10 students from the 2025 cohort (September 2025).

First-semester students were selected because they had only recently entered postgraduate education, allowing their existing translation competence to serve as an initial indicator of the linguistic difficulties they encountered.

Furthermore, the inclusion of four consecutive cohorts enables a modest longitudinal comparison to examine the consistency of Indonesian–Arabic translation problems across different academic years.

To obtain comprehensive data, the study employed multiple instruments and data collection techniques.

First, the participants completed a written translation test consisting of ten short Indonesian texts translated into Arabic. The texts were selected to correspond with the students' academic discipline, ensuring their relevance to the participants' educational background. The translations were completed manually, and students were permitted to consult dictionaries but were prohibited from using machine translation systems or AI-based translation applications.

This procedure was intended to ensure that the resulting translations accurately reflected the students' own linguistic competence rather than the capabilities of automated translation tools. The translation test served as the primary source of data for analyzing linguistic errors in morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexical choice.

Table 1. Blueprint of the Indonesian–Arabic Translation Test

Text	Linguistic domain	Error indicators	Difficulty
1	Morphology	Verb conjugation (taṣrīf al-afʿāl)	Low
2	Morphology	Plural formation	Low–moderate
3	Morphology	ʿAdad–maʿdūd constructions	Moderate
4	Syntax	Jumlah ismiyyah and jumlah fiʿliyyah	Moderate
5	Syntax	Naʿt–manʿūt agreement	Moderate
6	Syntax	Iḍāfah constructions	Moderate
7	Semantics	Contextually inaccurate meaning transfer	Moderate
8	Semantics	Literal translation and non-idiomatic expressions	Moderate–high
9	Lexical selection	Inappropriate or unnatural lexical equivalents	Moderate–high
10	Integrated assessment	Combined morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical errors	High

Second, the researcher conducted interviews with a purposively selected group of participants. These interviews sought to explore the students' perceptions of the difficulties they experienced during the translation process. The interview questions addressed several areas, including their previous experience in learning Arabic, the translation strategies they employed, the specific linguistic challenges they encountered most frequently, and their attitudes toward translating from Indonesian into Arabic. The interview data complemented the written translations and provided deeper insights into the factors underlying the observed translation difficulties.

The collected data were analyzed through several stages. First, the students' translations were examined to identify linguistic errors across four

principal categories: morphology (word formation, derivational patterns, and affixation), syntax syntactic order and the structure of *jumlah ismiyyah* and *jumlah fi'liyyah*), *na't-man'ūt* and *iḍāfah*.

Second, once the errors had been identified, they were classified using the error analysis approach. This analytical framework enabled the researcher to determine the most prevalent categories of errors and to identify the factors contributing to their occurrence (James, 2013). Specifically, the analysis examined whether the errors resulted from first-language transfer (*interference*), overgeneralization, or insufficient mastery of Arabic grammatical rules.

Third, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data interpretation was conducted through triangulation by comparing evidence obtained from three different sources: the translation tests, interview data, and observation data. This procedure enhanced the reliability of the findings by ensuring that the identified linguistic problems were not based solely on a single source of evidence. Malik *et al.* define triangulation as a technique for establishing data validity by using external sources or methods to verify and compare research findings (Malik et al., 2025). In qualitative research, triangulation strengthens validity through the integration of multiple data sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives.

Findings and Discussion

The results and discussion begin with a description of the research participants, who constituted the primary source of empirical data. This section is essential because it provides an overview of the participants' characteristics, thereby offering an appropriate context for interpreting the findings on their translation performance.

Profile of the Research Participants

The participants were postgraduate students enrolled in the Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* [PAI]) program at Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur. They represented diverse educational backgrounds, varying levels of Arabic language proficiency, and different professional occupations, reflecting the heterogeneity commonly found in postgraduate Islamic higher education.

In terms of educational background, some participants had completed their secondary education in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) before pursuing undergraduate studies in Islamic education. This group generally possessed a stronger foundation in Islamic sciences, including *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, and the fundamentals of Arabic. Another group had completed undergraduate degrees in Islamic education without prior *pesantren* education. Although these students generally demonstrated sound theoretical and academic knowledge of Islam,

their practical command of Arabic tended to be more limited. A third group combined a *pesantren* background with undergraduate studies outside the field of Islamic education, bringing together traditional Islamic learning and broader academic experience from non-Islamic disciplines.

The participants also differed considerably in their exposure to Arabic. Some had acquired Arabic through both *pesantren* education and undergraduate Islamic studies, enabling them to read classical Arabic texts (*kitab kuning*) with relative proficiency. Others had learned Arabic independently through textbooks or online resources. A smaller number had received little or no formal Arabic instruction, resulting in considerable difficulty in comprehending both classical and contemporary Arabic academic texts.

This diversity was further reflected in the participants' professional backgrounds. Most were employed as Islamic education teachers at elementary, junior high, or senior high schools, while others worked as local government employees, entrepreneurs, or were not yet employed. Such diversity contributed to a dynamic postgraduate learning environment, particularly with respect to linguistic competence in comprehending and translating Arabic texts.

Findings on Linguistic Problems

The findings indicate that the participants encountered linguistic difficulties in four principal domains: morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexical choice.

First: Morphological Problems

Three major categories of morphological difficulties were identified: (1) verb conjugation (*fiʿl*), (2) plural formation, and (3) the writing of numeral forms in relation to the nouns being counted (*ʿadad* and *maʿdūd*).

Regarding verb conjugation, 30% of the participants (8 students divided by the total number of students) incorrectly conjugated Arabic verbs according to the grammatical features of the subject (*fāʿil*), including number (singular, dual, and plural) and gender (masculine and feminine). For example, when translating the Indonesian sentence *Para siswa membaca buku di perpustakaan* ("The students read books in the library"), several participants produced *al-ṭullāb yaqraʾu al-kitāb fī al-maktabah*. Morphologically, the verb *yaqraʾu* is inappropriate because the subject is plural; the correct form is *yaqraʾūna*.

In another instance, some participants translated the same sentence as *al-ṭullāb qaraʾa al-kitāb fī al-maktabah*. Here, the past-tense verb *qaraʾa* likewise fails to agree with the plural subject and should instead be *qaraʾū*. These errors indicate an insufficient understanding of the highly complex Arabic verb conjugation system.

Interview data corroborated these findings. Most participants admitted that they were still uncertain about matching verbs with their subjects (*fāʿil*), whether the subject precedes the verb or the verb precedes the subject. One participant remarked, "We often simply guess the verb form because Indonesian does not distinguish verbs in that way."

Plural formation constituted another significant area of difficulty. 25% of participants (18 divided by the total number of students) indiscriminately attached the suffix *-ūn*, without recognizing that it is restricted to the regular masculine plural (*jamʿ al-mudhakkar al-sālim*). For example, the singular noun *walad* ("boy") was incorrectly pluralized as *waladūna*, whereas the correct plural form is *awlād* (broken plural, *jamʿ al-taksīr*). Likewise, *bayt* ("house") was rendered as *baytūna* instead of the correct plural *buyūt*. These errors suggest that many students generalized the regular masculine plural pattern to all nouns without recognizing the existence and productivity of broken plurals in Arabic.

Interview responses confirmed this interpretation. Most participants admitted that they remained uncertain about the principles governing Arabic plural formation, particularly the distinctions among *jamʿ al-mudhakkar al-sālim*, *jamʿ al-muʾannath al-sālim*, and *jamʿ al-taksīr*.

The third morphological problem concerned the relationship between numerals and counted nouns (*ʿadad–maʿdūd*). Translation test results showed that 20% of the participants (12 out of 60) failed to apply the relevant grammatical rules, largely because Indonesian expresses numerical relationships without comparable morphological agreement. For example, the sentence *Ada lima buah buku* ("There are five books") was translated as *hunāka khamsah al-kitāb*, whereas the correct form is *hunāka khamsatu kutub*. Likewise, *Ada dua puluh buah buku* ("There are twenty books") was rendered as *hunāka ʿishrūna al-kitāb* instead of the correct *hunāka ʿishrūna kitāban*. Such errors not only violate Arabic grammatical conventions but also reduce the clarity and precision of the translated text.

Interview findings further demonstrated that participants frequently struggled to combine numerals and counted nouns correctly because the Indonesian numerical system differs fundamentally from its Arabic counterpart.

Second: Syntactic Problems

Three major syntactic problems emerged from the analysis: (1) distinguishing between *jumlah ismiyyah* (nominal sentences) and *jumlah fiʿliyyah* (verbal sentences), 2) constructing *naʿt–manʿūt* (adjective–noun agreement), and (3) forming *iḍāfah* (genitive constructions).

With respect to the distinction between nominal and verbal sentence structures, 50% of the participants (30 out of 60) experienced considerable

difficulty. When asked to translate the sentence *Para peserta berkumpul* ("The participants gathered") using both sentence patterns, many produced *al-mushārikūn yajtamiʿūna*. Although semantically acceptable as a nominal sentence, difficulties arose when they were asked to convert it into a verbal sentence. Many wrote *yajtamiʿūna al-mushārikūn*, whereas the correct verbal construction is *yajtamiʿu al-mushārikūna*. In Arabic, when the verb precedes the subject, it normally remains in the singular form regardless of the plurality of the subject. These errors indicate that many students failed to distinguish between verb agreement when the verb follows the subject and when it precedes it.

Conversely, some participants translated inherently verbal Indonesian sentences into nominal Arabic constructions. For example, *Para siswa belajar di kelas* ("The students study in the classroom") was translated as *al-ṭullāb yadrusūna fī al-faṣl*. While grammatically acceptable, a verbal sentence such as *yadrusu al-ṭullābu fi al-faṣl* is stylistically more appropriate when the communicative focus is on the action itself. Classroom observations and interview data suggest that students often preferred nominal constructions because they perceived them as requiring less complex verb conjugation, reflecting the morphological difficulties discussed earlier.

Several interviewees admitted that they frequently struggled to determine when to employ *jumlah ismiyyah* and when to use *jumlah fiʿliyyah*. This finding indicates an incomplete internalization of one of the fundamental principles of Arabic syntax: nominal sentences generally emphasize the subject (*musnad ilayh*), whereas verbal sentences foreground the action (*musnad*).

A second syntactic difficulty involved adjective–noun agreement (*naʿt–manʿūt*). Translation test results revealed that 50% of the participants (30 out of 60) appeared to produce structurally acceptable adjective constructions, yet subtle grammatical errors remained. For example, the sentence *Perpustakaan besar itu bersih* ("The large library is clean") was translated as *al-maktabah kabīrah naẓīfah*. The adjective *kabīrah* should be definite to agree with the definite noun it modifies, resulting in the correct construction *al-maktabah al-kabīrah naẓīfah*. The participants tended to use indefinite adjectives even when the modified noun (*manʿūt*) was definite.

Interview data confirmed that many students relied largely on intuition when applying adjective agreement rules, indicating that *naʿt–manʿūt* agreement remains one of the classic challenges faced by non-native learners of Arabic.

The third syntactic problem concerned *iḍāfah* constructions. Sixty percent of the participants (36 out of 60) incorrectly formed genitive constructions. For instance, the phrase *Buku mahasiswa* ("the student's book") was translated as *al-kitāb al-ṭālib*, whereas the correct form is *kitāb al-ṭālib*. The error stems from the incorrect assumption that the first noun (*muḍāf*) may take

the definite article *al-*. According to Arabic grammatical rules, however, the *muḍāf* cannot be marked with the definite article in an *iḍāfah* construction.

During the interviews, most participants acknowledged that they found *iḍāfah* constructions surprisingly difficult despite their seemingly simple noun-to-noun structure. Many reported confusing *iḍāfah* with *naʿt–manʿūt*, suggesting that these syntactic errors reflect not only limited grammatical knowledge but also broader cognitive strategies through which learners simplify Arabic sentence structures into patterns they perceive as more familiar and manageable.

Third: Semantic Problems

The third major finding concerns semantic difficulties. These problems were manifested in two principal forms: (1) the selection of lexical equivalents that were inconsistent with conventional Arabic usage, and (2) the influence of literal translation from Indonesian on the structure and meaning of the Arabic target text.

With respect to the selection of inappropriate lexical equivalents, 40% of the participants (24 out of 60) chose translations that were semantically acceptable at the denotative level but inappropriate in context. For example, the Indonesian sentence *Dia menghadiri rapat* ("He attended the meeting") was frequently translated as *huwa ḥaḍara al-ijtimāʿ*. Although the verb *ḥaḍara* literally means "to attend" or "to be present," formal academic Arabic more commonly employs the verb *shāraka* ("to participate"), making *huwa shāraka fī al-ijtimāʿ* a more appropriate rendering because it conveys active participation rather than mere physical presence. Errors of this kind reveal the participants' limited awareness of the semantic nuances associated with Arabic lexical items.

The interview data reinforced this finding. Several participants admitted that they often struggled to select the appropriate word because dictionaries typically provide multiple meanings for a single lexical item. As a result, they tended to choose the first meaning listed without considering contextual appropriateness. This suggests that the participants' lexical limitations extend beyond vocabulary size to include insufficient pragmatic competence in selecting contextually appropriate expressions. Arabic possesses a remarkably rich system of near-synonyms, each characterized by distinct semantic distributions, making lexical selection particularly challenging for non-native learners.

Semantic difficulties also emerged in the translation of religious terminology. For instance, the Indonesian word *iman* ("faith") was often translated simply as *īmān* without considering whether the intended meaning referred to faith in a general sense or to the technical theological concept recognized in Islamic doctrine. During the translation test, several participants rendered the sentence *Keimanan itu penting bagi kehidupan* ("Faith is important for

life") as *al-īmān muhim li al-ḥayāh*. Although grammatically correct, this translation lacks the rhetorical richness characteristic of formal Arabic discourse. A more stylistically nuanced alternative would be *al-īmān ʿimād al-ḥayāh* ("Faith is the pillar of life"). This finding illustrates the participants' limited ability to capture the rhetorical and stylistic dimensions of Arabic semantics beyond literal meaning.

The influence of Indonesian literalism constituted another significant semantic problem. Translation test results revealed that 60% of the participants (36 out of 60) translated Indonesian texts on a word-for-word basis, resulting in Arabic expressions that appeared rigid and insufficiently natural according to conventional Arabic usage. For example, the sentence *Pegawai itu makan nasi setiap hari* ("The employee eats rice every day") was commonly translated as *al-muwaẓẓaf yaʾkulu al-ruzz kulla yawm*. Although semantically intelligible, this construction is less natural than *yaʾkulu al-muwaẓẓaf al-ruzz kulla yawm*, or, in a more idiomatic style, an expression employing the temporal phrase *yawman baʿda yawm*.

Literal translation became even more evident when participants translated idiomatic expressions. For example, the Indonesian idiom *ringan tangan* was rendered literally as *khafīf al-yad* ("light-handed"), whereas the appropriate Arabic equivalent is *sarīʿ al-musāʿadah* ("quick to help"). Such examples demonstrate that literal lexical transfer often fails to preserve the intended pragmatic and idiomatic meaning.

Interview findings further confirmed this tendency. Several participants explained that they deliberately translated word for word because they feared that freer translation might distort the meaning of the source text. This response reveals a cognitive tension between maintaining fidelity to the source text and producing a target text that conforms to the linguistic and stylistic norms of Arabic.

Fourth: Lexical Problems

The fourth major finding concerns lexical competence. Two principal issues emerged: (1) the production of linguistically unnatural expressions and (2) the selection of lexical equivalents that were inappropriate for the communicative context. Semantics and lexis have a strong and reciprocal relationship within the context of communication. The ability to construct sentences has a tangible impact on the intended meaning.

Regarding unnatural lexical usage, 60% of the participants (36 student devded by 60) produced translations that, while grammatically comprehensible, sounded unnatural to native Arabic speakers. For example, the Indonesian sentence *Dia membuat keputusan penting* ("He made an important decision") was translated as *huwa ṣanaʿa qarāran muhimman*. Although the verb *ṣanaʿa* literally

means "to make," it is not the conventional verb used with *qarār* ("decision"). The idiomatic Arabic collocation is *ittakhadha qarāran muhimman* ("to make a decision"). This type of error demonstrates insufficient awareness of Arabic lexical collocations and conventional usage.

Interview data strongly supported this interpretation. Most participants acknowledged that they were unfamiliar with commonly used Arabic expressions and therefore relied almost exclusively on bilingual dictionaries. This finding highlights a gap between linguistic competence—knowledge of dictionary meanings—and communicative competence—the ability to employ lexical items naturally and appropriately in authentic discourse.

The second lexical problem involved the selection of contextually inappropriate equivalents. Translation test results showed that 60% of the participants (36 out of 60) had difficulty identifying the specific contextual meanings of Arabic words, phrases, and expressions. Inaccurate lexical choices frequently resulted in semantic distortion. For example, the sentence *Ia menjalankan usaha kecil di rumah* ("He runs a small business from home") was translated as *huwa yajrī al-ʿamal al-ṣaghīr fī al-bayt*. The verb *yajrī*, which generally means "to run," "to occur," or "to proceed," is inappropriate in this context. A more accurate translation would be *huwa yudīru tijārah ṣaghīrah fī al-bayt* ("He manages a small business from home"). This error illustrates the participants' limited command of the semantic range and contextual usage of Arabic verbs.

Interview findings further demonstrated that the existence of multiple meanings for individual Arabic words often confused participants when selecting the most appropriate equivalent. In many cases, they relied on personal intuition to determine the intended meaning, only to discover through subsequent analysis and consultation that their choices were inaccurate. These findings indicate that lexical difficulties are closely associated with insufficient practice in selecting vocabulary according to specific semantic domains and communicative contexts.

Overall, the lexical problems encountered by the participants reveal systematic limitations in several respects. First, restricted vocabulary knowledge hindered their ability to select precise lexical equivalents, particularly for academic and contemporary terminology. Second, insufficient sensitivity to Arabic collocations and conventional patterns of usage resulted in expressions that sounded unnatural despite being grammatically acceptable. Third, limited awareness of contextual meaning frequently led to inappropriate lexical choices, causing the translated message to diverge from the communicative intention of the source text.

To provide a concise overview of the findings, table 1 summarizes the major linguistic problems identified in Indonesian–Arabic translation among postgraduate students at Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur.

Table 2. Major Linguistic Problems in Indonesian – Arabic Translation among Postgraduate Students at Institut Agama Islam Alazhary Cianjur

Linguistic Domain	Problem Aspects	Description
Morphology	Verb conjugation (*fiʿl*)	Difficulty in matching the verb (*fiʿl*) with the subject (*faʿil*) in terms of number and gender agreement (30% of respondents).
	Plural formation	Overgeneralization of the suffix *-ūn* without distinguishing between the regular masculine plural (*jamʿ al-mudhakkar al-sālim*) and broken plurals (*jamʿ al-taksīr*) (25% of respondents).
	ʿAdad–maʿdūd (Numeral writing based on differences in the counted objects)	Difficulty applying Arabic rules governing the relationship between numerals and counted nouns (20% of respondents).
Syntax	*Jumlah ismiyyah* vs. *jumlah fiʿliyyah*	Difficulty determining when to employ nominal sentence structures and when to use verbal sentence structures (50% of respondents).
	Naʿt–manʿūt (adjective–noun agreement)	Inconsistent agreement between adjectives and the nouns they modify, particularly regarding definiteness (*maʿrifah–nakirah*), gender, and number (50% of respondents).
	Iḍāfah (genitive construction)	Frequent errors in constructing *iḍāfah*, especially the incorrect use of the definite article (*al-*) on the *muḍāf* (60% of respondents).
Semantics	Non-conventional lexical equivalents	Limited understanding of semantic nuances and the contextual distribution of Arabic lexical items (40% of respondents).
	Influence of Indonesian literalism	Excessive reliance on word-for-word translation, resulting in rigid and non-idiomatic Arabic expressions (60% of respondents).
Lexicon	Unnatural lexical expressions	Limited sensitivity to Arabic collocations and conventional patterns of lexical usage (60% of respondents).
	Contextually inappropriate lexical equivalents	Difficulty selecting lexical equivalents that accurately reflect the intended contextual meaning (60% of respondents).

Analysis of the Factors Underlying Translation Difficulties

The linguistic difficulties encountered by the participants in translating from Indonesian into Arabic did not arise in isolation. The translation tests and interview data revealed three principal factors underlying these problems: negative transfer from Indonesian, insufficient mastery of advanced Arabic grammar, and limited practice in translating into Arabic.

The first factor is negative transfer from Indonesian. The translation test results indicate that participants frequently relied on literal translation by closely following Indonesian syntactic structures.

This tendency was further confirmed through the interviews. Most participants acknowledged that, when translating from Indonesian into Arabic, they rarely compared the grammatical structures of the two languages carefully because doing so often increased their uncertainty. Instead, they adopted what they considered a practical shortcut by transferring Indonesian sentence structures directly into Arabic. These findings demonstrate that L1 interference substantially influences translation quality. In this regard, Al-Jarf argues that the first language frequently becomes a source of error when learners attempt to produce the target language, particularly in formal tasks such as translation (Al-Jarf, 2026). In other words, the structural patterns and linguistic habits of the first language shape learners' cognitive framework in ways that are not always compatible with Arabic.

The second factor is insufficient mastery of advanced Arabic grammar, particularly with respect to complex morphology, *iʿrāb* (case marking), and distinctive Arabic syntactic structures. The translation test revealed that participants frequently struggled to construct appropriate *tarkīb iḍāfī* (genitive constructions) and to distinguish between *jumlah ismiyyah* (nominal sentences) and *jumlah fiʿliyyah* (verbal sentences) in context.

The interview findings reinforce these observations. Most participants admitted that although they had acquired a basic understanding of Arabic grammar, they had received little systematic instruction in advanced grammatical topics. Consequently, they often encountered difficulties when translating texts requiring more sophisticated grammatical constructions. These findings indicate that inadequate mastery of advanced Arabic grammar constitutes one of the principal sources of translation difficulties (Desfina et al., 2026).

The third factor is the limited amount of practice in translating into Arabic. Analysis of the curriculum and the participants' educational experiences indicates that most students were accustomed to translating from Arabic into Indonesian, particularly when studying classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and contemporary Arabic writings. By contrast, opportunities to practice translation from Indonesian into Arabic were extremely limited.

As a consequence of this imbalance, participants consistently reported during the interviews that translating from Indonesian into Arabic required considerably more time and effort than translating in the opposite direction.

These findings are consistent with the observations of Damsing and Haron, who argue that learners of Arabic as a foreign language generally demonstrate stronger receptive skills (reading and listening) than productive

skills (writing and speaking) (Damsing & Haron, 2026). A similar view is advanced by Khaldieh, who maintains that productive language skills are inherently more demanding than receptive skills (Khaldieh, 2000). Meanwhile, Hermawan argues that productive language skills are inherently demanding because language learners are required to actively express their ideas both orally, through speaking, and in written form, through writing. Among these two productive language skills, writing is considered more complex than speaking, as it encompasses virtually all dimensions of language proficiency (Hermawan, 2018). Therefore require sustained and extensive practice. From this perspective, the limited opportunities for Indonesian–Arabic translation practice further weaken students' productive competence in Arabic.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its identification of specific linguistic difficulties in Indonesian–Arabic translation and its potential to inform targeted remedial instruction for postgraduate students. Rather than proposing general curricular changes, the findings indicate several areas in which translation materials, classroom exercises, and assessment practices can be improved.

First, the errors involving verb conjugation (30%), plural formation (25%), and *ʿadad–maʿdūd* constructions (20%) indicate the need for focused morphological remediation. Translation materials can be revised to include short Indonesian sentences that require students to select appropriate Arabic verb forms, construct plural nouns, and apply number–noun agreement rules. These exercises should progress from isolated grammatical structures to complete sentences, with corrective feedback explaining the relevant rule and the nature of each error (Larson, 1997).

Second, the syntactic findings point to three specific targets for remedial instruction: the construction of *jumlah ismiyyah* and *jumlah fiʿliyyah* (50%), *naʿt–manʿūt* agreement (50%), and *iḍāfah* constructions (60%). Teaching materials should therefore include sentence-restructuring tasks that require students to transform Indonesian sentence patterns into grammatically appropriate Arabic constructions. Additional exercises should address agreement between nouns and their modifiers and the formation of *iḍāfah* phrases. These activities would enable instructors to identify recurring error patterns and provide feedback linked to particular grammatical rules rather than treating translation errors as undifferentiated problems.

Third, the semantic and lexical findings indicate the importance of contextual interpretation and idiomatic expression. The reported difficulties include literal translation resulting in rigid or non-idiomatic Arabic structures (60%), unnatural lexical equivalents (60%), and contextually inappropriate

vocabulary (60%). Accordingly, translation exercises should require students to compare alternative Arabic renderings, justify lexical choices in context, and revise literal translations that fail to convey the intended meaning naturally. Short academic passages and authentic Arabic texts can serve as materials for examining differences in meaning, register, and usage. These activities should prioritize accuracy of meaning and appropriateness of expression rather than word-for-word correspondence.

Fourth, the reported influence of Indonesian, limited mastery of Arabic grammatical rules, and insufficient practice in Indonesian–Arabic translation suggest the need for a more systematic remedial cycle. Such a cycle may consist of an initial diagnostic translation task, classification of errors by linguistic domain, targeted exercises, corrective feedback, and a subsequent translation task using comparable linguistic features. Instructors can monitor progress by comparing error frequencies before and after remediation. This procedure would make instructional evaluation more concrete and help determine whether the proposed interventions address the difficulties identified in the study (Newmark, 1988).

The practical contribution of this research is therefore a data-informed framework for identifying and addressing specific Indonesian–Arabic translation errors among postgraduate students. Its findings provide a basis for revising teaching materials, developing targeted grammatical and lexical exercises, and establishing more systematic error-based feedback. However, the effectiveness of these proposed interventions requires further evaluation through classroom implementation and pre- and post-instruction assessment; it cannot be inferred from the present findings alone.

Conclusion

This study examined the linguistic difficulties encountered by postgraduate students at Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Alazhary Cianjur in translating from Indonesian into Arabic and explored the factors associated with these difficulties. The findings reveal recurring problems across morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical domains.

Morphological difficulties primarily involved verb conjugation and plural formation, particularly when students had to select Arabic forms appropriate to grammatical context. Problems involving *ʿadad–maʿdūd* constructions were also identified, especially in applying the grammatical patterns governing numerals and the nouns they modify. Syntactic difficulties concerned the construction of *jumlah ismiyyah* and *jumlah fiʿliyyah*, agreement between *naʿt* and *manʿūt*, and the formation of *iḍāfah* constructions. These errors indicate challenges in applying Arabic grammatical rules when restructuring Indonesian expressions into grammatically appropriate Arabic sentences.

Beyond grammatical form, the findings also revealed semantic and lexical difficulties. Some translations relied on literal correspondences that produced rigid or non-idiomatic Arabic expressions, while others involved lexical choices that did not adequately reflect contextual meaning or conventional Arabic usage. These patterns demonstrate that successful Indonesian–Arabic translation requires not only grammatical accuracy but also appropriate interpretation of meaning and sensitivity to target-language lexical conventions.

The interview data identified three factors reported by participants as relevant to their translation difficulties: interference from Indonesian, difficulties in applying Arabic grammatical rules, and limited experience in translating from Indonesian into Arabic. These accounts help contextualize the errors identified in the translation tests. However, the findings do not establish definitive causal relationships or demonstrate that particular teaching practices produced the observed difficulties.

The study contributes a context-specific typology of Indonesian–Arabic translation errors among postgraduate students, showing how difficulties occur across grammatical, semantic, and lexical dimensions. Its practical implication is that translation instruction may benefit from targeted exercises addressing the identified error categories, including verb conjugation, plural formation, sentence construction, grammatical agreement, *iḍāfah*, contextual lexical selection, and the revision of overly literal translations. Such exercises should be accompanied by corrective feedback that explains the relevant linguistic rules and the reasons particular translations are inappropriate.

Future research could examine these instructional interventions through classroom implementation and pre- and post-instruction assessments. Studies involving larger and more diverse participant groups could also investigate whether similar error patterns occur in other postgraduate programs and educational settings. These directions would extend the present study without generalizing beyond its participants or claiming instructional effectiveness that has not yet been empirically established.

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Author Contributions Statement

The first author conceptualized the study, conducted fieldwork to collect primary data using the research instruments, communicated directly with

the respondents, analyzed the research data, and prepared the initial manuscript. The second author contributed to data analysis, provided critical feedback on manuscript development, and supported the collection and review of relevant literature. The third author reviewed the manuscript and refined its translation and language use. All authors contributed to the preparation of the final manuscript (AH, IM, WW).

AI Writing Statement

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used Claude and Gemini as AI-assisted tools for language editing, grammar checking, and organizing ideas. The original research ideas and the substantive content of the article are the authors' own work. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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